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Hamlet's Aesthetics and the Aesthetics of Hamlet

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Hamlet's advice to the players concerning the purpose of playing has come to sound so familiar that we may have forgotten how to listen to it closely, but we need to try once again. We all remember that Hamlet describes how plays "hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature: to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and Pressure" (3.2.22-24. *Riverside Shakespeare*). Obviously enough, Hamlet's definition of playing is grounded mimetically, in the belief that a play imitates reality, if not directly, then at least in a symbolic or representational way. Such a mimetic definition further presumes that a play articulates some truth about reality. Hamlet may thus tell Horatio, "There is a play to-night before the King,/One scene of it comes near the circumstance which I have told thee of my father's death" (3.2.75-77). In other words, the truth of the elder Hamlet's death is present in "The Murder of Gonzago" to the extent that Lucianus mirrors Claudius in a ratio of performer to spectator which further suggests that Hamlet mirrors us. If Hamlet is at times contradictory, even inexplicable, that is merely *prima facie* evidence of the complex truths the character mirrors. We too face our own inexplicable and contradictory selves, and like Hamlet, delay when our better interests suggest otherwise.

To reason this way about the text, to believe in its capacity to tell us something true, is to grant to its signs the power to return us to the reality they seemingly evoke. To approach the text of *Hamlet* in the way that Hamlet's definition seems to warrant is to per-

nit the signifier to vanish, and its place to be taken by the signified. To adapt Hamlet's own metaphor, the play disappears as a mirror, loses its twin, when it comes to show us the truth. The power of a compelling drama, in other words, is that it seems blind to its own status as a system of signs. Perhaps this is why A.D. Nuttall will praise that criticism of Shakespeare's plays written in a transparent language" which willingly submits itself to a sort of mimetic enchantment" that explains plays as analogues to "real-life equivalents" (81).

For all its attractions, this sort of reasoning nonetheless faces a powerful challenge in the logocentric rejection of mimesis as a falling away from the immediately present. As Jacques Derrida explains it in his *Grammatology* and his *Dissemination*s, logocentrism, or what he calls the "metaphysics of presence," involves the conviction that just as the written script perversely supplants the spoken word, imitates speech and thus taints it, so mimesis perversely supplants the truth it seems to permit us transparently to gaze upon. This logocentric elevation of speech over writing, and its consequent evaluation of mimetic drama, is, however, always subject to a reversal, or a deconstruction, precisely because speech and writing are each the other's enabling opposite in an inseparable dialectic.

In fact, such a dialectic informs Hamlet's logocentric valuations of speech and writing, valuations which lead him to see fictions both as monstrous supplements and as compelling mirrors to passion. Hamlet's contradictory double valuations of drama are the product of exactly the sorts of reversals Derrida has taught us to expect, but these valuations also mean that the play we call *Hamlet* is in a sense its own traitor, at one point advancing a mimetic argument for the purpose of playing, at another dismantling the very foundations for such an argument. On the one hand a logocentric text, *Hamlet* is a sorting out in dramatic terms of the

incapacity of mimetic drama to tell us something true. On the other hand, *Hamlet* always remains a play, so there should be no surprise that at the precise moment the text seems to submit itself to an internalized critique of its own claim to present the truth and thus to warrant the attention of an audience, it reinscribes that critique within a defense of the capacity of plays to bring us, in fact and in truth, to the very face of scorn and vice.

From the first scene of the play, the route which the text follows to this doubled aesthetics involves, as might be expected, the status of the ghost. "Is not this something more than fantasy?" (1.1.54), Barnardo asks Horatio of the first appearance of the elder Hamlet's ghost, thereby establishing the doubtful meaning of its presence in Denmark. This question involves more than creation of the play's atmosphere; it is in many respects the fundamental question of the play. As Horatio recognizes, the stakes here are profound, his belief in the meaning of the ghost's presence hinging on what for him is immediately present, that is to say, on only the "sensible and true avouch" (1.1.56) of his own eyes. Reports of the ghost's appearance have not been compelling for Horatio, for any such report could not be verified by a sort of face-to-face interrogation, and so it is that Horatio demands five times, with increasing intensity, that the ghost speak. The ghost's silence is, of course, thunderous, propelling Horatio into discomforting speculations about the ghost's guilty purposes. In the face of this silence, of this absence within presence, Horatio nonetheless holds fast to one certainty: that the ghost's presence must be described to the younger Hamlet, because "This spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him" (1.1.171).

Horatio's prediction comes true, for the ghost speaks only to Hamlet and only Hamlet hears the ghost. This limitation on the dialogue is more than evidence for speculations about Hamlet's Oedipal personality, however; the evidence points instead to how

the text is profoundly logocentric, how it inscribes the privileging of speech over writing, of face-to-face conversation as access to truth. "Speak, I'll go no further," (1.5.1-2) Hamlet commands the beckoning ghost; "speak," he repeats, "I am bound to hear" (1.5.6). While later Hamlet may come to question the veracity of the ghost's report of his murder, here in their first conversation there are no doubts. His "prophetic soul" (1.5.40) confirmed, Hamlet receives from his father the commands to revenge his murder and to "remember me" (1.5.91), commands which involve for Hamlet the immediate calling into question of writing itself, a move not unexpected as we see Hamlet's working out of a logocentric position. In place of all the "saws of books" (1.5.100) in his memory, Hamlet claims in his second soliloquy, he will put his father's commands. Having assigned his father's speech the privileged position over all that he has read, Hamlet can now imagine himself possessed of a good and true memory. He is ready for revenge.

Except that Hamlet dithers, his delay a suggestion that when it comes to his revenge, all that there is is readiness, or at least that execution is not swift. That readiness, always tied to Hamlet's memory, takes so long to become execution should, like so much in Hamlet's logocentric reasoning, not surprise us. So long as Hamlet remembers his father, that is, his father's voice recalled in a memory untainted by the supplements of writing, Hamlet can imagine his memory of his father's voice and his father's presence to be one and the same. But to remember his father in this way and to revenge his father's death pose contradictory and unstable imperatives for Hamlet. Claudius' presence is the foundation for Hamlet's revenge. Eradicate Claudius, and thereby execute part of the ghost's commands, and there will be little need to remember the absent father, for it is the memory of the father that defines Claudius' presence as a regicide. Memory, in short, is

linked in Hamlet's thought to purpose, a connection he will later turn to in the speech he crafts for the Player King.

If the relationship between the ghost's two commands is inherently unstable, there is yet further instability in Hamlet's thinking in his second soliloquy. At the very moment in his soliloquy when Hamlet supplants the saws of books with the presence of his father's commands, which "all alone shall live" (1.5.102) in his memory, Hamlet reinscribes those commands "Within the book and volume" (1.5.104) of his brain. The memory which was to be a living reservoir of his father's speech now becomes itself a written record, one wherein once again trivial saws--for example, "That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain" (1.5.108) --can be set down in the tables. If Hamlet starts out, in other words, in a typically logocentric privileging of speech over writing, it is also, and typically, that writing returns in his thought to supplement the speech which he privileged in the first place. No sooner does Hamlet engage in virtually the first step of logocentric thought than that thought itself begins, subtly and inescapably, to put itself under question. From this point forward, Hamlet's attempts to revive his true memory, the memory of his father's final words, will never succeed precisely because the attempt is always an effort already undergoing the process of dismantling itself.

Given the importance of Hamlet's memory, which, as we shall see, is intimately connected to his aesthetics, it is significant that the first sort of playing Hamlet requests is an impromptu performance of Aeneas' tale of the deaths of Priam and Hecuba--"If it live in your memory" (2.2.448), as Hamlet tells the first Player. Often understood mimetically as an analogue to Hamlet's psychology (Pyrrhus' hesitation at taking Priam's life corresponding to Hamlet's delay in executing his revenge), the presentation of the tale also serves to drive Hamlet into a distinctly logocentric

ejection of the capacity of fictions to project a compelling image of true human passion. In short, the first play-within-the-play motivates Hamlet to logocentric conclusions about drama, which if held to, would totally undermine his subsequent definitions of the purpose of playing.

There is more involved here, then, than the player's seemingly bad acting, his wan visage, tear-filled eyes, and distracted aspect. The real issue is that from the player's living memory, which Hamlet hoped would contain a reflection of the elder Hamlet's death, is projected not even an evocation of the actual presence of Priam's death, but something, as Hamlet says, "monstrous," a "fiction . . . a dream of passion" (2.2.551- 52). A monstrous supplement to the reality of Priam's death and of Hecuba's grief, the tale presses home for Hamlet the logocentric awareness that memory subjected to transmission through a text is memory that forgets its living, its passionate, purpose. For the Hamlet of the third soliloquy, a player can only play at having true memory, can appear to possess true passion only if the very fiction, that "nothing" (2.2.557) that is drama, supplements passion in a way that diverts memory from its legitimate course.

Just as he had commanded the ghost to speak, Hamlet has insisted on a "passionate speech" (2.2.432) from the player, but now he evaluates the player's passion as chimerical. The intensity of Hamlet's reaction to the player's speech is, in short, directly proportional to the passion he projects in place of the player's. Were the player Hamlet himself, Hamlet concludes, the player would "drown," "cleave," "make mad," "appall," "confound," and "amaze" (2.2.563-65): a series of actions which seem present before us as we view the intensity of Hamlet's response to the player's false passion. Having turned away from a fiction, from a monstrous supplement to real passion, Hamlet has turned inward. In conversation with himself, Hamlet next interrogates

himself, in soliloquy asking passionately again and again who it is who diverts him from his revenge. This self-interrogatory move, this attempt to find truth present within oneself, is thoroughly understandable as the last recourse of the logocentric dream of presence in speech. If the player's speaking is all exteriority, all playing at passion and true memory, then Hamlet's soliloquy is pure autoaffection, or the voice of the self, without apparent mediation, inwardly speaking the truth to the self.

By the beginning of his third soliloquy Hamlet has, in other words, so passionately called into question the capacity of fictions to project a vision of the truth that, as a consequence, it may seem at the very least paradoxical that he concludes the soliloquy by ascribing to plays the capacity for catching the conscience of a king. If by supplanting true and vital memory, plays for the Hamlet who begins the third soliloquy monstrously supplement real passion, then it is logically not possible for plays to be mirrors held up to nature, to have the capacity to convey truth. Having condemned plays as fictions, the Hamlet who ends the soliloquy nonetheless privileges drama in a reversal that seems unexpected until we recognize that Hamlet also turns away from the logocentric elevation of speech, supplanting speech instead with writing. This move had been anticipated, of course, when, just prior to his third soliloquy, Hamlet planned to set down "a speech of some dozen lines, or sixteen" (5.2.541-42) for the first player to memorize. Even before he voices his third soliloquy, in other words, Hamlet plans to supplement his own speech, to devise a mechanism whereby words he might utter will become words he will write down, words that become part of a fiction, "The Murder of Gonzago," words that the Player King playing at passion will deliver. Another way of saying this is that the logic of the third soliloquy replicates the logic of the second: speech, initially elevated over writing, finds itself supplemented by writing. And

just as the second soliloquy linked Hamlet's memory to this reversal, so also does the Player King's speech.

Which 12 or 16 lines in the Player King's speech constitute Hamlet's text, whether those lines form a single block or are scattered throughout the speech, or whether in fact the 12 or 16 lines have not become 25 or 30 are less significant matters than recognizing how the Player King's speech as a whole involves memory, passion, and purpose--exactly Hamlet's logocentric concerns. Purpose, or the "slave to memory" (3.2.188), and "What to ourselves in passion we \ propose," (3.2.194), the Player King declares, inevitably suffers deflection from its intended course, for both purpose and passion, like grief and joy, "Their own enactures with themselves destroy" (3.2.198). These words evoke the unstable relationship between the ghost's two commands to remember and to revenge, and this is why the Player King's trivial, fond, and common enough Renaissance sentiments about extremes have little to do with catching the king's conscience. These sentiments are instead expression of Hamlet's inevitable transformation of his own memory. If Hamlet were to remember his father's spoken command and to permit that command to wipe away the saws of books, then, as we have already seen, his father's speech could not permit itself to be supplemented by writing. Perversely supplementing speech, writing destroys memory, but what is the Player King's speech if not Hamlet's writing down, hence his resignation to, the power of writing over memory? Expressing himself not in soliloquy, not in terms of the self speaking to the self, but in writing, and writing that itself is now a fiction, Hamlet expresses through a text what for all intents and purposes is an apology. Memory is now indeed inscribed in the book and volume of his brain, but that inscription is in turn reinscribed in the text of a play whose title page we might imagine to read " 'The Murder of Gonzago,' as rewritten by Hamlet, Prince of Denmark?"

The audience for Shakespeare's play may not find itself, in Stephen Booth's words, "on the brink of intellectual terror" (151) as it wrestles with these reversals in Hamlet's thinking, but it may very well find itself agreeing with Booth that *Hamlet* is the "tragedy of an audience that cannot make up its mind" (152) as it shuttles between Hamlet's competing claims about playing. But the audience must shuttle through the text because there is an "indivisible circularity," in James L. Calderwood's expression, or "a form of reciprocal possession" (175) between the Globe theater and Elsinore, between the fiction and the reality it presumably imitates. Any effort to break the circuit or to dispossess either the mimetic or the antimimetic argument is doomed to fail. Having opened the debate between these contradictory aesthetics, the text itself cannot erase the argument.

Of course it is easy enough to say that the oppositions in Hamlet's thinking ought not to be pressed too far, reflecting nothing more remarkable than what is to be expected of a complex and contradictory character. Following this line of thought, however, begs a much larger issue, that of which side of the oppositions between Hamlet's mimetic and antimimetic stances to accept, hence to valorize. It is not that the choice is easy, for when we valorize Hamlet's antimimetic thinking, we arrive at his conclusions in defense of mimesis. Conversely, if we follow along with Hamlet's mimetic argument that plays mirror nature, we find ourselves very quickly arriving at a place that calls into question the capacity of fictions to warrant the attention of an audience. That is, if the metaphor of the mirror obtains, then it must obtain not only for the ways a play seems to project an image of the truth but also for the ways it projects an image of an audience's response to any play. Indeed, this would be the case with Hamlet's response to the story of Priam and Hecuba: as spectator to the

player's speech, Hamlet stands to the player in the same relationship as the audience stands to Hamlet.

But if the mimetic argument holds, the audience finds itself in a quandary responding to Hamlet respond to the player's tale of Priam and Hecuba in a mirroring of its own response to Hamlet. If the audience thinks mimetically, concluding with Hamlet, its reflection on stage, that fictions cannot convey legitimate passion, but only supplement it, then the audience must turn away from the text of *Hamlet* itself, finding it no more compelling for them than the tale of Priam and Hecuba was for Hamlet. At the precise moment the play becomes most intensely mimetic through a mirroring of the audience's relationship to the play itself, at the precise moment when in a sense the play reflexively considers its own relationship to what it imitates, that very mirroring indicates that fictions are not vehicles for conveying legitimate passion. The mimetic argument thus brings the audience to the curious position of using the text against itself, of finding *Hamlet* to be not merely a self-consuming artifact but also a text that argues against texts. It is not in this case that the mirror held up to nature has no twin but that the mirror reflects falsely.

In the end it will not do to claim that Hamlet's contradictory responses to drama merely enhance the sense that the play mirrors reality, if not directly, then at least in a symbolic or representational fashion. Indeed, to permit this claim to govern entry in to the text of *Hamlet* is to presume that plays work in ways Hamlet himself questions. That questioning turns, I have suggested, on Hamlet's logocentric valorization of speech over writing, an opposition not static but unstable. Hamlet cannot avoid the reversals of thought which underpin his double valuation of drama precisely because such reversals are inherent in the opposition between speech and writing which engenders them. However we start to think about the play's doubled aesthetics, we will ex-

perience similar reversals of thought, which is to say that we cannot simply choose one of Hamlet's arguments and erase the other. Whether we choose to start from the mimetic stance of Hamlet's advice to the players or from the antimimetic stance of his third soliloquy, we will always be driven to support the enabling opposite of our original choice as we think about this text to double business bound.

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Could Kate Mean What She Says?

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Recent criticism of *The Taming of the Shrew* has begun to move away from the older desire to judge its central characters, to pronounce Kate a shrew indeed and praise Petruchio's gutsy transformation of the bitchy sociopath, or to find for Kate and with John Masefield pronounce Petruchio "a boor who cares only for his own will, her flesh, and her money" (108). Certainly a few feminist critics try to keep this old case open and with Thomas McCary charge Petruchio with misogyny, narcissism, and a pack of other crimes (122, 128), but the critical mainstream, including much feminist criticism, has moved beyond the judgmental. Even so, readers are still left with problems of interpretation. One of the toughest to solve is Kate's closing speech. Is she sincere, as Robert Heilman (160) and T.M. Parrott (148) think? Or has she merely learned a more socially acceptable way to be shrewish, as Larry Champion thinks (40)? Or is she speaking ironically, as many feminists think, and if so is or is not Petruchio aware of the irony? What does Kate mean?

One of the most fruitful of contemporary approaches to the play has been linguistic. Marianne Novy's 1979 study of the language of the play, in relation both to its theme of patriarchy and to modern game theory, found one of the play's chief movements to be Kate's discovery of "a new way of using language which reconciles her to her society" (275-76). In 1980 Marion Trousdale termed Shakespeare's comedies "linguistic" and described how

they create "a new language . . . out of a critical exploration of the old" (248-49). By 1983 A.D. Nuttall was ready to object to structural criticism's assumptions that "truth is something made" and that "language is prior to meaning" (8). Nevertheless, in 1985 Joel Fineman went on to analyze the play in light of the apparent conflict in it between "the language of woman" and "the order and authority of man" (138). Examinations of the language of the play continue, perhaps, because they can best open up the nature of the play, getting at continuing critical problems like this one concerning Kate's concluding speech.

Much criticism of the language of *The Taming of the Shrew* has touched on but essentially overlooked one of the important ways it furthers the play's comic spirit. If we agree with Northrop Frye that Shakespeare's comedy in particular allows us to join in a triumph over a society that blocks us from achieving what we want (75), then we need to look explicitly and closely at how the play relates the mastery of language to self-mastery and freedom. In fact, more than anything else, *The Taming of the Shrew* may be a comic exploration of the way language accommodates us and empowers us, freeing us both *from* various bondages past and present and for full life in the future.

If the characters in *The Taming of the Shrew* depended on social structures to provide their freedom, they would not enjoy much of it. Social structures would reduce most of the characters to willless puppets. Servants like Grumio and Tranio would do their masters' wills, the young would do their duty to their elders, and women would follow their fathers and husbands. But, of course, the characters do not depend on social structures for their freedom. Instead, they find it in language. If there is irony in Kate's final words accepting her place in the social structure, then it is merely the final example of what the play makes clear in scene

after scene. Regardless of social bonds, mastery of language is freeing.

The servant class clearly shows this freeing quality of language. Tranio has the largest servant-role because, of all the servants, he has best mastered language as a tool of freedom. Specifically, Tranio frees himself by using language non-referentially. Words, Tranio knows, need not refer directly to the experiential world--neither to the subjective world experienced in his thoughts and feelings nor to the objective world he observes. Tranio shows himself the conscious master of non-referential language in the first scene of the play, establishing in himself and in his relation to Lucentio the major theme in the play. Tranio's language is non-referential because in this scene he does not speak words that reflect what he must be feeling. His supposed master delivers himself of a speech whose content is callow at best and fatuous at worst, and whose style represents the stilted language of the academy. Tranio must be feeling how stupid Lucentio has just sounded, how far Lucentio has been educated beyond his intelligence. And he is clearly not at all interested in Lucentio's educational plans. Yet, as Novy has mentioned (274), Tranio's words pay lip-service both to Lucentio's status and to his ideas, directly challenging neither the style nor the content of that ridiculous speech. Tranio's words refer directly to ideas and feelings he could not possibly be experiencing:

> . . . gentle master mine;
> I am, in all affected as yourself,
> Glad that you thus continue your resolve
> To suck the sweets of sweet philosophy. (1.1.25-28)

But in doing so, these words free Tranio because by seeming to refer to the world Lucentio does experience, they open the way

for Tranio to pursue other "Ovidian" sweets much more to his liking. Note that Tranio is not "acting" here; this scene precedes all the theatrical clothes-changing and role-playing. Some recent critics like David Daniell have erred slightly in calling "acting" the major motif of the play, for the play's larger concern is with the actor's--and everyone else's--tools, with words which can refer so variously to worlds both understood and experienced.

The distinction Tranio draws between "rhetoric" and "common talk" in his first speech (1.1.35) is perhaps his way of distinguishing referential and non-referential language. "Rhetoric" is the kind of non-referential language practiced in the academies, presented here in the highly artificial style and fatuous content of Lucentio's opening speech, Lucentio seeming to have learned the non-referential artificial language of rhetoric without ever learning that it is in fact non-referential. It certainly comes across as discourse unrelated to the experiential world, and its speaker as unaware of this disjunction. "Common talk," on the other hand, seems to describe language that refers rather directly to the world of experience, the world of "acquaintance," of "your stomach," of "pleasure"(1.1.34, 38, 39).

Tranio, knowing the difference between "rhetoric" and "common talk," uses his knowledge to free himself from the rather limited role his social status alone would confine him to, not only in the opening scene but in the remainder of the play as well. He puts that knowledge to use by becoming a master talker. Having out-talked his erstwhile master Lucentio in their opening speeches, Tranio would get what he wants out of their stay in Padua if nothing else happened. But when something else does happen, Tranio is ready with words when Lucentio needs them: "Counsel me, Tranio, for I know thou canst; / Assist me, Tranio" (1.1.157-58). The words he offers end up making Lucentio into the servant he no doubt has really been all along, and Tranio into

the master. And his words are what enable him to "become" the master to the world; Gremio, his presumed rival for Bianca's hand, has to declare, " . . . this gentleman will out-talk us all" (1.2.246). Tranio alone of all the servants continues to have a role in the final scene, taking part in the banter of the ruling-class men and women:

> *Tra.* 'Tis well, sir, that you hunted for yourself;
> 'Tis thought your deer does hold you at a bay.
> *Bap.* O, O, Petruchio, Tranio hits you now. (5.2.55-57)

Those who get their power from the social structure may tell Tranio that he is a sailmaker's son and no more than a servant, but his mastery of language, from "rhetoric" to "common talk," tells the audience something else. He talks his way to freedom.

Petruchio's servant does almost as well. He is not as clever as Tranio, but he knows enough about language to keep himself free. In fact, the difference between these two servants may be that, while Tranio uses non-referential language offensively to change his *de facto* status despite *de jure* social structures, Grumio uses non-referential language defensively to keep himself from becoming Petruchio's mere puppet while remaining his servant.

Grumio's mastery of non-referential language shows up repeatedly in the play. He joins Petruchio's word-game with the tailor, adding the sexual innuendo: "Take up my mistress' gown to his master's use! / O fie, fie, fie!" (4.3.162-63). He puts down his fellow servant Curtis by playing his own word games with him, again using words with non-referential double meanings:

> *Gru.* . . . and thereby hangs a tale.
> *Curt.* Let's ha't, good Grumio.
> *Gru.* Lend thine ear.
> *Curt.* Here

> *Gru.* There [strikes him.]
> *Curt.* This 'tis to feel a tale, not to hear a tale.
> *Gru.* And therefore tis call'd a sensible tale; and this cuff was but to knock at your ear, and beseech list'ning. (4.1.57-66)

These double-entendres--the innuendos, the puns--all turn on combining referential and non-referential meanings in any given usage, a meaning that applies directly to what is experienced, along with a meaning that the speaker "makes" apply to serve his own purpose, in Grumio's case to secure himself Curtis's and the tailor's deference and Petruchio's good will.

Grumio's real defensive coup comes earlier, in his first scene. The knocking at the door scene has puzzled many a critic; in an essay that did a lot to correct the extremes in critical interpretations of Kate and Petruchio, for instance, Heilman could conclude only that "the 'knocking at the gate' confusion is there for fun, not function" (153). The scene may further theme more than plot, but its function seems clear. Grumio is distancing himself from Petruchio, refusing to do his will, by pretending not to understand his words. He knows full well that "knock" has two meanings: he combined them in his scene with Curtis. He also knows which meaning Petruchio has in mind, the referential meaning. He simply chooses to "hear" the non-referential meaning as the safest way to say "no" to his master and suffer the fewest consequences. He is pretending to have no facility with language, buttressing his case by dropping in a malapropism and by expressing the refusal in terms of respect: "Knock, sir? Whom should I knock? Is there any man has rebused your worship?" (1.2.6-7). Without question Grumio's subjective experience, his felt world, is really something like, "Why doesn't he knock? Do I have to do everything for him?" But his language refers not to these feelings but to what he hopes are Petruchio's assumptions about him,

which would be something like, "He is stupid, but he's loyal to me." Grumio fools Hortensio, who doesn't know him well, but he doesn't fool Petruchio, who has no doubt seen Grumio playing with words as the rest of us will in act 4. Petruchio catches on to the language a lot quicker than Lucentio did. But Grumio does get half a loaf: though he doesn't escape punishment, he does escape doing Petruchio's will. It's better to have one's ears wrung than to have one's will annihilated, to be free within if not without.

Critics with teenaged children or undergraduate students should know in a flash what Grumio does in this scene. It's what their daughters do when caught at the Pizza Hut after being refused permission to take the car out: "But *I* didn't take it out; *Johnny* drove!" Or it's what their students do when caught without the assignment: "You said to *prepare* it and I have; I didn't know you wanted me to write it down." Knowing that one's own words need not refer to what one is really experiencing and that others' words can refer to realities other than the ones they intend gives at least a modicum of freedom to those who cannot or will not seek more. Grumio, with some mastery of varying meanings, knows this well.

The two characters most restricted by social conventions, the servants, then, clearly find various kinds of freedom in their ability to use language non-referentially, the sailmaker's son from Bergamo doing so most fully, but Grumio doing so too. The next most restricted characters, the young women, belong to the ruling class but are restricted by their youth and by their sex. Kate and Bianca differ significantly from the young men of their class in the degree of freedom society offers them, for the young men have their own money, find education on their own, and travel away from home, while the young women apparently have no money, are educated by their father, and are the only young people besides Hortensio who live in the city of their upbringing. Kate and Bianca, however, do not differ from the young men of

their class in the degree of freedom they desire. The phrases "as I please" and "I please myself" echo four times through *The Taming of the Shrew*, Kate using them three times (3.2.209, 3.2.212, and 4.3.80) and Bianca once (3.1.20), and both object in similar language to others imposing on their freedom, Kate exclaiming, for example, "What, shall I be appointed hours" (1.1.103), and Bianca "I'll not be tied to hours, nor 'pointed times" (3.1.19). Despite this similarity of desire and expression, on the other hand, Kate and Bianca differ from each other dramatically in their ability to grab and hold the kind of freedom they talk about, at least in the first acts of the play. This difference relates directly to the degree to which each has learned to use language non-referentially.

Kate just cannot do it at all. Certainly she has a great deal of linguistic skill, which she uses like and with physical blows against all opponents. When Hortensio/Litio reports on his abuse by Kate and exclaims that "with that word she strook me on the head" (2.1.153), he says more about Kate's use of words than he knows. For Kate, words and language must directly express what she feels, must refer directly to subjective experience. If she feels anger, she expresses it--at Litio, at Bianca, at Petruchio. She thinks this direct, referential use of language is freeing,as she explains to Petruchio:

> My tongue will tell the anger of my heart,
> Or else my heart concealing it will break,
> And rather than it shall, I will be free,
> Even to the uttermost, as I please, in words. (4.3.77-80)

The problem, of course, is that Kate is anything but free. It's not just that her society restricts that freedom: with women as with servants that's a given. It's that her particular use of language,

which seems so free and even licentious, is actually so narrow that it ironically increases rather than decreases her restrictions.

This reading of Kate's freedom depends on getting right what the play sees as the full nature of freedom. As the play suggests through the servants, freedom consists not in lowering social restrictions but in being able to get what one wants, to do or not do what one wants, within those restrictions, in being able to realize oneself and impose oneself on the world. Kate's referential use of language keeps her from finding the latter, full freedom, heading as it does toward the former, illusory freedom. What Kate would like to achieve, of course, is a husband. Critics honest with the play recognize this. Kenneth Muir, for example, explains that "she wants a husband, while doubting whether any man she respects will want to marry her," and he goes on to comment on the "degradation" of such a position (27). The play offers a lot of evidence that Kate is precisely frustrated in this way. Why does she tie Bianca's hands and order her to talk about her suitors if not to have one herself at least vicariously: "Of all thy suitors here I charge [thee] tell / Whom thou lov'st best"(2.1.8-9). Why does she fear, even after Baptista restricts Bianca's suitors, that he will still let Bianca marry first and leave her dancing barefoot at Bianca's wedding and leading apes in hell, if she is not desperate that he not reverse his restrictions? And why would she bewail Petruchio's absence on their wedding day rather than complaining about being forced into the marriage and exulting over its not coming off, if she were not only willing to be married but also looking forward to it:

> Now must the world point at poor Katherine,
> And say, "Lo, there is mad Petruchio's wife,
> If it would please him come and marry her." (3.2.18-20)

Clearly Kate's limited use of language goes hand in hand with her limited ability to do what she wants to do and get what she wants to get. Critics may err in treating these dual limitations as if they were single. Juliet Dusinberre, for instance, sees Kate needing only to broaden her "assumptions of what is real" (106) and Hugh Richmond describes her as "philosophically a monist" (91). They miss Kate's *two* needs--for a fuller sense of the non-referential potential of language and for a fuller sense of what kinds of freedom that makes possible.

She *could* have developed these senses by watching Bianca, who wants to please herself as much as Kate does but who also has the linguistic ability to do so. Unlike Kate but like the male servants, Bianca can use words freely to express what she feels and wants without referring directly to anger or desire. Her brief exchange with Kate in her "bondage" scene provides a good example. She no doubt feels a good deal of anger and fear, yet her words have no anger or fear in them. Her words at first glance do appear to contain the normal response of a fearful girl. But on closer look, Bianca's words don't really even contain the submission they apparently offer; instead,they taunt Kate by indirectly referring to and reestablishing Bianca's superiority to her. The "duty" Bianca offers reminds Kate of her approaching spinsterhood as well as of Bianca's favored status with their father: "what you will command me will I do, / So well I know my duty to my elders" (2.1.6-7). The help Bianca offers reminds Kate of her own inability to get what she wants: "If you affect him, sister, here I swear / I'll plead for you myself, but you shall have him" (2.1.14-15). The humor Bianca seems to inject really reminds Kate of how little she has compared to Bianca, of how Bianca's scraps should seem a feast for her: "Is it for him you do envy me so? / Nay then you jest" (2.1.18-19). And Bianca pointedly does not give Kate what she wants, an intimate, sisterly, gossipy discussion of the men in

her life. Bianca and Kate replay the Grumio-Petruchio exchange from act I. Bianca, momentarily as powerless as Grumio was, loads her words so that they seem to refer directly to her powerlessness but actually refer indirectly and more meaningfully to her own power apart from and superior to Kate's. And to bring home this similarity, the play has Bianca get the same results Grumio got: both escape doing what they don't want to do, and both get beat for it, but both get defended by a third party and have clearly "won" despite their blows. This similarity between Bianca and Grumio is important because it can keep the critic from the kind of false dichotomy that Fineman creates in his analysis of the play when he insists that it presents "the battle between the determinate, literal language traditionally spoken by man and the indeterminate language traditionally spoken by woman" (143). In fact, not just women but all who must establish their freedom--male servants and younger daughters alike--use non-referential language. And women, when not needing to establish freedom, can be as direct as men.

With those she has power over, her servants and suitors for example, Bianca can be as directly referential as Kate. She speaks in Tranio's "rhetoric" to Kate, when Kate binds her temporarily, and to her father, whose social position binds her more fully, but she speaks "common talk" to Cambio and Litio. A wide gulf separates her language before her father--

> Sir, to your pleasure humbly I subscribe;
> My books and instruments shall be my company,
> On them to look and practice by myself (1.1.81-83)--

from her language before her tutors--

> I am no breeching scholar in the schools,
> I'll not be tied to hours, nor 'pointed times,

> But learn my lessons as I please myself. (3.1.18-20)

Her invoking of her father's pleasure is surely subjectively non-referential; how could she feel for that if she is so willing to be wooed and to marry without his knowledge or consent? Her insistence on pleasing herself, on the other hand, refers directly to what she does feel, for she succeeds in pleasing herself throughout the play. She gets it all--parental and social approval, wooers with wealth and good looks, a husband of her own choice, everything that pleases her. Some critics seem to envy her achievement, but the play does not. If freedom in this comedy is getting what a person wants, then she has it, and her language brings it to her.

But it is not from the free Bianca but from the even freer Petruchio that Kate learns how to separate her language from the experiential world. Certainly Petruchio is the young person in the play who is most free. He has the apparent freedom of minimal restrictions, for he is a wealthy young male with no obligations to estate, business, or family. Establishing that Petruchio possesses this kind of freedom may be the point of the differences between him and Lucentio. Lucentio comes to Padua "by my father's love" in order to "institute / a course of learning and ingenious studies"(1.1.5,9-10), and puts a fair amount of emphasis on the family and cities that have formed him:

> Pisa, renowned for grave citizens,
> Gave me my being, and my father first,
> A merchant of great traffic through the world,
> Vincentio, come of the Bentivolii;
> Vincentio's son, brought up in Florence,
> It shall become . . .
> To deck his fortune with his virtuous deeds (1.1.10-16).

The speech minimizes the self--he does not even refer to himself in the first person during much of it--and stresses the societies that he is part of. Petruchio, on the other hand, uses the first person pronoun six times in his first five lines (1.2.1-5), comes not to be tied to studies but to seek his fortune, and gives short shrift to the city and family that have formed him; one line each will do--"Verona, for a while I take my leave" (1.2.1) and "Antonio, my father, is deceased" (1.2.54)--and each line dismisses the authority of its subject.

Petruchio also has the fuller freedom, of course, the one Tranio and Bianca so clearly had--the freedom, in Frye's words, to triumph over a society that blocks us from the "realizing of what we want" (75). He wants a wealthy wife and gets one. He wants Kate in particular and gets her. He wants a tame and household Kate and gets that too. On both levels Petruchio is clearly the freest person in the play.

Petruchio also has the widest mastery of language. Like Tranio, he recognizes that language can work on two levels, the non-referential and the referential, the rhetorical and the common. That recognition comes out implicitly in his first dialogue with Kate. Petruchio starts with the playful and imaginative speech that seems to refer to wasps, asses, and combless cocks but actually refers to wooing, taming, and marriage, but he switches to the directly referential speech of the conclusion: "Thou must be married to no man but me; / For I am he am born to tame you" (2.1.275-76). Petruchio even makes his recognition of these two levels of language as explicit as Tranio did in the preceding act; the non-referential is "all this chat," and the referential is "plain terms" (2.1.268-69). The "rope tricks" Grumio says Petruchio has mastered are surely what modern editors think they are--"rhetoric," Tranio's rhetoric.

Petruchio certainly is a master of plain terms, too. While Bianca uses them only with the servant class, Petruchio uses them even with his elders, in particular with Baptista, an elder from whom he wants something. The play has Grumio signal the amazing directness of Petruchio's words: "You are too blunt," he warns; "you are marvelous forward" (2.1.45, 73). This is the kind of language, of course, that Kate uses constantly, and "forward" is what she gets called repeatedly. But while Kate's first dialogue with Petruchio shows her potential, she has not yet developed his mastery of that other, non-referential language.

The whole of the taming process extends Petruchio's use of non-referential language through the rest of the play and demonstrates his ability to separate his language from both subjective and objective experience. His subjective experiences through the process must include anger at Kate and frustration; he expresses both often enough before Grumio and even once before Kate: "I swear I'll cuff you, if you strike again" (2.1.220). Yet all he expresses during his "taming" is reverend care and perfect love, a strong contrast to Kate's need to express the anger of her heart. And surely his subjective experience includes sexual desire; while speaking in his "plain terms," he tells Kate that "thy beauty . . . doth make me like thee well" (2.1.274). Yet all he expresses on the subject during the "taming" is apparently in his sermon on continency, a strong contrast to the sexual innuendo that shows up in so much of the discourse of the play.

Petruchio's ability to use language without reference to his objective as well as subjective experience also shows up repeatedly in relation to Kate. The same man who uses the plain terms of direct reference to tell Kate that she is wild and needs taming uses non-referential language to tell her that she is mild and virtuous. He tells the wedding guests that they are aggressors when it's Kate who is so. He tells servants and the tailor that meat and gown are

unsuitable when they are perfectly acceptable. He tells Kate that it's seven in the morning when it's two in the afternoon.

And as if Petruchio's mastery of plain terms and of the "chat" of nonreference were not enough, criticism has long recognized Petruchio as the principal master of poetry in the play. Ifor Evans calls his language the "most interesting" poetically (28), particularly in regard to the nature imagery that recent criticism has made so much of (see, for instance, J.A.Roberts). Petruchio, the freest character in the play, is also its greatest master of language, from the blunt to the doubly non-referential to the poetic. He completes the pattern that will finally answer our opening questions: could Kate mean what she says in her final speech? What does she mean?

Kate has clearly learned how to use non-referential language. We see her first use it on the road to Padua, and even here she manages non-reference doubly. The opening conflict in the scene seems to be leading to an argument; Kate must once again be feeling anger and frustration. But after Hortensio's intervention, Kate speaks words that seem to refer to reconciliation, managing to suggest her view of Petruchio's apparent irrational willfulness without stating it:

> ...be it sun, or moon, or what you please;
> And if you please to call it a rush candle,
> Henceforth I vow it shall be so for me. (4.5.13-15)

Her words no longer tell directly the anger of her heart; they speak it as indirectly as Bianca's did in the bondage scene. Even more clearly, Kate is for the first time using language without direct reference to the objective world, and her description of Vincentio is as "mad" as was Petruchio's early description of a sweet, mild Kate.

The key to this development in Kate may be in her new use of the word "please." We've seen Bianca equally able to acknowledge her father's "pleasure" and to "please" herself. This is the fourth time Kate has used the word, but only the first time she has acknowledged anyone else's pleasure. Surely the point is not that Kate really, subjectively, wants to please Petruchio, anymore than Bianca does her father. The point is that Kate has learned to speak of other's pleasure while pursuing her own: after all, Hortensio's "say as he says" is followed by "or we shall never go," and it's precisely "going" that is Kate's desire, so she pleases herself as much as Petruchio in her two-fold non-reference. The second half of the scene may show Kate doing what Petruchio has done repeatedly with servants and others. When he was angry with Kate, his words spoke of anger toward others. If Kate is now angry with Petruchio (and who wouldn't be?) but cannot safely speak angrily toward Vincentio, Petruchio's stand-in as a powerful male, she can belittle him at least playfully. In doing so she learns not only the practical but also the emotional value of her new, rich language. She's having fun.

Kate must deliver that last problematic speech in the same spirit. Surely it is non-referential. Critics like Heilman and Parrott who think she is directly referring to her new state of being, her new subjective experience, simply must explain why this new socially acceptable Kate is not attaining her new status through the same socially oriented non-reference as Tranio, Grumio, Bianca, and Petruchio use. Critics like Champion and Frye who find the speech to be still that of a shrew must explain why others who speak this way aren't equally shrewish--why Lucentio is not a "shrew," for instance, in speaking as Baptista's servant while laying plans to steal his daughter. Critics who see irony in the speech are getting at its real significance, though many of them miss its full complexity. Certainly they miss it if they apply its irony to

Petruchio. He's the master of words and surely sees the non-reference and enjoys Kate's freeing use of it. And just as surely they miss that complexity if they see its irony as game-playing, as Novy does (277). The complexity lies in the realization that Kate has finally freed herself. She has wanted her father's affection, no doubt ever since she found herself replaced by Bianca, the new baby. Well, now Kate is the new baby, "another daughter" worth "another dowry" (5.2.114). She wanted male admirers, at least from the time the Bianca had such a wealth of them. Well, now she has them. And she wanted a husband, which at last she has: "Come, Kate, we'll to bed"(5.2.184). In the exaggerated, playful language of non-reference Kate can make an "elaborate appeal to political and social sanctities," as Saccio calls it (39), and offer to abase herself before Petruchio "if he please" (5.2.178), but the real pleasure is Kate's pleasure in finally being able to get what she wants, in her freedom. The later tragedies may judge Kate's speech "equivocation," but this comedy finds her not guilty. Non-reference is the *langue* of Kate's society, and Petruchio the dialectician and grammarian who teaches her to use it. What she says, non-referentially, is that she loves having that *langue* and that she loves the man who taught her. She means it, all right.

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The Wait

I fight--it's time--it's right--and am torn to pieces fighting
Robert Bly

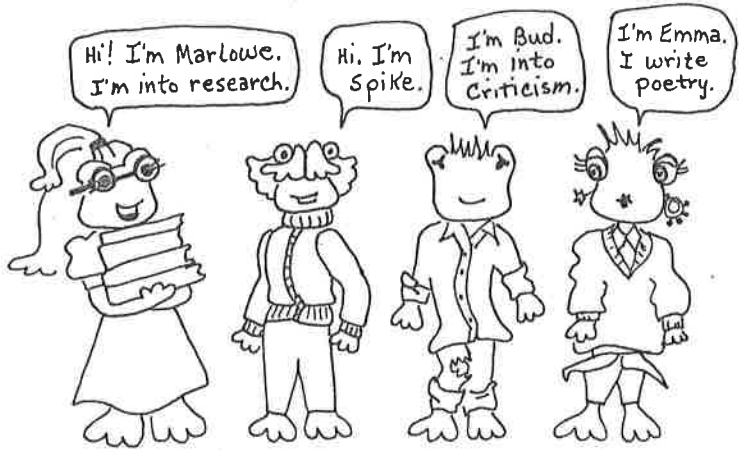
The half-asleep December moon
Leans over the shunting yard,
The frost-coated sleepers lie
Invisible beyond the signal,
And the station, aloof from the town,
Dormant in the darkness.

From Fargo, North Dakota,
I am expecting my parents,
And my brothers and sisters,
And Philippa my beloved.

I wait--the train coming late--and wait till midnight.
We wait like this when we expect our loved ones.
If we die in another land, we will arrive in coffins.
Our loved ones will wait late for us.

I pace up and down the platform
Watching the moon peering out of the clouds,
Then disappearing into the darkness again
Swallowed by the graying interior of the light.

How long the train shall take to arrive!
I stand there alone, with attenuated heartbeats,
Waiting as I wait for a thousand years.
Then suddenly I see the station master's face, coming toward me.
I weep--it is true--it is certain--and am torn to pieces weeping.



David Breeden
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Penny Arcade

We'd just had a $40.00 dinner.
My first $40.00 dinner.
Dutch treat.
I could tell, it was my night.
The moon almost full.
The mountains close and dark.
I dropped a quarter in RED BARON,
Made ACE.
Dropped another quarter in SUPER SLUGGER,
Made JOIN THE PROS.
I drove my car
The farthest, the fastest,
Through the most terrifying streets.
Nothing could stop me.
When I tried TEST YOUR STRENGTH
It said HE MAN.
She was impressed.
I could tell, it was my night.
The witch doll in KNOW YOUR FUTURE
Said, "I see passion in your future."
She bought popcorn and cotton candy.
I shot ducks
And for the first time forgave everybody.

Docking the Lamb

Revenge. Stupidity. I
love people for their hatreds.
I love the movies where priests
and witches roast like wieners
and pop. Burning cities. Hey,
we need melodrama, for our souls.
You know, the real Hamlet burned
his step-dad, mamma, and most
everybody else. He got a king's
daughter and lived happily ever
after, forget Ophelia. And what
about Weland the Smith by the
grey ice, the jealous king hamstrung
him so he'd make rich things, so
Weland set the prince's eyes as
jewels, wrought his skull into a
fancy cup, then raped the drunken
princess. Cruelty is our favorite
heirloom, the vase on the shelf.

Same House

Here it is--(at last) in sharp columns and
no dark recesses--you can walk inside,
but you don't, and see as much as
you do from outside and just as clean,
and there's the flowers but it's fall and the
colors are almost water but you can pick some

and, yes, she's waiting over there by the peach
tree you climb next to where the cat was shot and
she's smiling (well, as usual, damn her, she always
smiles, even to you) and, well,
no, had a fine time, this is later and
she'll be back, it's not her fault, she had
to wash, no, she'll be back, the
water's fine (fill in the water part), but
it's one dimensional but works under the circumstances.

Second Floor (same house)

Why in the hell would anyone put
a light switch (and not a good
switch, a damn string hanging)
at the top of the stairs when
the only thing living up there are
mice who've frozen to death already?
But you know, not even her socks
can raise this occasion past a party
on the last party's beer. Not even
the weird, sensual S she makes
on the carpet. I've been to school.
I know, if I tear off enough pieces
of oily brass from the ancient radio
and clock I can make them work. I've
been to school, I know this is
nothing a wince and a sharp breath
won't cure. You see the problem. These
narrow steps, my heels hanging off these
pink tongue-and-groove boards cool to
my fingers. If she's not here I won't
feel her, but when I see her, this is

later, outside, I hit her and she's
hard, but I can't touch the fine
lace over her nipples. She's younger,
walks past where we killed the snake,
over the flagstones, on out over the
gravel dotted in purple toward the oak.

Brand New Shoes (after reading Life, 1943)

The XXth century is a restaurant.
Firm girls clean the chrome counter
While the orders snap through grease.
And we get up each morning,
Clean the microphones and menus up.
Clean the limp necks from the Dardanelles.

(But it was different when Jehu
Drove his furious chariot
To the cool stones
Hung with purple
And had Jezabel pushed
Out the window and
The dogs ate her all
But her hands and feet.
You could go by and see
What you get for your
Hairdos and sins.)

Our age is cut in two

Like a worm on a sidewalk,
Neither end knowing the other,
The rebellion in the trenches,
The baas between machine guns,
The shootings at corners
So the bullets bounce down alleys
And the mayors complain.
Men wave money and shoes
So maybe we won't shoot them,
But we don't need their money and shoes,
The stacks pulled down
To keep a clear field of fire--

All forgotten, though
Some acceptable killings
Are shuffled into the things remembered
By crude mnemonic devices.

And the girls clean the chrome counter
Till their tight bodies
Swell and split with the bloody heads
Of more sacrifices.

I can tear this page
Out of *Life* magazine
In two and the Russians
Won't die--they'll stand
On the scaffold
Looking at their feet
Like they've got brand new shoes
But they won't die.
They'll get old

And make things.
And I would do it,
If this weren't a collector's item.
But what I think doesn't matter.
I just pull images
Out of the *mundi* hat.
It's my hobby.
I'll write a song for the scaffold--

You've held your child,
(Brindle cat on the sofa),
You've held your child,
And the trees disappear.

You've seen several noons
(Brindle cat on the sofa),
You've seen too many
It's fall, but the trees are green.

The geese at the pond
(Brindle cat on the sofa),
The geese at the pond,
And the green of the trees--

You guess who's gone
(Brindle cat on the sofa)!
You can guess
By night with half a moon.

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Winter Windows

The bamboo we potted and placed outside the west windows
sieved the summer sun. It got to us in pieces, throwing
itself against the floor, part of our world pied, dapple
heat we could live in. But this morning there is no sun.
The year's first winter announces itself; the northwesterly
plays the Phyllostachys edulis against the screen, clicking
and scratching the new season's song for no one particular.
The black marks trees make will tell as much as green.
The sky will go all one color. The scraping in the gray,
severe and unadorned, will last no longer than its time,
but it will have its time, this season of singing windows.

Sleeping on the Floor / A Song for my Father

On August nights when the hot air took
us from our beds and we slept on pallets
near the outside doors, he'd come to my room.

That was before we had ever talked,
and he never flinched when I held on
to the softness between his hip and ribs.

I didn't know we'd never really talk.
We'd play catch once, and he'd take me out
for a ride once after I was married to tell me

my mama was giving him heat about what
he was not doing about my not going to church.
But before he finished asking if I could do anything

about it, he was going back before the question.
Holding on to him, I didn't dream. Behind his back
nothing could get me; it would be years until I read

about guarding beds with brooms and sieves
and I would consider putting them up or singing
him songs in place of the talks we should have had.

From Pon-Yo's Black Side

I doubt I could

ever be a king's

wrought gold anything nor

a bird on a golden bough

charming nobles

in some enameled clime

but if

On

some cajun

Saturday night

you

ever wander through

my land

We will savor

the grape

and

play us

a round

While waiting on some distant time

TALK.

of Monk

and Mingus, too

---say, jump,---

-Yeaaa-

Swing.

I'll tell you

How

on Friday night we walked

together

from the fields

and went

our separate ways

for the old black man

to Pon-Yo's

black side

to charge
the air

with box

and board and tub

and like a shaman

sing and dance

and

shuck

a forty-eight hour Saturday night

then

I'll take you

to the open

window

near

my

bed

And scratch

and

squeeze

and sand

your

soul with

Valmon Chavis

Zydeco

And

we

will

the both

of us

Be

Singing

and Stepping

way past

dawn

and

Shuffling in

three-quarter

time

TIME

into

Oblivion.

Theodore Haddin
University of Alabama at Birmingham

The Buddha Sings

The Buddha sings
When I close my eyes
This morning is everywhere,
And the road is a river,
Pear trees hung with white blossoms.
My feet move over the tops
Of white blossoms,
My body slowly sinking in.

Night Runner

(For James Mersmann)

He runs at night
From his house in the valley
Out upon roads
Where his white tennis shoes
Widen to a whisper going by,
A faint pulse of breathing
Over cool asphalt and grass.
As often as night must come,
I see his body, I hear his sigh.
He runs alone in moonlight,
His shadow arches by roadside fields.
He carries a flashlight for cars.
And once when two head lights
Peered round a curve,
I saw his flashlight arc
From himself
And the moon and he in them

Made a fist of light
That shattered the darkness
Of my window for an instant
And then disappeared
In the criss-crossing
Quick switch-off
Where darkness
And he ran on.

Love Poem

I think of a body of water
It doesn't have to be anywhere,
It's the one we know from all
The others, kept, believed in,
Seen when felt, remembered when we look
At the shimmering light on the river
Sliding away, or the deep pool
Where rocks go down with glacial edge,
Far down, and the white stones
Holier than memory await us, and we know
When we look, that the slightest movement
At the surface is felt in us, and nothing,
Nothing at all, is lost.

English Departments and the Literary Canon

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In the introduction to their 1972 essay collection, *The Politics of Literature*, Louis Kampf and Paul Lauter state: "Two types of institutions are the major source of nearly everyone's experience of literature: the schools and the publishing houses. These institutions, in effect, function as criticism once did: they are the arbiters of taste; they advise people on the choice of books available to them" (45).

That schools and the publishing industry do indeed function in this way, that they play a significant role in determining literary canons, is one central assumption of my argument; since 1972, in fact, this position has become almost axiomatic for many critical theorists and sociologists of literature. In this essay I shall sketch some of the historical developments that lie behind Kampf and Lauter's claim. In doing so, I will limit my discussion to one smaller kind of institution within the large category of "schools" --the university English Department. I want to trace generally the relationship between the idea of a literary canon and the rise of English Studies as a professional discipline, and then specifically the consequences that conflict over the profession's identity had for the emergence of the modern American poetry canon in the 1930s and 1940s.

Like many other fields, English Studies came into being as an independent discipline during that period when American universities acquired their basic modern shape, the years from about 1870 to 1910. The educational historian Lawrence Veysey

traces three stages of development during these years--a utilitarian stage following the Civil War, the increased prominence of the Germanic ideal of research for its own sake during the mid-1870s, and then the rise of the ideal of a general or liberal education, beginning in the 1880s ("Stability" 5-7). English Studies could play an Arnoldian role in such an education, as Phyllis Franklin has pointed out, inculcating moral values and "supplement[ing] the fading influence of religion" (23).[1] Indeed, English went from being a largely extracurricular activity, confined to literary societies, to being the core of the liberal arts curriculum (Rudolph 13). Although English became a formal discipline during this third stage of educational reform, however, the field has its roots in the earlier utilitarian stage. English had to become a profession to be taken seriously, to compete with more obviously useful scientific and technological disciplines. Frequently defended in our century for its intrinsically humanizing value, in its early years the field benefitted, paradoxically, from the utilitarian bias of American culture. In the late nineteenth century, "English" meant two things: composition and philology. Johnny couldn't write then either, and concern about the poor quality of students' prose provided impetus for thriving composition courses. At the same time philology acquired reflected glory from the new prestige attached to science, and its quasi-scientific methods helped gain English Studies recognition as a discipline.

A field of study defines itself and justifies its existence by laying special claim to a certain area of knowledge. Stanley Fish, the contemporary critic most occupied with what one might call the theory of professionalism, describes the phenomenon thus: "Professions characteristically justify their special status by claiming 'cognitive exclusiveness,' a unique access to some area of knowledge that is deemed to be for the well-being of society" (89). Further, as most sociologists of the professions argue, the univer-

sity department intensifies that claim to exclusiveness: "A department emphasize[s] the unique identity of its subject, its special qualities and language, its special distinction as an activity of research and investigation" (Bledstein 327). English Departments did not spring to life ready to teach and research an already established body of texts using already established methods. English professors needed to define the content and methods of their field, their professional territory, and establish standards for that content. The idea of a literary canon provides that definition and acts as a form of quality control. Historically the canon has functioned as a set of boundaries that has helped English Departments present themselves as having a specific body of knowledge to impart--no small irony when one remembers that these departments "were invented in order to open up the traditional canon of 'teachable literature'" beyond Greek and Latin (Fiedler 110). As Richard Ohmann bluntly puts it, "English had to look like a subject" (243), and the literary canon was its subject.

In the nineteenth century as now, English Departments justified their ways to Deans by teaching freshman composition while they took their rationale and self-image from scholarship (which, as I have noted, meant philology) and from Arnold's idea of major authors and texts as the touchstones of a liberal education (Ohmann 301). To organize an education around "great books" and "great authors" is to place the concept of a canon at the heart of the university curriculum. The curriculum then becomes the mechanism by which the English Department ensures that its self-created canon of great books be taken seriously and perpetuated. Meanwhile, the self-justification of academic subspecialties within this curriculum and canon re-enacts on a small scale the original self-justification of the profession as a whole:

> The specialists on each topic determine the range of questions that can be posed about it. Since the very establishment of the specialty presupposes its fundamental importance, this range of questions will probably include no very searching ones about the specialty's actual value (Graff, "Criticism" 351)

When we talk about the literary canon today, then, we are talking about an idea partly created by academics to validate their professional existence. I do not want to suggest that this self-justification is bad or unique to our field--rather that we should recognize that our notions of "Great Books" have often been shaped by institutional, professional, or what once might have been called "extrinsic" pressures. Hence I think it also fair to say that by "literary canon" we usually mean "academic canon," especially since few people outside universities care about the literary canon, or even knows what the term means. As Leslie Fiedler, among others, has argued, the tenability of a canon assumes a distinction between "true literature and mass culture" (111-112), and until recently most English professors have seen it as their job to maintain and defend that distinction. It is no coincidence that English Departments began to form around the same time that the gap between a literary and a popular, or "sub-literary," canon began to manifest itself. Literature became the property of universities as popular fiction and magazines replaced it in the reading habits of the culture. In this situation it became the English Departments' job to "save" literature, and thus a distinction already emerging in the culture at large became formalized in the structure of the new universities.

So far I have suggested two functions that the idea of a canon has served historically for the university English Department: to define the boundaries of a field of professional operation, and to justify that field by showing it has "standards." A third function

has been to help the department play its role in the university's mission: the preservation, perpetuation, and dissemination of culture. Frederick Rudolph may exaggerate in seeing universities as inherently reactionary institutions and in arguing that "their intentions are conservative--to preserve and to transmit that which has survived" (3). He has much historical evidence on his side, however. Among historians of English Studies, one finds strong consensus as to how the humanities were used in American colleges well into the nineteenth century. In Ohmann's summary, the colleges were engaged in "transmitting a stable corpus of knowledge, embodied in a canon of classical and scriptural texts, with the purpose of confirming traditional culture and, more than incidentally, traditional class structure" (282).[2]

While the structure of higher education came to change radically, this fundamental purpose, among others, remained. By 1908, quite early in the history of academic American criticism, we find Irving Babbitt, one of T. S. Eliot's teachers, arguing explicitly that the university's function is "the perpetuation of culture," and that a homogeneous literary canon serves that function (102).[3] For students to read all the same books--to share a canon--provides the common frame of cultural reference that, in Babbitt's view, a liberal education should provide. For Babbitt, the canon embodies "a sense of absolute values" and "'the constant mind of man'" (123-124). By 1929 the scholarly and pedagogic methods used to achieve the profession's goals were changing, but the goals themselves remained stable. In that year Norman Foerster, an influential historical scholar sympathetic to criticism, argued in *The American Scholar* that "the best taste, I take it, is simply that which most nearly coincides with the past conscious reasonings, insights, and conclusions of mankind" (37). For Foerster as for Babbitt, professors of literature should concern themselves with "an earnest study of the unchanging" (40). If the category

"cultivated readers" underlies the category "literature," as the literary sociologist Robert Escarpit (59) later came to argue, it was in the university and through a common canon of past texts that the readers would get their cultivation. And if "literature" is a category not of production but of use, a social artifact rather than an aggregate of imaginative ones (see Williams 47; Stade 144-145; Eagleton 9; Roberts 87), then in the university English Department there existed for the first time an institution the main purpose of which was to use books as literature.

I have laid out in general terms some ways in which the emerging profession of English Studies required or used the notion of canonical texts. Let me shift in both time and focus now to sketch how the concern with professional self-definition that I have described affected the formation of one particular canon, that of modern American poetry. American literature and modern literature--modern poetry, modern fiction, modern anything--both took some time to be accepted into the university curriculum. In 1917 Fred Lewis Pattee became only the second person in the country to be endowed with the title "Professor of American Literature." In the same year, however, enough interest in and scholarship on American literature existed for the *Cambridge History of American Literature* to appear, although it also contained enough flaws for Foerster to call, in the title of an important essay collection, for *The Reinterpretation of American Literature*. The American Literature group of MLA formed in 1920; the journal *American Literature* began publication in 1929. In the five years between 1928 and 1933, the number of doctoral dissertations in American literature jumped over 700%, from 56 to 406 (Holman 450-452).

Even as American literature slowly gained a foothold in the academy, however, that term really meant "American prose." Historically our influential theories of American literature--the

theories of, say, Perry Miller, R. W. B. Lewis, Henry Nash Smith, Charles Feidelson, Richard Chase, F. 0. Matthiessen, Sacvan Bercovitch, Leslie Fiedler, Lionel Trilling, Richard Poirier, Leo Marx--have been theories of American prose. Of the critics Russell Reising discusses in his recent overview of such theories, *The Unusable Past*. only Yvor Winters, D. H. Lawrence, and Matthiessen have written significant criticism on American poetry. One distinction rarely made in discussions of our profession's history concerns the content of early English Studies. Many critics discuss the debates over methodology (philology vs. history, history vs. impressionistic criticism, and so on), but fewer discuss what was actually taught and talked about. *Scrutiny* shows that American poetry was not a significant part of the English curriculum at many institutions until at least World War II and often later.

With the gradual acceptance of American literature starting in the late 1920s, American poetry could be less easily dismissed because of its Americanness. It did suffer neglect for a different reason, however. The reputation of the Fireside Poets was already starting to diminish, so that except for Whitman and Dickinson, neither of whom were being widely read yet, to study American poetry in the 1930s meant, essentially, to study modern poetry. If poets could be forgiven their Americanness, they could not be forgiven their modernity. Leslie Fiedler writes that when he entered graduate school in the late 1930s, twentieth-century literature was seen as the last refuge of an inadequate scholar, and even nineteenth-century literature was viewed with some suspicion (111). Gerald Graff, describing course listings at Northwestern University, notes that in the academic year 1934-35 only four English courses came up to the nineteenth century, and that Arnold, Tennyson, and Whitman were the most recent poets taught. He speculates that 280 out of an estimated 360 stu-

dents taking these courses read nothing published after 1850 ("Criticism" 389). Nor did this situation change quickly. In 1963 Rene Wellek still felt it necessary to plead for the inclusion of contemporary literature in an English Ph. D. program (314). Two statistics show vividly how the acceptance of earlier American literature preceded that of modern work. Between 1950 and 1970, *PMLA* published more articles on American literature to 1900 than in any other category. Only in 1972, however, did the number of articles on twentieth-century American literature in the journal catch up with the number published there on twentieth-century British literature (Fisher 407).

To study modern American poetry involved English professors in questions of evaluation and problems of analysis that many of them were either ill-equipped or unwilling to confront--"unwilling" because they did not see such questions as germane to literary study as it was then defined. Foerster, for example, defending literary historians, argued that they try to operate "without the bias of criticism"; they are unconcerned with questions of "worth or value," "praise or blame" (10-11). Hence a shift in the balance of professional power was required before modern American poetry--the work of Eliot, Pound, Crane, Moore, Stevens, and others--could even receive attention. It took the growing ascendancy of critics in English Departments and scholarly journals beginning in the late 1930s, and the ascendancy of a critical methodology designed especially for modern poetry, to bring about the willingness to evaluate that poetry and incorporate it into the curriculum.

This shift in power occurred, of course, with the advent of the New Criticism. The difficulties of modern poetry required both a defense and a trained audience that did not yet exist for most of these "poets without laurels," as John Crowe Ransom called them. The New Criticism was designed to defend and explicate this

poetry. The work of Allen Tate, R. P. Blackmur, Yvor Winters, Cleanth Brooks, and, in England, F. R. Leavis on Pound, Eliot, Moore, Crane, Stevens, and Dickinson constitutes the first systematic attempt within the academy to establish an American poetry canon. Brooks articulates the New Critical view of this poetry in one of the movement's seminal texts, *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939): "The best defense against the charge of unintelligibility is to submit detailed interpretations" (xxxi). Modern poetry, Brooks proposes, needs a new kind of reading:

> From time to time poets appear, who, if they are accepted at all, demand a radical revision of the existing conception of poetry. Of this sort are our modern poets, and herein lies the difficulty of accepting them, or, if they are accepted, the difficulty of accommodating them in the traditionally accepted pattern (xxviii -xxix).

That the New Critics sought not merely to read poems closely but to reconstitute the field of English Studies emerges clearly from Ransom's influential 1938 essay "Criticism, Inc.," one of the first calls for the institutionalization of a professional literary criticism and a response to the claims of historical scholars that anyone could "do" criticism, that it was not sufficiently rigorous an intellectual enterprise to qualify as a professional activity. Ransom argues that criticism should be a collective professional enterprise based in the academy: "The university teacher of literature . . . should be the very professional we need to take charge of the critical activity," and criticism "must be developed by the collective and sustained effort of learned persons--which means that its proper seat is in the universities" (328, 329). Ransom then goes on to say what criticism is not. It excludes "personal registrations," the recording of subjective appreciation of an art work (342); it excludes the moralistic Neo-Humanism of Babbitt and

Paul Elmer More; it excludes historical scholarship; it excludes linguistic studies, philology. In sum, it excludes everything that English Studies had ever been. Further, Ransom admits that in seeking to redefine the field's basic premises, he is also seeking a shift in the professional power structure. He describes his contemporary situation in terms that anticipate many recent analyses of how the profession maintains itself:

> In a department of English, as in any other going business, the proprietary interest becomes vested, and in old and reputable departments the vestees have uniformly been gentlemen who have gone through the historical mill. Their laborious Ph.D.'s and historical publications are their patents. Naturally, quite spontaneously, they would tend to perpetuate a system in which the power and the glory belonged to them (334).[4]

A few pages later, Ransom observes politely that "a change of policy suggests itself" (346).

Before it came to be seen as the job of academic criticism to make aesthetic judgments, the study of American literature had to be justified on social or political grounds, as Paul Lauter has shown: "In the 1920s, the new professors of American literature justified their study of that previously scorned subject as vital to understanding the character of an emerging world power" (423). During this period it was poet-critics like Eliot and Pound, literary journalists like Edmund Wilson and magazines like *The Dial*, not university professors, who had the most impact on the formation of an emerging American poetry canon. With the decline of literary journalism as a viable profession, however, professors took over the shaping of canons and taste.[5]

Hence one job for Ransom's new critics was to be "the erection of intelligent standards of criticism." These standards would

demand making the kind of evaluative judgments that shape and reshape canons, and Ransom contrasts the new critic with the old historical scholar on precisely this basis: the historian can "spend a lifetime in compiling the data of literature and yet rarely or never commit himself to a literary judgment" (328). No more equipped to make the informed judgments on which canons are based, in Ransom's view, are those who teach "whatever may be meant by 'appreciation'" of a canon already established for them:

> The professors so engaged are properly curators, and the museum of which they have the care is furnished with the cherished literary masterpieces, just as another museum might be filled with paintings" (339).

The contemporary canon, however, by definition, will be shaped not by historical methods but by the criticism that Ransom proposes: "Contemporary literature . . . is almost obliged to receive critical study if it receives any at all, since it is hardly capable of the usual historical scholarship" (336), as William Cain argues in *The Crisis of Criticism*, the New Criticism established tenets that became accepted as the very essence of the profession: that the critical study of literature properly occurs within university departments; that literary study means focusing on "the text itself"; that critics and teachers must attend to specifically literary matters, in such a way as to distinguish their work from that going on in other departments like history. The titles alone of many New Critical essays reveal these critics' self-consciousness about their professional goals: Blackmur's "The Critic's Job of Work," Tate's "The Present Function of Criticism," Ransom's "Wanted: An Ontological Critic," Winters's complaining question "What Are We To Think of Professor X?" In early New Critical writings, we can, in Cain's words, "observe the discipline reconsolidating itself,

declaring its new business, refining its product, and securing its boundaries" (100). Thus, new as their critical methods and the particular canon that they promoted were, the New Critics continued to do what the earliest professors of English had done: to privilege a canon as a way to define and justify their work, to demonstrate their standards, and to preserve and disseminate a particular version of "culture." Canons may change their shape, but they do not go away, and some of the forces that condition their acceptance seem to have remarkable durability.

NOTES

[1]For similar statements of this point, see Lucas: "From the beginning--that is, from Matthew Arnold--the study of literature was seen as providing a stay against political and cultural anarchy" (196); and Eagleton: "As religion progressively ceases to provide the social 'cement,' affective values and basic mythologies by which a socially turbulent class-society can be welded together, 'English' is constructed as a subject to carry this ideological burden from the Victorian period onwards. The key figure here is Matthew Arnold, . . ." (23-24).

[2]Similar overviews of the humanities' role in nineteenth-century American higher education are offered by Veysey ("Stability" 1) and the Commission on the Humanities, which describes early colleges' efforts "to maintain, through induction into the traditions of classical culture, a small elite of the educated in a predominantly agricultural society . . . . Through the humanities the early college expressed its faith in the coherence of knowledge, in a single cultural tradition, and in the community of the learned" (Humanities 63).

[3]As one small measure of how English Departments historically have affirmed the importance of maintaining a more or less

monolithic canon, one need only note, as John H. Fisher (400) does, the homogeneity, at least into the mid-1960s, of *PMLA*--the journal by which the profession represents itself to itself.

[4]As early as 1908, Babbitt had voiced a similar complaint against philologists' control of the English Department: "The philologists . . . command the approaches to the higher positions through their control of the machinery of the doctor's degree" (131).

[5]A number of essayists develop this position at length, although from varying perspectives, in Graff and Gibbons's *Criticism in the University*. See especially Gibbons, "Academic Criticism and Contemporary Literature"; Graff, "The University and the Prevention of Culture"; and Bell-Villada.

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The Image of Mary Magdalene in Seventeenth-Century Poetry

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Seventeenth century veneration of Mary Magdalene amounted almost to a cult following, and resulted in a number of poems about her by metaphysical and baroque writers, many of whom were Catholic. In fact, as Sir Herbert Grierson has observed, the Magdalene was "the favorite saint of the Counter-Reformation, suggesting images at once voluptuous and pious."[1] The British Magdalen poems of this period, greatly influenced by continental, particularly Italian, style, display surprising iconographic resemblances when compared to their medieval or modern counterparts. Though the poems vary in quality, they emphasize similar imagery, and focus on the same subject matter--a dubious episode only uncertainly connected with Mary Magdalene in Biblical, ecclesiastical, and literary tradition. Their likeness suggests a psychological need or strong interest common to the period.

Six poets produced eight poems about the Magdalene between the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the Restoration. Two more writers, John Donne and Henry Constable, also wrote sonnets about the Magdalene early in the same time period, but they differ by rationally analyzing ideas which the other poets express emotionally. Robert Southwell, first a Puritan and then a martyred Jesuit priest, aided in bringing continental interest in Mary to England with his prose homily, *Marie Magdalens Funeral Teares,* in 1591.[2] Southwell himself wrote two poems about her,

both published in 1595: "Mary Magdalens blush," considered the earlier and inferior poem, and "Mary Magdalens complaint at Christes death", exhibiting typical Counter-Reformation use of courtly love language applied to a sacred subject.

Anglican George Herbert represents, according to Louis Martz,[3] the finest synthesis of the Catholic and Italian influence. Herbert's "Mary Magdalen," published in *The Temple*, 1633, though not one of his best poems, combines baroque subject matter and imagery with metaphysical punning and conceits. Another Protestant, the Scot William Drummond of Hawthornden, had traveled extensively in France and Italy, and had little use for rigid Calvinism. His sonnet sequence *Flowers of Sion*, published in 1623, reveals classical influences. Henry Vaughan wrote a very interesting "St. Mary Magdalen" (*Silex Scintillans II*, 1655). Though published several years later, Vaughan's poem resembles Herbert's in style and diction more than it does the baroque examples by Richard Crashaw.

With Sir Edward Sherburne and Crashaw we move into true baroque and imitation of Italian "Marinism," the ornate style of Giambattisto Marino.[4] In 1651, Sherburne translated a poem by Marino: "And she washed his Feet with her Teares, and wiped them with the Hairs of her Head," which compares Mary with Cleopatra in the sumptuousness of her love gifts. It was also printed under Sherburne's own name with the title, "The Magdalen." Sherburne, like Southwell, influenced British poets toward the more florid Italian style. Crashaw represents the epitome of this movement, as well as of fascination with the Magdalen. He composed two poems about her, although many consider his earlier short lyric, "The Teare," to be merely a draft of ideas which he expanded and developed for 186 lines in "The Weeper" (*Carmen Deo Nostro*, 1652). Both poems contain so many rich images that they seem designed, like the baroque ar-

chitecture described by Austin Warren, "not to reveal the structure, but to be in themselves impressive."[5] Crashaw's raptures over Mary's cheeks, eyes, and tears appear at first rather remote from the Christian principles behind the Magdalen story.

The Bible actually tells very little about Mary Magdalene. Matthew hardly mentions her, except to indicate her presence at the Crucifixion and Resurrection. Two gospels (Luke 8:2 and Mark 15:9) state that she was the woman out of whom Christ cast "seven devils." All four gospels, however, identify her as watching at the cross, coming to the tomb on Easter morning, and reporting Christ's Resurrection to the disciples. All but Mark add that she brought "sweet spices" to anoint the body. According to one gospel (John 20) Mary mistook Jesus for the gardener when she stood alone "weeping" outside the empty tomb, while in Matthew 28, she appears as one of three women who spoke to an angel at the tomb. She was also identified with Mary of Bethany, sister of Martha and Lazarus, named in Luke and John as the woman who anointed Jesus' feet with ointment or tears, and "wiped them with her hair." This incident took place at the house of Simon the leper in Bethany, while apparently a separate woman broke an alabaster box of "spikenard very precious" and poured it over Jesus' head in Nain at Simon the Pharisee's.

However, church tradition had combined these events and assigned them both to Mary Magdalene. Because of the number of women named Mary in the New Testament (which connects seven different appellations with that name), confusion arose about exactly how many there were. John Donne refers to this controversy in his introductory sonnet for *La Corona*, "To the Lady Magdalen Herbert, of St. Mary Magdalen":

> . . . so much good there is
> Delivered of her, that some Fathers be

> Loth to believe one Woman could do this;
> But think these *Magdalens* were two or three.[6]

Donne himself accepts the tradition that her "fair inheritance/ *Bethina* was, and jointure *Magdalo*," pronounced by Pope Gregory in the sixth century. Gregory determined that Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany, and the repentant sinner with the box of ointment were "one and the same Person."[7] Magdala, a fishing town, possessed a reputation for harlotry, which may explain why Mary became connected with the woman taken in adultery, and was thought to be a prostitute. She was also believed to be wealthy and to have lived in a castle, as referred to by Vaughan.[8]

Nearly all of the church fathers wrote about her, including Augustine, Gregory, and Jerome. Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend* included Mary in its popular catalogue of saints' lives. She also appeared in many homilectic treatises by intellectual clergymen. Chaucer translated one of these, falsely attributed to Origen. In literature, she was praised by many Latin hymns, including those of Petrarch, who was "especially devoted to her," by numerous continental lyrics, and by her position in the English mystery cycle. There, as in the liturgical Easter drama, her importance centered on her discovery of the Resurrection. She was also the hero of one full-length miracle play in the Gnostic Digby manuscript. This play, based on *The Golden Legend* and other saints' catalogues, incorporates events from her later life, when she supposedly journeyed to Marsailles, converted the French to Christianity, was credited with saving the lives of the Queen of Marsailles and her new-born infant, and ended her days in seclusion as a hermit. She became the patron saint of wine-growers and perfume makers. Mary's later life, especially in Gnostic writing, became "overlaid with that of another reformed prostitute-turned-saint named Maria of Egypt," who was born 500

years later.[9] Though arguments about her still naturally occurred, most seventeenth century poets accepted all these traditions about her rather uncritically.

Strangely enough, despite the many traditions surrounding Mary Magdalene, seventeenth-century poetry about her exhibits little iconographic variation. None depict Jesus curing her of demon possession, or demons pursuing her as in the Digby miracle play; only one makes reference to her presence at the Crucifixion, and never once does any mention her discovery of the empty tomb, her conversation with Jesus in the garden, or her report of His Resurrection to the disciples, all favorite medieval themes. They do, however, utilize elements which reveal traces of old myths. In fact, all concentrate on the weeping, repentant prostitute, and nearly all present the same scene: Mary falling at Christ's feet, washing them with her tears, drying them with her hair, and anointing them with ointment. They do this consistently even though Scripture does not explicitly associate her with the incident. This prevalence indicates that the subject reflected some common need or interest shared by people of the time, or at least some common strong influences. And continental influence cannot fully explain it either: Englishmen were notoriously suspicious of the French and Italians, while the widespread continental interest in Mary merely intensifies the question. Neither modern nor medieval treatments tend to stress the incident. Medieval poets emphasized Mary's closeness to Christ, and her asceticism and miraculous power in later life. Some do hint at the courtly love relationship favored by baroque poets, but they approach it in a more literal way. More recent poets, on the other hand, prefer to de-spiritualize their conceptions of her and make her a very human woman. They may, like James Elroy Flecker, describe their own responses to the Magdalen's changed life, or like Boris Pasternak, examine her psychological growth as an individual

without supernatural help. Dante Gabriel Rosetti presents her desperately refusing a proposition by Simon the hypocritical Pharisee, and Oscar Wilde rejects her repentance and honors her former love of life and sexuality. These varied Victorian examples suggest how striking is the resemblance of the seventeenth-century models.

Elements common to the poems include references to Mary's prostitution, her tears, her hair and ointment or balm, and their association with Christ's feet or with abject submission to Christ. In each case, the poet suggests Mary's earlier life as a wealthy prostitute, and her tearful repentance. Tears and lamentation dominate each of the poems. They result from the literature of eyes and tears introduced by Southwell, which influenced even Andrew Marvell.[10] Southwell's "Mary Magdalens blush" says that "cares must cure, and tears must wash awaye" her faults. His later poem is a "complaint" of "dying life," "miserie," and "a world of heaviness." George Herbert asks, "Why kept she not her tears for her own faults . . . why did she strive / To make him clean who could not be defiled?" Drummond's Magdalen "out-weepes" the very blackness of her eyes in her "Care" and "Sharp Remorse," and makes Christ's feet "teare-wet." Vaughan advises all women to "Learn *Mary's* art of tears." Sherburne's brief poem mentions her tears in the title and in the poem as well. But Crashaw outdoes them all, with his poems being entitled "The Teare" and "The Weeper." In both, he addresses Mary's tears, comparing them to many things, and in the longer poem, the tears answer him. This seventeenth-century preoccupation with her grief apparently even caused the addition of a new word, *maudlin*, to denote "an overly sentimental weeper." The word first appeared in print in 1607.[11] But tears also support Panofsky's suggestion that the Magdalen has acquired features of the fertility goddess's lament for Tammuz/Adonis.

Connection of Mary's tears with the washing of Christ's feet occurs in Herbert, Drummond, Vaughan, Sherburne, and Crashaw's longer poem. An emphasis on falling at the feet of Christ as a symbol of humility recalls medieval and Renaissance sermonizing on the subject, and Jesus' own washing of the disciples' feet. Herbert makes it a didactic metaphysical lesson:

> Showing his steps should be the street
> Wherein she thenceforth evermore
> With pensive humbleness would live and tread.

Drummond expresses the same idea about the lowering of her head--Mary's "Eyes" and "Lockes," he says, "To touch thy sacred feet do now aspire." She begs forgiveness, "His teare-wet feet stil drying with her hair." Vaughan confuses the two Biblical incidents and combines Simon the Pharisee with Simon the leper. Though he includes the breaking of the alabaster box, he emphasizes the foot-washing and asks Mary,

> Why art thou humbled thus, and low
> As earth, thy lovely head dost bow?
> . . . thy wither'd self in haste
> Beneath his blest feet thou didst cast.

In Sherburne's poem, Mary makes her offering "Tears" and "Hair" on the "silver Tables" of his feet. The title quotes the Biblical passage about the footwashing. Though Crashaw wrote in his first Magdalen poem that her tear should never lay its "Head" in the dust, he concludes "The Weeper" with these words spoken by the tears: "We go to meet / A worthy object, our Lord's feet."

Another iconographic feature associated with Mary Magdalene is her long, flowing hair. One possible derivation of her name has been made from the Hebrew word "Magdala," which denoted a

person with "plaited or twisted hair, a practice then much in use by women of loose character."[12] Two books of the New Testament (I Timothy 2:9 and I Peter 3:3) enjoin against elaborate hairdressing. Mary was often painted with loose hair down to her feet, sometimes wild and unkempt in her grief, looking like a Maenad. If poets thought of her as the woman who wiped Christ's feet with her hair, then the hair had to be long. Several of the seventeenth-century poets emphasize this. Herbert mentions that she wore Christ's feet as a "Jewel" on her head, suggesting replacement of other ornaments. Vaughan spends six lines on the subject of her hair:

> Why lies this Hair despised now
> Which once thy care and art did show:
> Who then did dress the much lov'd toy
> In Spires, Globes, angry Curls, and coy,
> Which with skill'd negligance seem'd shed
> About thy curious, wilde yong head? (11. 15-20)

Drummond draws an even more interesting mythic connection of her "Lockes" with those of the gorgon Medusa, at the same time introducing ideas of sin and the devil: "Soul stinging serpents in gilt curles which creepe."[13] Sherburne and Crashaw, both influenced by Marino and other Italian models--Sherburne's, of course, being merely a translation--stress her beauty and the "gold" of her hair (though she is usually painted as dark).

Marjorie Malvern in her iconographic study, *Venus in Sackcloth: The Magdalen's Origins and Metamorphoses*, demonstrates how the figure of Mary Magdalene in pictorial art assimilated aspects of many different symbolic and mythological figures. As Malvern points out, the Magdalen can often be recognized by two "highly connotative attributes": her "long flowing hair" and her "ointment jar," both of which are also connected with Pandora and other fer-

tility goddesses.[14] The Bible associates Mary in many ways with ointments or anointing. Besides the two anointings with the alabaster box, Mary was also one of the women who, according to the Gospels, brought spices to anoint Christ's body after burial. Tradition connected these incidents because Jesus supposedly told the disciples, "She has come before my death to anoint my body to the burying" (Mark 14:8). The Magdalen's jar acquired some of the qualities of Pandora's box, with its contradictory contents of both "good" and "evil," as a symbol of both her sinful life and her sainthood, of both life and death.

Along with their similar subject matter, these poems display related image patterns. These include courtly love metaphors, treasure motifs, and natural imagery of plants and flowers, water and fire. All of the poems have in common what Praz calls the "seventeenth century need" to use, "when it came to religion, the very language of profane love, transposed and sublimated."[15] This group of images includes Cupid and his arrows, Christ as a lover, emphasis on eyes as the windows of the soul, and music--sighing and singing being intermingled. Southwell compares the arrows of God's love to those of Cupid in lines that evoke Bernini's statue of St. Teresa:

> Woe worth the bow, woe worth the archers might,
> That drave such arrows to the marke so right.
>
> To pull them out, to leave them in, is death.

The other poets also use the arrow imagery, along with courtly compliment, lament for lost love, and erotic language such as could appear in a troubadour love lyric: in Crashaw words like "wanton," "blushing," "kisses," and "sweet" abound.

Other image groups appear consistently: precious jewels and metals ("gilt," "Pearl dissolv'd in Gold," "silver tables," "watry Diamond," "Maiden Gemme," "crystal," "beads on a rosary"); along with a great deal of natural imagery, including gardens and vegetation, water and fire. The later poets describe Mary in terms of flowers, vines, and fruit. She resembles the "Rose," the lily, and the "purpling vine." She has flowers in her cheeks and a "garden" in her face. The poets manage to relate her to every body of water imaginable: a dew drop, springs, streams, waves, seas. Crashaw exaggerates the water imagery beyond all measure: in "The Weeper," he refers to the Magdalene's tears as "the gentle stream," "milky rivers, " "showers," "rain," "fair floods"--and of course the infamous "two walking baths," "weeping fountains," "portable and compendious oceans." Along with the water imagery runs a strain of fire metaphors which also have a double-edged significance. As water represents both the dangerous seas of sin and the saving baptism of repentant tears, so fire suggests in the poems both the fever of lust and the redeeming fire of the spirit. Often Mary herself is associated with stars. Perhaps this natural image derives from her name, which is the same as the Virgin Mary, called *stella maris* or "star of the sea." It recalls as well Mary's assimilation of symbols connected with Venus the "foam-born," and the "evening and morning star." Finally, in an attempt to transcend the sense and unite the contraries, these poets favor many images and verbs of motion. Things rise and fall, "fly" and "flit," ebb and flow, dart, "recoyle," and drive "to the marke." A great deal of shining, running, flashing and blending occurs. "0 floods, 0 fires, 0 suns, 0 showers!", exclaims Crashaw, "Mixed and made friends by Love's sweet powers."

Many of the images express a voluptuousness that moves almost too far from their meditative purpose. Crashaw even mixes clas-

sical deities with the saints: the fourth stanza of "The Teare" (slightly revised and retained in "The Weeper") reads:

> Such a Pearle as this is,
> (Slipt from Aurora's dewy Brest)
> The Rose buds sweet lip kisses;
> And such the Rose it selfe when vext
> With ungentle flames, does shed,
> Sweating in too warme a Bed.

Other passages betray a similar sensuality; for example:

> The dew no more will sleep
> Nuzzled in the lily's neck;
> Much rather would it be thy tear
> And . . . tremble here. (45-48)

Such passages remind one of the luscious, exuberant pink-and-white angels painted in baroque chapels, whose bosomy figures and rosy cheeks look a good deal more fleshly than spiritual--though Louis Martz argues that they serve a true meditative purpose. Perhaps the emphasis on gold, jewels, and flowers proceeds from the same baroque impulse that caused architects of the Counter-Reformation to gild their church ceilings and fill rooms with ornamental details--an attempt to employ the sensual in the service of the spiritual, support of ecclesiastical and monarchical wealth, aristocratic preference for the aesthetic. Poets applied much of the same imagery to other female figures, especially the Virgin Mary. Mario Praz sees the "exotic atmosphere" and "wealthy similes" as imitations of the Song of Solomon.

Recent studies of the Qabala, the Apocrypha, and the Gnostic gospels reveal the "suppressed feminism" and dual treatment of God in these works, which include midrashim on the Song of Solomon.[16] According to Elemire Zolla, the Protestant Reformation with its "male-minded" politics did not overwhelm the outward androgyny sanctioned by the Catholic Church, but actually "reopened the way for a revival" of this "whole hidden strain" in Christian thought, though perhaps by the back door.[17]

The Apocryphal Gospels of Mary, Phillip, and Thomas portray Mary Magdalen as the consort or companion of Christ. In these and other Gnostic writings, she becomes a personification of the "wisdom" of Christ. The Sophia (Wisdom), "sometimes called Pistis (Faith) and sometimes called Prunikos (Whore)" is a central figure in Gnostic myths." [18] She embodies both the positive and negative aspects of woman as matter and evil who may be saved by faith and love. Though these documents were "never widely disseminated," they affected the transformation of the Magdalen as a symbolic figure. As the Gnostic sister-spouse of Christ, she took on qualities of the Bride in the Song of Songs. This relationship is intensified by the Bride's identification with spikenard and the "savour of good ointments" (4:10), as well as with gardens, vinyards, and wine. But this association also links her with ancient fertility goddesses and mystery cults like the one at Ephesus, where the Magdalen, like the Virgin in some traditions, was reputedly buried. Malvern follows Erwin Panofsky in showing how the mythological Eve-Pandora becomes superimposed upon the saint, and Pandora's box becomes Mary's ointment jar.[19] Ephesus connects her with Demeter and Persephone. Her former madness and sexual license even suggests the Dionysian Maenads, as can be clearly seen by comparing paintings, while the love symbolism surrounding her connects her with Venus. The Magdalen was sometimes linked with the Virgin Mary in a way that recalls the celestial and common Venus. Some documents even confused her with the mother of Jesus.[20]

The iconographic portrayals of Mary Magdalene in lyric poetry exhibit several profound strains of seventeenth-century faith and

philosophy. There was a greater emphasis on female saints, and a stronger interest in the suffering as opposed to the victorious power of martyrs. There was a growing movement toward meditative practices like those of St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. Francis de Sales. And many experienced a desire to rekindle spiritual passion in a world that was already moving into the cold rational science of the Enlightenment. All of these expressed the "characteristic turning inward" of people in this period--for whom government, authority, the outward realm, could "no longer seem providentially ordained."[21] Mary Magdalene became a symbol for the wounded inner self of a patriarchal and Christian society-the problems of unintegrated feeling and physicality, like the *mater dolorosa* figures in earlier western mythology. Veneration of Mary represents an attempt by Christianity to reconcile not only the light and spiritual qualities of the Virgin, but the whole feminine image. It should be remarked, however, that seventeenth century poets leave the Magdalen on her knees, humbled, and thus fail to integrate fully those aspects of the self which she represents.

Perhaps Henry Constable's sonnet of 1607 best sums up the reasons why Mary Magdalen became the focus for all those feelings, though most baroque poets would not--or could not--analyze their emotions so rationally:

> Sweet saint, thou better canst declare to me
> What pleasure is obtained by heavenly love
> Than they which other loves did never prove,
> Or which in sex are differing from thee;
> For like a woman-spouse my soul shall be,
> Whom sinful passions once to lust did move
> And since betrothed to God's Son above
> Should be enamored with His Deity.
> My body is the garment of my spright
> While as the daytime of my life doth last,

> When death shall bring the night of my delight
> My soul unclothed shall rest from labours past:
> And clasped in the arms of God enjoy
> By sweet conjunction everlasting joy.[22]

The seventeenth century needed to approach and understand God through a spiritualization of the senses.

Notes

[1]Quoted in Marjorie M. Malvern, *Venus in Sackcloth* (Illinois, 1975), p. 9.

[2]Louis L. Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation* (New Haven, 1964), p. 200

[3]Martz, p. 185.

[4]Mario Praz, *The Flaming Heart* (New York, 1958), p. 213.

[5]Austin Warren, "Baroque Art and the Emblem," *Seventeenth Century Prose and Poetry*, ed. Witherspoon and Warnke (New York, 1963), p. 1078.

[6]*The Complete Poems of John Donne*, ed. John T. Shawcross (New York, 1967), p. 159.

[7]Malvern, p. 19.

[8]"*Magdal*-castle was thy seat," l. 13 of "St. Mary Magdalen." This tradition may have arisen by derivation from the Hebrew word "Migdalo," meaning tower. See Helen Meredith Garth, *Saint Mary Magdalene in Medieval Literature* (Baltimore, 1950), p. 78.

[9]Garth, pp. 12-14, 18-27. Further analysis of the relationship between the two women may be found in Catholic encyclopedias, dictionaries, and lives of the saints.

[10]Martz argues that the key to Marvell's poem "Eyes and Tears" lies in a Latin epigram about the Magdalen, and that his "On a Drop of Dew" echoes Crashaw (*Poetry of Meditation*. p. 203).

[11]In Middleton's *Michaelmas Term*. See Malvern, p. 84, and the *OED*.

[12]Garth, p. 77.

[13]A previous version of the line recalls Circe's enchantment: "Rings wedding Soules to Sinnes lethargicke sleepe."

[14]Malvern. pp. 4 and 8.

[15]Praz, p. 204.

[16]See Elaine Pagels, "The Suppressed Gnostic Feminism," *The New York Times Review of Books*, November 22, 1979, and Carlo Suares, *The Qabala Trilogy* (Boston, 1985).

[17]*The Androgyne* (New York, 1981), p. 29.

[18]Malvern, p. 43.

[19]Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology* (New York, rpt. 1962). Panofsky and his wife Dora developed this idea further in *Pandora's Box: The Changing Aspects of a Mythic Symbol* (New York, 1956). 14

[20]Malvern, p. 30.

[21]Marc F. Bertanasco, *Crashaw and the Baroque* (Alabama, 1971), p. 44.

[22]"To Saint Mary Magdalen," *An Anthology of Catholic Poets* (New York, 1926), p. 193.

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John Ashbery: The Reader's Dilemma

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In 1976, John Ashbery won the National Book Award, the Pulitzer Prize, and the National Book Critics' Circle Award for his volume of poems, *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*. This sweep of America's three most prestigious literary awards gave legitimacy to his poetry and established him as a contemporary poet to be tackled by a wider readership. Most novice readers soon find themselves lost in the labyrinth of an Ashbery poem, however, and often conclude that his poetry is too difficult, even incomprehensible. How does this happen when, for the most part, Ashbery writes such beguiling lines? As one reads his poems, trying to grasp their meaning, common words link to form phrases which, in turn, stream on to create long sentences that appear to be reaching an "imminence of revelation." (Jackson 70) Obscure historical names, characters from mythology, little known places, and other arcanities rarely appear in the poetry. The grammar and syntactical structure are in order. Yet, frequently, his poetry does not make sense. In order to understand Ashbery better, it is necessary to identify some of his themes and to tackle the problem of his style.

But we may be in trouble from the start because Ashbery says that his poetry does not have specific themes. In an interview published in *The Craft of Poetry* in 1974, he claimed that "not in many years have I sat down to write a poem dealing with a particular subject, treating it formally in a kind of essay." Yet, Ashbery confesses that he begins with a title, thereby defining an area

in which he will move around although he says "the original things that I begin with I may decide to cut out of a poem." (Sommer 313) But as we shall see when we look at the poem, "Scheherazade," he cannot always do this. Ashbery is fascinated with "the experience of experience . . . and the particular experience is of lesser interest to me than the way it filters through to me." (Molesworth 177) As he has written in the poem, "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror":

> Is there anything
> To be serious about beyond this otherness
> That gets included in the most ordinary
> Forms of daily activity, changing everything
> Slightly and profoundly . . . .
> (*Selected Poems* 201)

Ashbery's critics hunt assiduously for subjects and have suggested a variety: love; time; age; poetry; the relationship between poet and reader; the connection between speech and experience, words and acts; or, finally, the absence of a stable center in human experiences and especially in language. Ashbery himself conceded in 1974, two years before the publication of *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*, that if his poetry had any specific subject at that point in his life, it was the passage of time. (Craft 122)

But ultimately, he argues that these are not general subjects but, rather, each is among a myriad of contents. The wide range of themes proposed by critics tends to confirm Ashbery's argument. His poetry and, more specifically, each poem may contain a series of separate, individual, probably unrelated topics that may or may not combine to present the significance of the poem. His poems reflect happenings in everyday life and because he never knows from one day to the next, one month to the next, what will happen in his life, so, too, he never knows what will happen in his

poems. For example, if he falls in love during the time he is working on a poem, as he did while writing "Three Poems." the topic of love may slip into a few lines of the poetry.

Ashbery's poems rarely have an identifiable time or place setting or any underlying narrative which might help the reader identify an era or a physical location. Still, to begin to understand his poetry, we must always remember that his source for poetry is the environment in which he lives, especially New York City, a habitat that is vivid, vibrant, dangerous, and stimulating. It is in this worldly *context* that Ashbery finds his *contents*. In any one instance, there may be dozens of "happenings" bombarding the poet's mind, competing for his attention. As he has said, "Every moment is surrounded by a lot of things in life that don't add up to anything that makes much sense and these are part of a situation that I feel I'm trying to deal with when I'm writing." (Craft 119)

Ashbery's poems present an astonishing array of contents that merge with each other, in succession, all seeming to work toward a grand conclusion or final statement yet somehow a denouement is never reached. Ashbery seems to find a single point of view impossible, not even desirable. And he wryly notes that meaningfulness can't get along without randomness, which prompts Helen Vendler to suggest, in an article published in *The New Yorker*, that "he tries to construct an intelligibility out of randomness."

The first stanza from "Scheherazade" shows the way Ashbery seeks to portray his uncrystallized consciousness and its multiple/sequential perceptions of reality through a stream of contents that may or may not be related. But even when they are related, they do not necessarily present coherent, understandable concepts. Each phrase or sentence, by itself, is comprehensible and the reader scans each one anticipating that the meanings of the sentences will all relate to each other providing an overall under-

standing of the passage or stanza. But, frequently, the sentences apparently stand alone, their basic ideas having little or no obvious relationship to each other. His contents shift from one idea to yet another one which is unrelated to any concept preceding it.

"Scheherazade," its contents seemingly schizophrenic, reveals two of Ashbery's major subjects: first, the impossibility of portraying adequately explanations or interpretations of human affairs and, second, the difficulty encountered in writing poetry:

> Unsupported by reason's enigma
> Water collects in square stone basins.
> The land is dry. Under it moves
> The water. Fish live in the wells. The leaves,
> A concerned green, are scrawled on the light. Bad
> Bindweed and rank ragweed somehow forget to flourish here
> An inexhaustible wardrobe has been placed at the disposal
> Of each new occurrence. It can be itself now.
> (*Selected Poems* 169)

We are faced with an enigma in the first line, "reason's enigma." Because we turn to reason for an answer when facing inexplicable problems, to meet with its "enigma" four words into the poem gives reason for pause. Is Ashbery suggesting that reason has an enigma in a possessive sense? Perhaps part of reason is a mystery in the sense that regardless of how much we seek for an answer through reason, we do not always find it, or, if we do, the answer only uncovers other enigmas, an exchange of one kind of ignorance for another. Or perhaps we should read it to mean "enigmatic reason," that is, reason is a mystery. How we come to solve problems cannot be elucidated. Or, perhaps he is only suggesting that reason is a contradiction. Maybe the interpretation of these words does not matter since "reason's enigma'" whatever it is, does not support or explain the water, and consequently, does not

need to be explained itself by reason. Yet, one thing Ashbery's poetry does is to make us acutely aware of our need to find a meaning or to construct for ourselves an explanation.

Considered at a literal level, the next several lines present a number of concrete contents that flow easily, one to the next, binding together to produce a detailed description. We have water, stone catch basins, dry land, fish, leaves, bindweed, ragweed. Yet. after conceptualizing these objects in our mind, we discover the images are woven into contradictory statements: water is collecting in the catch basins although, apparently, there is no rainfall. Or, perhaps, there is rainfall which explains the water in the basins but casts great doubt on the dry land. Does it make a difference whether we choose to interpret these contradictions as a drought or rainfall? As mentioned earlier, Ashbery says, "Every moment is surrounded by a lot of things in life that don't add up to anything that makes much sense . . . ". Perhaps in presenting us with an apparent contradiction between drought and rainfall, Ashbery is merely giving us a moment that doesn't add up to anything.

On the other hand, whether there is drought or rainfall comes down to the question: Did it rain? Rain, this supreme activity of nature, leaves us to consider Ashbery's assertion that "meaningfulness can't get long without randomness." For a people, such as farmers, who suffer or benefit from the weather, either representation of nature--rain or drought--presents an occurrence that is at the same time both random and meaningful. It is random because we cannot control the rain and meaningful, especially when crops or animals depend upon rain to flourish or, indeed, just to survive. "An inexhaustible wardrobe has been placed at the disposal / Of each new occurrence. It (that is, nature) can be itself now." Nature changes as she wishes.

However, these last two lines may also introduce the topic of writing about poetry, an Ashbery favorite. "An inexhaustible wardrobe" may refer to the English language and the fact that each time the poet wishes to describe a "new occurrence," he may choose from a seemingly endless vocabulary. There are words in the English language to describe an event or person or perception exactly as Ashbery wishes to describe it. Thus, Ashbery has given us lines that may represent two different and distinct contents.

In the next few lines, Ashbery shifts his content away from praise of vocabulary to lament the difficulty he faces in finding the correct *style* to describe best an experience or object. "Other dreams came and left while the bank / Of colored verbs and adjectives was shrinking from the light / To nurse in shade their want of a method." The vocabulary may be there but it retires for lack of an appropriate method or style to convey what the poet means.

Ashbery reinforces this amorphous condition of shifting contents or contents with dual meaning by exploiting multiple, shifting dictions and tones and a wide variety of rhetorical tropes. As one critic has noted:

> A typical extended poem will launch itself, or maybe wake up to find itself already in transit, throw out a fertile suggestion, make connections, go into reverse, change key, short circuit, suffer enlightenment, laugh, nearly go over the edge, regard itself with disbelief, irony, and pathos, and sign off with an inconclusive gesture. (Corn 82)

Ashbery incorporates in his style roundabout expressions, puns, hyperbole, irony, surrealism, contradictions, cliches, ellipsis, prophecy and multiple dictions. (Once, during an interview, Ashbery was asked what kind of diction he used. His reply: "As many as I can think of!") One of his favorite techniques is to show a

"plurality of voices" by shifting pronouns. Ashbery confesses that he doesn't have a strong sense of his own identity; consequently, "you" may refer to the poet or it can be another person . . . and so can "he" and "she" for that matter and "we." The fact he is addressing someone is more important than the particular person involved. From "Ode to Bill":

> Some things we do take up a lot more time
> And are considered a fruitful, natural thing to do.
> I am coming out of one way to behave
> Into a plowed cornfield. On my left, gulls
> On an inland vacation. They seem to mind the way I write.
> (*Self-Portrait* 50)

This poem opens with a non-referential phrase, "Some things we do" and introduces the first pronoun, "we" which shifts to "I" and then to "they" before returning to "I." The last sentence is particularly puzzling. To what or whom does "they" refer? Perhaps, "they" are literary critics or Ashbery's readers or his friends or, possibly, himself? Or, if we choose to read it literally, we can enjoy a laugh at the idea of gulls expressing an opinion about the way Ashbery writes.

These five lines also give us a glimpse of Ashbery's lack of a physical point of reference. "Cornfield" and "gulls" are mentioned in the same line creating considerable confusion in the reader's imagination, especially with that reader who places cornfields in Iowa and gulls off the Atlantic Coast.

Ashbery's poetry appears to be flat, without emotion, but a closer look reveals his humor and his philosophical tones. For humor, we turn again to "Ode to Bill": "

> What is writing?
> Well in my case, it's getting down on paper
> Not thoughts, exactly, but ideas, maybe:

Ideas about thoughts. Thoughts is too grand a word.
Ideas is better, though not precisely what I mean.
Someday I'll explain. Not today though.
(*Self-Portrait* 50)

And for philosophical musings, to "Grand Galop":

Does anything matter?
Yes, for you must wait to see what it is really like,
This event rounding the corner
Which will be unlike anything else and really
Cause no surprise: it's too ample.
(*Self-Portrait* 14)

Critics such as Harold Bloom and Helen Vendler enthusiastically embrace the "ground breaking" poetry Ashbery produces. His shifting contents and apoplectic style do not bother them. Bloom argues that Ashbery is such an excellent poet partly because a reader must reread the poetry many times to uncover its secrets. (Bloom 200) Now that we have dissected a bit of Ashbery, it might be proper to end with another quotation. Ashbery says:

My poetry talks about itself. That is mainly what it does. To talk about it further is unnecessary and, for me, an ungenial gymnastic. (Richman 63)

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Wulf and Eadwacer: A Mother's Lament for Her Son

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In order to reconstruct an Old English work, scholars must determine the meanings of words and phrases for Old English speakers. *Wulf and Eadwacer* is one of the most challenging Old English works because it contains many difficult words and phrases. For years scholars have wrestled with this enigmatic work.

Wulf and Eadwacer is preserved in the Exeter Book (fols. 100v-101r), but because it contains many Anglian forms, a copy may have existed as early as A.D. 900 (Wrenn 85). In 1842 Benjamin Thorpe, the poem's first editor, confessed that he could make no sense of the obscure verses. Other early critics labeled the poem "The First Riddle" because of its puzzling nature and because it precedes the *Riddles* in the Exeter Book. One supposed solution was "Cynewulf" who was thought to be the author of the *Riddles*. Other interpretations include a dog romance and a charm to cure warts, but these seem to be based upon rather loose translations (Baker, "Classroom Edition," 1).

Some critics maintain that the poem is intentionally ambiguous because many of the words can be translated to have two very opposite meanings. For example, *lac* in line 1 can refer to either "battle" or "gift." *Abecgan* in line 2 can mean either "kill" or "serve." In line 12 *wyn* (joy) and *lap* (pain) occur together (Baker, "Classroom Edition," 7). Thus Alain Renoir insists upon what he terms a "non-interpretation" of the poem. He focuses upon broad

themes of isolation and unity rather than assigning the poem a specific situation (Greenfield 292).

But most modern scholars follow Henry Bradley's interpretation of the poem as an elegiac lament. The elegiac mood is evident in other Old English works such as *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Wife's Lament*, *The Husband's Message* and *Beowulf*. These are not elegies in the traditional sense, but because they share certain themes and motifs "elegy" is a convenient term of reference (Greenfield 292). In most of the Old English elegies, an unnamed and isolated speaker mourns the loss or death of a loved one (Alexander 111). The speaker in *Wulf and Eadwacer* is thought to be a woman because of the feminine inflections of *reotoqu* in line 10 and *seoce* in line 14 (Baker, "Classroom Edition," 1).[1]

Bradley is the first critic to claim that the poem is about thwarted love (Baker, "Classroom Edition," 1). Many followed his lead, invariably casting the two men addressed by the speaker, Wulf and Eadwacer, as her lover and her husband. One popular view is that Eadwacer is a tyrant who closely guards his wife and keeps her from her lover, Wulf. Wulf is from another tribe, and the woman's people will kill him if he ventures into their territory. The "whelp" mentioned in line 16 is thought to be the woman's child by Wulf, a child whom her people do not want (Crossley-Holland, 49).

In his interpretation of the poem, Michael Alexander writes that "all is speculative in such archaeological reconstruction" and certainly it is impossible to recreate the exact situation (130). Peter S. Baker offers one of the most thorough treatments of the work. He proceeds through the poem word for word in an attempt to uncover precise meanings, and he clears up many of the difficulties scholars have encountered. For example, *lac* in line 1 has been translated as "battle," "sacrifice," "gift," "message," and "game." Baker carefully considers each of these translations. He

finds that "battle" is due to a misinterpretation of another Old English poem, "sacrifice" usually takes a verb more ceremonious than *gife*, "game" is imported by modern scholars from Old Icelandic and "message" is a metaphorical extension of the most common meaning, "gift," which Baker finds most appropriate (Ambiguity," 39-40). Thus he would read line 1: "It is to my people as if one might give them a gift." Baker follows in the tradition of Bradley in his concluding speculation that the poem is about separated lovers.

But in fact Old English love poetry is extremely rare. *Wulf and Eadwacer*, *The Wife's Lament*, and *The Husband's Message* constitute the whole of Old English love poetry (Greenfield 224), and translations of The *Wife's Lament* and *The Husband's Message* are controversial because they, too, contain difficult words and phrases. Kemp Malone classifies these works as *Frauenlieder*, or medieval lyrics in which a woman laments for her lover. But love is not a common theme in Old English poetry. C. L. Wrenn writes that the "egocentric expression of love did not normally find a place in ancient Germanic culture" (85), and that any treatment of lovers was "almost impersonal" (86). Therefore, I find it unlikely that *Wulf and Eadwacer* is about separated lovers.

In my view, the poem is a mother's lament for her son. Like many Old English poems, it embodies the heroic spirit and code of conduct (Wrenn 85), a code which specifically provides the role for the noble woman as *freopuwebbe*, or "peace-weaver," and stipulates that the *comitatus* be built on a relationship between lord and thegn, the most dramatic of these being that of uncle and nephew.

Many Old English works reflect the role of woman as "peace-weaver:" marriages are arranged to create ties and promote friendship between tribes (Baker, "Classroom Edition," 1). The woman's son is then sent back to her people and remains in the

custody of her brother, who teaches him to be a valuable warrior. When conflicts persist despite the arranged marriage, the woman could find herself in a most distressful predicament (Baker, "Classroom Edition," 1). This is the situation I propose for *Wulf and Eadwacer*. The woman speaker is an unhappy *freopuwebbe* whose son, Wulf, has been sent to live with her people. Her people's tribe and her husband's tribe are not compatable, so her loyalties are torn.

The heroic spirit and code of conduct pervade Old English literature and can even be found in Anglo-Saxon paraphrases of the Old Testament. In *A New Critical History of Old Enqlish Literature*, Stanley B. Greenfield and Daniel G. Calder quote an example of the comitatus relationship in Genesis A, an Old English manuscript dated around 700 A.D. Loyalty between uncle and nephew is demonstrated in the description of Abraham rescuing his nephew Lot, who has been captured during an attack (208).

But nowhere is the heroic code more obvious than in *Beowulf*, where the hero is taken into his uncle's custody at the age of seven and transformed from a sluggard into a worthy warrior (Crossley-Holland 128). His uncle feeds him, rears him, gives him gold, and in Beowulf's words is "mindful of our kinship; for as long as he lived, he loved me no less than his own three sons..." (Crossley-Holland 135). Out of loyalty to his uncle, Beowulf later refuses the crown and allows his cousins to rule. A similar uncle-nephew relationship exists between King Hrothgar and Hrothulf. King Hrothgar's wife, Waelhtheow, fears that Hrothulf will usurp the throne from her sons, so to prevent Hrothulf she reminds him of all his uncle has done for him (Crossley-Holland 105).

The many stories which parallel and contrast with the central narrative in *Beowulf* also reflect the heroic code of conduct. For example, the noble Sigemund and his nephew Fitela are "com-

panions in countless battles" (Crossley-Holland 96). Treachery is depicted through the characters Heremod and Unferth who have killed their own kinsmen (Crossley-Holland 96, 103). And in the Finn Episode, Queen Hildeburh is perhaps the most vivid example of an unhappy *freopuwebbe*. She is married to King Finn, but her marriage has not brought peace between tribes. When her brother Hnaef visits, King Finn's retainers attack him. In the ensuing battle, Hildeburh loses brother and son, and she commits her son's body to her brother's funeral pyre (Crossley-Holland 99-103). Hrothgar's daughter, Freawaru, is another "peace-weaver" whom Beowulf predicts will be unhappy in her arranged marriage because it will not bring peace between tribes (Crossley-Holland 124).

I identify ample evidence that this heroic code of conduct can be found in *Wulf and Eadwacer*. In line 1, "It is to my people as if one might give them a gift," the woman refers to her son Wulf, who is in the custody of her brother. She is certain in line 2 that her people will protect him if he comes upon danger, yet she grieves because she is separated from her son and her people. Line 3, "We are apart," is repeated in line 8. While this repetition does not constitute a refrain, it does add to the pathos of the poem, emphasizing the mother's sense of loss (Wrenn 85).

Greenfield writes that the islands in line 4 are perhaps symbolic of separation (224), and certainly the woman is literally separated from her son and her people. She knows that her son is secure, for in line 5 she says "secure is that island, surrounded by fens," and in line 7 she repeats that her people will protect him. Yet she also refers to her people as *wealreow weras* or "slaughter-cruel men" in line 6, and in line 11 she refers to her husband as *beaducafa*, or "battle-quick" (Baker, "Classroom Edition," 7-8). She fears the enmity between the two tribes, and she knows that violence could erupt.

In line 10, the woman sits apart and grieves. Greenfield has mentioned the pathetic fallacy of the rainy weather and the speaker's tears (224). And Baker writes that *reotugu*, the word used to describe her mourning, does not translate as quiet weeping. Rather this word means wild lamentation and wailing. It occurs in two other Old English works in this same context: a mother lamenting for her son. In the *Fortunes of Men* 46, *reotan* describes the wild lamentation of a woman standing beside her son's funeral pyre. And in *Beowulf*, this word describes the thundering heavens as Grendel's mother laments the death of her monstrous son ("Ambiguity" 48). In both cases, the word deals with violence, so perhaps the speaker in *Wulf and Eadwacer* fears that her son will meet a violent death if the two tribes engage in battle.

In lines 11-12, the speaker's husband embraces her, and she experiences both joy and pain. I disagree with the popular interpretation of her husband as a tyrant who uses her sexually against her will (Baker, "Ambiguity," 47). Rather, it seems that he is trying to comfort his wife, and she responds with mixed feelings. Baker has pointed out that the juxtaposition of opposites, joy and pain, reflects the speaker's inner turmoil (Ambiguity" 48). She is devoted to both her husband and her people. She addresses her husband directly in line 17, "Do you hear me, Eadwacer?", indicating that she thinks he is incapable of understanding her turmoil.

In lines 14-16, the speaker makes it clear that it is her son's "seldom comings" and not a lack of food that makes her ill. She sits alone and worries about her son, and the extent of her distress is nowhere more obvious than in the plaintive "Wulf my Wulf" in line 12 (Greenfield 292). Lines 16-17 have been interpreted in many ways. I offer this reading: "Wulf, our wretched cub, has been borne away to the woods." The speaker addresses Eadwacer directly here in an attempt to communicate her fear. But Baker writes that the dual form *uncer* (our) can refer to more than two

people ("Ambiguity" 45). The poem at this point is especially difficult because the speaker belongs to two groups that are violently opposed and, according to Baker, can both be referred to by the pronoun "us." I agree with Baker that the ambiguities are used artfully to generate tension and increase the emotional power of the poem ("Ambiguity" 41).

The last two lines read: "That may easily be torn apart which was never joined, our song together." These lines sum up the speaker's distress and make clear the dual theme of separation and unity. The poem ends on a note of despair because the speaker sees no hope for peace between the two tribes to which she is devoted, and thus she sees no hope for a reunion with her son.

Wulf and Eadwacer is not a love poem but an elegy that reflects a feminine perspective on the heroic code of conduct, a system of values prevalent in Old English literature and implicitly invoked in this poem. In particular I am reminded of Freawaru, whom Beowulf predicts will be an unhappy "peace-weaver." About her arranged marriage, he says, "The deadly spear rests but a little while, even though the bride is good" (Crossley-Holland 125). This Beowulfian context illustrates the case in *Wulf and Eadwacer*. The speaker of the poem is an unhappy "peace-weaver" whose marriage has not brought peace between tribes. Her loyalties are torn, and she laments because she is separated from her son.

Notes

[1]In "The Narrator of the *Wife's Lament*," Martin Stevens proposes that feminine inflections in Old English may have nothing to do with the sex of the speaker. Stevens explains that Old

English grammar allowed for the occurrence of both natural and grammatical gender (*Neophilologische Mitteilunqen,* 69 [1968], 72-90). Thus the feminine inflections of *reotogu* and *seoce* may be grammatical gender and not necessarily an indication that the speaker is a woman. For more information on this point, see Ralph C. Bambas, "Another view of the Old English *Wife's Lament*." (*JEGP*, LXII [1963], 303-309). Bambas writes the first important article to question the identity of a woman speaker in *The Wife's Lament.*

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St. Erkenwald and The Speaking Dead

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The difficult game of tracking down folk motifs and tracing them back through literature to their original sources has fascinated scholars for many years and the knowledge gained from such studies has benefited both critics and general students of English literature. Some folk motifs have become famous in the twentieth century not only to scholars but to the general public through such inherited sources as ballads and fairy tales. Among these motifs are the Fairy Mistress, the Enchanted Forest and the Hero in Disguise. Another enduringly popular folk theme is that of the Speaking Dead. The Speaking Dead appear as "messengers from beyond the grave" in such famous and varying works as Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Dickens' *The Christmas Carol*.

During the medieval period, English authors used the folk motif of the Speaking Dead in all genres of literature: prose, poetry, and drama. The fourteenth century in the Midlands was an especially rich period for literature in general and for the use of the Speaking Dead motif in particular. One of the most interesting poems in which a Midland writer used the folk theme is *St. Erkenwald*.[1] This poem represents a particular type of Middle English narrative: the miracle story. The author includes the Speaking Dead motif in his poem to express a moral precept.

St. Erkenwald is the story of a miracle that occurred while the saint served as bishop of London. According to the poem's account, St. Paul's Cathedral had been the site of a famous heathen temple during the Saxon period. After St. Augustine's successful

English mission, however, the Christian clergy rededicated it as a cathedral. During the construction of the church workmen found a rich tomb containing a man's body, crowned, and clothed in royal robes. The corpse was undecayed and emitted a sweet odor; its clothing was as fresh as on the burial day. Summoned to witness this marvel, Bishop Erkenwald shut himself alone in his palace and prayed earnestly for divine guidance. At dawn he emerged to celebrate the Mass of the Holy Spirit. When the service was over he led some of the great lords present to the marvelous tomb.

The saint commanded the corpse, in Christ's name, to tell him who he was and what was the condition of his soul. The deceased answered in a dreary voice that it had been the chief judge of New Troy (London) more than a thousand years before Christ. He told the Bishop that although he had lived righteously, Christ did not extend His mercy to him during the Harrowing of Hell because the judge had died an unbaptized pagan.[2] Erkenwald wept with pity at the dead man's plight, and one of his tears fell on the judge's face while the saint was speaking the words of baptism. Immediately the corpse cried out in joy, giving thanks that his long wait was over; the single tear combined with the sacred words had saved his soul. As his spirit entered heaven his voice ceased and his body, with its gorgeous vestments, fell into sudden decay.

The poem, composed by an unidentified poet, survives in a single paper manuscript, British Museum Harleian 2250, consisting mostly of religious and didactic pieces copied from various North West Midland sources. The protagonist of *St. Erkenwald* is an historical figure who served as Bishop of London from approximately 674 until 692 A.D. Four Latin Lives of the saint exist in manuscript, but the earliest mention of Erkenwald is Bede's brief biography in the *Ecclesiastical History* (Miller 281-282). All following accounts depend on his for basic information. Expand-

ing on Bede's sketch, the later narratives relate many stories about Erkenwald's miraculous powers. Erkenwald's cult never gained great popularity on the Continent, but it was widespread in England for several centuries. The saint's sumptuous shrine in St. Paul's Cathedral was famous both for its splendor and for its healing miracles.[3] But veneration of the English saint gradually declined until, by the end of the Middle Ages, the cult had fallen into the almost total neglect from which it has never recovered.

None of the earlier lives of the saint mentions Erkenwald performing any miracle that in the slightest degree resembles the one the anonymous author of the poem *St. Erkenwald* assigns him. Not only is there a complete lack of evidence that would substantiate any claim that the work has a direct written source, but there is also a total dearth of information about any oral tradition of this miracle. However, the Speaking Dead folklore motif is a common theme in Western medieval religious literature. It occurs in sermon exempla, saints' lives, and miracle legends.[4] Christian medieval legends of ghosts who reveal details about their lives after death, or who give directions about their corpses, follow old and set patterns. The second common medieval variation of the Speaking Dead motif, stories about martyrs who continue to talk or sing after death, also follows set formulas. This type of Speaking Dead tale is probably the most popular. The third common variation of the Speaking Dead motif in medieval Western literature concerns a dead person whose speech, and sometimes his soul, is temporarily restored so that he may be saved. This category of Speaking Dead legends is closely related to the famous Trajan miracle story which the author of *St. Erkenwald* adapted.

An anonymous monk of Whitby was the first writer to record this celebrated tale. The monk wrote a Latin biography of St. Gregory the Great in 713 A.D. in which "the Emperor Trajan was

refreshed and even baptized by St. Gregory's tears" because he had performed an act of compassion that "seemed more likely to have been the deed of a Christian than of a pagan (Colgrave 126-129)." Bede does not mention this miracle in his biography of Gregory; however, two other early versions of the story do exist, both based on the Whitby narrative (Morse 15; Savage xvii- xviii). Through them the legend became well known.

One phase in the further development of the Trajan miracle story seems closely connected with the folklore motif of the Speaking Dead in *Erkenwald*. In Jacopo della Lana's *Commentario*, written about 1326, the author tells how during excavations made in Rome during St. Gregory's pontificate, workmen uncovered some bones and a tongue as freshly preserved as though just buried. St. Gregory, hastily summoned to witness this marvel, questions the tongue. It replies that it had once belonged to Trajan who is now in hell because he had been a pagan. Gregory, greatly moved, prays for Trajan's soul and a heavenly vision reveals to him that his prayer has been heard (Savage xx). Here is the closest analogue to the account in *Erkenwald*: excavations, discovery of a tomb, the bishop's visit, a dialogue between bishop and dead body, emphasis on the pagan's justice, and his salvation through the bishop of Rome's intercession. The chief differences are the description of the body and the means of salvation.

That the Trajan legend was well known in medieval England is clear, not only from previously cited authorities, but also from its appearance in such popular works as *Piers the Plowman* and collections of stories used as exempla. None of *Erkenwald's* sources or analogues are as stylistically sophisticated and successful as it is, however, and in none of them is the Speaking Dead motif used in exactly the same way as in this poem[5]

The *Erkenwald* poet introduces the folk motif in the second half of his narrative. It is inextricably linked to two other related

folklore themes: that of the Preserved Corpse and that of the Dead Man Whose Soul is Redeemed. The Preserved Corpse motif, though really a minor miracle in *Erkenwald*, dominates the first half of the poem since it is the only marvel introduced there, and all the people, including the Dean, assume it to be the one miracle they will witness.

The word "meruayle" and its synonyms, stressed throughout the first part of *Erkenwald*, disappear in the second half of the poem. An air of speculation and wonder has already been established and to develop it further would only detract from the conversation between the saint and the corpse, a conversation which demands our complete attention since it is the key which unlocks the mysteries of the first part.

The third miracle, that of the soul-healing tear, demonstrates how a Christian saint may save a dead man's soul; this miracle is particularly amazing because the dead man is an unbaptized pagan. When the judge's soul ascends to heaven it enters into eternal bliss. The preserved body is important as a physical symbol of the judge's spiritual worth, and as a means of attracting Erkenwald's attention so that the greater miracle can occur. Similarly, the Speaking Dead miracle is important thematically in the poem as a means to achieve the major miracle: the judge must be able to communicate in such a way that St. Erkenwald can clearly understand his plight at the same time that the crowd can comprehend what a great and unusual manifestation of God's power and compassion they are finally allowed to witness.

In *St. Erkenwald* words dealing with work or occupation identify the people. The supporting characters of the poem's narrative action remain relatively universalized or typified and even the talking corpse is never named. The effect of these deliberate omissions is to place necessary focus on the central figure, the saint. He is the only character in the poem identified by both his

occupation and personal name. The poet introduces him in the opening lines of the prologue as "a byschop in pat burghe, blessyd and sacryd:/Saynt Erkenwolde, as I hope, pat holy mon hatte (11.3-4)." Only he can resolve the many questions and the mood of bafflement that dominate the first half of the work.

The second half of the poem begins when the Bishop turns away from the Dean and the anxious crowd, and towards the preserved body, commanding it to speak to him in obedience to Christ's word (1.177). Just as in the first part of the poem he had been presented as a deliberate contrast to the people, so in the second part he is a perfect foil to the dead man. As the saint and pagan converse, the poet reveals that both are 'men of law' who have respectively guided their unruly people worthily and fairly. Both are also strong but humble men of faith. But Erkenwald is a baptized Christian while the judge had died an unbaptized heathen; the saint can look forward confidently to eternal bliss in heaven while the righteous pagan sees only an eternity in purgatory as his future. The fact that the pagan, however righteous, is doomed to infinite darkness and coldness so saddens the bishop that, putting ritual decorum aside, he "balefully bere down his eghen/pat hade no space to speke, so spakely he oskyd (11.311-12)." The saint's compassionate tears, mingled with the baptismal words he speaks, wash all pain from the judge's soul (1.333).

As an early bishop who saved souls and confirms the faith by miracle, St. Erkenwald conforms to a familiar hagiographical type. But although there is no physical description of the saint, except that he is "riche reustid" (1.135) at Mass and afterwards, and only a stock description of the judge's preserved corpse (11.77-92), both men do impress their personalities on the poem. Erkenwald appears as a grave, visionary saint who stands humble but confident between God's immeasurable wisdom and mankind's awed, questionings. He is Bishop of London, spiritual

judge over his diocese. That his justice is tempered with mercy is evident from his emotional, tearful response to the dead man's plight.

As for the judge, he too impresses his personality on the poem. While living, he was such a good man, straight and ready in the law that "Quen I deghed for dul dcnyed alle Troye,/Alle menyds my dethe, pe more & the lasse (11.246-47)." In reward for his service the 'folk' gave him a magnificent burial. In death he is humble in his faith, yet, as Ruth Morse has pointed out, he is an eloquent lawyer, who cannot resist pleading his case for salvation (37-38). He is still aware of what is just, as he was in life; he sadly believes that he and his soul are beyond salvation (11.300). This doom he accepts out of faith in Christ, not out of sinful despair. But he cannot restrain a very "human" longing for the eternal reward that only his lack of Christian baptism keeps from him.

It is to this judge that the poet gives many of his most powerful lines in the second half of the poem; first when the dead man dolefully unburdens his sorrow in purgatory (11.281-308), and then when he solemnly reveals his joy in heaven (11.324-40). All the intermingled imagery is concrete and sensuous, referring to food, medicine, temperature, light and darkness, depth and height. After the saint's tear touches the dead man's face, the judge tells him:

> 'Ryzt now to soper my soule is sette at per table.
> ffor wyt pe wordes & pe water pat weshe vs of payne
> Liztly lasshit per a leme loghe in pe abyme
> pat spakly sprent my spyrit wyt vnsparid murthe
> Inot pe senacle solemply per soupen all trew;
> & per a marciall hyr mette wyt vnsparid murthe
> & wyt rcuernce a rowme he razt hyr for eur' (11.332-38).

In the second half of his poem the Erkenwald poet skillfully avoids any slackening in the pitch of narrative interest he had established in the first half. He does this by creating an absorbing, dramatic interchange between saint and dead pagan, by gratifying expectations, dispelling mysteries, and delivering a series of sharp surprises. Magnificently arrayed and preserved though he is, the corpse reveals that he was in his lifetime a mere man of law (11.198-200); the one assumption about which there has been no doubt--that he had been either a saint or a king--is thus rejected. Moreover, his account of the exemplary justice he practiced in life (11.229-44) adds irony and pathos to his description of the misery of his soul and of the joy he yearns for (11.225-72;289-308). Then, while the saint and the observing faithful weep in sympathy for the dead man, there occurs--half by accident--the poem's major miracle; St. Erkenwald's single tear becomes an agent of salvation. The poet's final surprise for his audience is the instantaneous decomposition of the splendid body and the near-contempt with which he dismisses incorruption as a minor wonder in the closing lines of the story (11.341-348).

Through his great skill and originality within a confining traditional framework, *Erkenwald's* author composed a saint's miracle legend that, after seven intervening centuries, is still capable of easily holding an audience's attention. Adapting the marvelous histories of two famous figures, the pagan emperor Trajan and the Christian bishop St. Erkenwald, the fourteenth-century English poet welded together a new tale in which the Speaking Dead motif has a major role.

Notes

[1]Although all major editions of *St. Erkenwald* were consulted, refer to Ruth Morse's edition (1975) for page and line citations included in this paper.

[2]When the pagan judge tells Erkenwald that he was left behind at the Harrowing of Hell, it is important to understand that the judge was not damned for sin, but belonged in the limbo of the unbaptized. This distinction is clearly delineated by Margaret Williams in her introduction to *The Pearl Poet: His Complete Works* (88). Williams is one of several writers who have argued that the Pearl Poet probably composed *St. Erkenwald*.

[3]For more information about the history of the shrine the best sources are Ruth Morse's edition of *St. Erkenwald*, p. 14 and G. G. Holweek's article in *A Biographical Dictionary of the Saints* (327). The first critic to emphasize how the history of the shrine may have influenced the poem was Henry L. Savage in his 1926 edition of the poem.

[4]As art, none of the individual treatments of the Speaking Dead motif in religious literature can be favorably compared to *Erkenwald*--except for Chaucer's "The Prioress' Tale," a comparison of Chaucer's miracle story to the Erkenwald poet's tale reveals how two medieval English master craftsmen worked the same folk motif into different products.

[5]Perhaps the most striking parallel is a miracle recorded in Kornmann's *Opera Curiosa*. James Hulbert quotes it in the original Latin in "The Sources of *St. Erkenwald* and *The Trental of Gregory* (*MP* 16 [1919] 151)." Williams translates it into modern English (87). Although scholars are uncertain about the exact date of the Opera's composition, they agree it is probably a direct derivative of the English poem.

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Language Incongruity as Method in the Innocents Abroad

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A quick pursual reveals that *Innocents Abroad* contains as much biblical material as Mark Twain ever incorporated into any one work. Using biblical allusions, language, phrases, and descriptions, in many instances he revises and elaborates them, a practice which, while distinctly earmarking the version as his own, reflects his extensive knowledge of the Bible. At times scriptural contexts in the book imply and even constitute irreverence, which Twain, in a letter to his publisher, terms a seemingly "tip-top feature of it" (Hill 24). Nevertheless, irreverence for its own sake is not his intent. Rather, Twain employs biblical material to emphasize points or to achieve a humorous effect while simultaneously expressing his opinion of the matter at hand.

One of the primary intents in *Innocents* is to contradict the way contemporary travel brochures said one should act and feel upon seeing the "magnificient" sights of the Old World, and to show how the average tourist would act and feel if he gave vent to his true inclinations. Twain overtly implies just this intent more than once in the course of the book. But it is not enough for him to contradict these traditional expressions of amazement and admiration--he must throttle them into ridicule. As Vedder notes, Twain "sees so clearly the humbug and pretence and superstition beneath things conventionally held to be sacred, that he sometimes fails to see that they are not all sham..." (94). True though this may be, it probably caused no great worry to Twain; what better way for one more interested in exposing than in determining historical falsity to make an unerring exposition than to make a blanket exposition? If his language and methodology suggest irreverence now and again, then that is the price of their use. And the humor that these conventions frequently produce is well worth the risk of offending the overly delicate sensibilities of some readers.

Richard Cracroft states that "Twain's biblical allusions are powerful because they create ludicrous incongruities between the humdrum and the sacred" (123). Examination of this juxtaposition in "The Legend of the Seven Sleepers" in *Innocents Abroad* speaks for Twain's thematic intent which here is a denunciation of false historicity by means of blending biblical content and humor-producing mechanisms. All the irreverence in the book is, according to McCarthy, really "an act of reverence, an expression of [Twain's] will to believe" (257). By juxtaposing scripture--something that Twain believed in, at least in his early writing career with the legend--something he obviously did not believe --he seeks to focus the reader's scrutiny of the legend so that its newfound prominence magnifies its absurdity. He makes it seem as if he opposes religion while up-holding the tale, but his methodology makes it clear that just the opposite is actually the case. Twain consistently chooses this method of denouncing religious folklore, as other passages in the book, especially the episode at Adam's Tomb, clearly show.

Twain's pen is pervasive in his adaptation of the legend of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. Seven young Christians decide to leave their country due to the reigning king's policy of persecution. They steal ample provisions and embark upon a five-year stint of wandering, riotous living, and robbery. Finally, they hear that the king has been converted, so they begin to make their way homeward. They stop at a cave and drink some "curious liquors"

which they had previously secreted there and fall asleep for what turns out to be more than two centuries. Awakening, they are puzzled to find Ephesus changed and all familiar faces gone. After making several inquiries, they realize what has happened and, later, go off to accept their long overdue death. While Twain, like Washington Irving with "Rip Van Winkle," does weave in fairy tale devices because the legend so demands, his style is predominantly a blend of scriptural language and vernacular. He uses the tale as an expressive means to the end rather than as an end in itself.

The legend begins with the cliche "Once upon a time," and is immediately paired with the biblical "It came to pass," which together make a balanced structure, blending scripture and fairy tale cum vernacular phraseology. Along this same line, kings and magical liquors are paired with a biblical setting--Ephesus, an important New Testament city. Soon after the tale begins in earnest, combinations of scriptural language and vernacular present themselves in almost every line. The seven young men say "one to the other, 'Let us get up and travel'." Any number of passages in the Bible have people saying something "one to the other." It vividly contrasts with the vernacular "And they got up and traveled," a statement which is obviously poking fun at the biblical phraseology used by the men, which in turn, and more importantly, pokes fun at the legend. Both statements, taken together in or out of context, are structured to provoke laughter because of the very unbiblical nature of the narrator's retort to the very biblical phrase spoken by the men. The lines describing their preparations to leave have several phrases wherein word order is typically biblical: "they took also," "belonged unto," "beast did run," and "they had not." Also scriptural is the usage of the term "beast" for "the dog Ketmehr," which is comical because "beast," as used in the Bible, denotes a beast of burden and is never used

in reference to dogs. Anyway, what possible use could seven young men fleeing from persecution have for a stolen dog? Twain's bilingual readers would have noted additional humor in that "Ketmehr," loosely translated from German, means "chained more" or "always chained." The very description of the dog's abduction is adroit humor since Twain makes it appear to be the dog's fault that it is taken:

> ...and they took also the dog Ketmehr, which was the property of their neighbor Malchus, because the beast did run his head into a noose which one of the young men was carrying carelessly, and they had not time to release him....

This passage deftly illustrates Walter Blair's remark that Twain "realized the possibilities of laughter created by contrasts between realistic passages and fantastic ones..." (161).

Paired with these tongue-in-cheek passages are vernacular diction devices, so carefully wrought and so highly refined as to be incredibly solid conceptual incongruities. With the one device Twain vulgarized the characters' actions, relative to their creed; with the other he vulgarized the language by which he refers to them. The men

> ...tarried not to bid their fathers and mothers good-bye or any friend they knew. They took only certain moneys which their parents had and garments that belonged unto their friends...and they took also certain chickens that seemed lonely in the neighboring coops, and likewise some bottles of curious liquors that stood near the grocer's window....

The idea of these "Christians" stealing their provisions is perhaps the more readily apparent of the two devices. Along this same line is the seemingly oxymoronic "or any friend they knew." Two instances of incongruency are evident in this phrase: First, all

people are Christians' friends, and, second, how is one supposed to have a friend and not know him? Another vague possibility, but one still worth mentioning, is that the latter part of the passage is sexually connotative: "friends" implies females and "knew" is used as when Lot *knew* his daughters. In certain clauses, phrases grammatically complementary and juxtaposed to those with biblical word order are vernacularly worded and employ fewer biblical word choices. For example, "was carrying carelessly" follows "beast did run"; "which was the property of their neighbors" follows "took also." These incongruities are consistently successive; when the humor from one begins to wane, another immediately appears. So, in effect, humor actually increases instead of slackening.

From the point when the young men begin highway robbery--"going through" lone travelers as they earlier liberated the occupants of their neighbors' coops, until the time they return to the cave and their liquor cache--the different modes of expression and sarcasm directed at the religious elements intensify dramatically. The sarcasm portrays the "Christians" as indulging in very un-scriptural behavior in robbing travelers and imbibing their "strange liquors." But the context will allow no conclusion that the Christians are final targets of this sarcasm; they are merely the means by which it is deflected onto the tale in ridicule of its historicity. With varying degrees of intensity and with some decrease in density, this method of alternation continues throughout the remainder of the legend. Beidler aptly phrases it as little more than "aimless horseplay" (39), and Cracroft calls it "good-natured irreverence" (122), but it is actually another instance of Twain's incorporating fun in his task.

Twain's parting shot is to viciously turn the sarcasm directly onto the legend itself, specifically upon the characters, thereby eliminating the deflective step used previously. He does this by

means of a contorted, biblically-phrased sentence: "And in that selfsame day, likewise, the Seven-up did cease in Ephesus, for that the Seven that were up were down again, and departed and dead withal." To name Christians after terms associated with a card game--Seven-up--would have aroused the indignation of contemporary staunch Christians, but why not give them a jolt for good measure? Likewise, a final bit of rhetorical horseplay occurs in the humorous nomenclature of the liquors: Rumpunch, Jinsling, and Eggnog--common names for magical spitits.

Two hints spoken by the narrator in the section immediately following the legend clearly indicate his disgust with and resulting levity in the tale. He says that the ancients feared to go into the cave lest they should fall asleep. But the induced sleep stems from the "curious liquors," not from the cave. This tongue-in-cheek statement follows his near-confession of some sort of internal mischief: "Such is the story of the Seven Sleepers (with slight variations)...." It is incorrect, then, to say that Twain rails incomprehensively against religion. It is also incorrect to say that he merely makes a passing attempt to put contemporary Christians on the defensive then goes on to the next topic. Rather, his attention to word choices, his carefully structured incongruities, and his revealing "afterword" indicate Twain's distaste for sham perpetuated in the name of tradition.

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Content and Technique in Sylvia Plath's "All the Dead Dears"

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Because most critical studies of Sylvia Plath's poetry focus on its highly charged content, the technical brilliance of her work has been over-looked. Yet Plath was an extremely conscious craftsman, intensely aware of the value of the precise word, the evocative image, the striking metaphor. Further, she was sensitive to the effects of sounds and their ability to reflect or reinforce the emotional tone of a poem. In her best poems content and technique work together to produce startling and original results. One of her early and rarely analyzed--poems, "All the Dead Dears," reveals not only a bizarre and arresting content but also great technical complexity and skill in the use of diction, image, metaphor, and sound values. A close analysis of this poem will provide a specific illustration of her considerable talents, both thematic and technical.

Written in 1957 while she was a Fulbright Fellow at Cambridge University, "All the Dead Dears" was inspired by an exhibit which she had seen at the Archaeological Museum in the town of Cambridge. Discovered in 1952 at the Roman ruins in Cambridge, the stone coffin containing the skeletons of a woman and two small animals was displayed with an explanatory card which read: "Apart from some fragments of textiles remaining from the shroud in which the body had been wrapped, and the skeletons of a shrew and a mouse, no objects were found with the bones of the woman buried in this double coffin of stone and lead.

A.D. 400." The viewer was then instructed to "note distal end (near foot) of left tibia, which has been gnawed."[1] Plath refers specifically to this exhibit in the headnote of the poem.

At first glance "All the Dead Dears" seems to present the rather conventional view of death as the grim reaper, as the inevitable terrifying experience which awaits each person at the end of his life. Yet a closer look reveals that Plath has added some grotesque and unusual twists to this conventional view so that it is a rare reader who does not turn cold and shiver, who does not feel "Zero at the bone," to borrow from Dickinson, upon encountering this poem which contains the effects of childhood ghost stories and fairy tales about witches, ghouls, and monsters. "All the Dead Dears" presents death as a sinister, hovering presence waiting to prey on the living; the ironic and bitter twist is that one's own dead relatives and loved ones are the death figures who wait greedily to drag one into the horror of the grave "to lie / Deadlocked with them." The images, metaphors, and word choices of the poem are brilliant in their concreteness and in their aptness, and the harsh grating consonant sounds, the combinations of hard "g's," "k's," and "r's," reinforce the harshness of the theme.

The poem opens with the concrete image of death from the Archaeological Museum in Cambridge--"a stone coffin of the fourth century A.D. containing the skeletons of a woman, a mouse, and a shrew," as indicated by the headnote.[2] The two small animals had gnawed on the woman's ankle before dying themselves, a fact which is developed into an eating metaphor in stanza two of the poem. The rigidity and hardness of death are suggested by the words "poker-stiff" and "granite" as well as by the repeated "g," "r," and "k" sounds:

Rigged poker stiff on her back
With a granite grin

This antique museum cased lady
Lies, companioned by the gimcrack
relics of a mouse and a shrew
Which battened for a day on her ankle-bone.

The word choice is superb, giving us both an accurate visual description and a chilling, sinister feeling. The lady is rigged, or laid out, on her back in a straight, stiff position, the skeletal jaw resembling a rock-like and immobile grin. The light, casual description of the mouse and shrew as companions, fanciful ornaments, and souvenirs ("companioned by the gimcrack / Relics of a mouse and a shrew") gives way to the gruesome revelation that they grew fat ("battened") by eating on her ankle.

In the second stanza, in a spine-chilling and macabre manner, the image becomes a symbol of decay and death in general, grinding down and devouring the living:

These three, unmasked now, bear
Dry witness
To the gross eating game
We'd wink at if we didn't hear
Stars grinding, crumb by crumb,
Our own grist down to its bony face.

Having been discovered and subsequently displayed in a museum ("unmasked now"), the three skeletons force us to recognize the harsh fact of our own slow but constant and inevitable destruction ("the gross eating game")[3] which we would prefer not to look at ("We'd wink at"). The last two lines portray time as a grist mill grinding not grain but flesh and bones, the word "grist" suggesting gristle or cartilage as well as grain. The "mill" of time and decay grinds down through the flesh and cartilage of each living being until nothing is left but the bare skull ("its bony face"). Reinforcing the mill metaphor are the grating consonant sounds

of "r," "gr," and "kr" (particularly "*gr*oss," "*gr*inding," "*cr*umb by *cr*umb," and "*gr*ist") which reproduce the grinding sounds of the mill. The metaphor is indeed shocking in its aptness.

The third stanza shifts to two other equally gruesome and appropriate metaphors. The dead who make us acknowledge these inescapable realities are compared to barnacles which cling to the living so tightly that they cannot be removed: "How they *gr*ip us th*r*ough thin and thi*ck* / These ba*r*na*c*le dead!" And this particular dead woman is described as a relative of the speaker; literally, of course, they are not "blood relatives" but are kin in that both must experience death: "This lady here's no *k*in / Of mine, yet *k*in she is." With a grisly play on the expression "blood relatives," the speaker goes on to describe her as a terrifying cross between a vampire (or perhaps a vampire bat) and a scavenging animal which preys on rotting carcasses, eating the marrow from the bones:

> she'll su*ck*
> Blood and whistle my ma*r*row *c*lean
> To p*r*ove it.

The poem has moved from the general to the specific and individual, for the speaker now sees herself and her own actual relatives caught up in this cycle of decay and death. The next three stanzas develop the horrifying idea implied by the title that all the speaker's dear dead ancestors are waiting to drag her into death with them. Looking at her face in the mirror, the speaker sees there the features she has inherited from them and one by one their faces blend with hers in the mirror. They are described as witches, more frightening than those in childhood fairy tales, for they reach out "hag hands to haul me in" to death with them. The word "haul" suggests being forcibly pulled or dragged against

one's will. Also in the mirror the speaker sees a grotesque, distorted reflection of her insane father's body floating up from the waters of the pond in which he had drowned (by suicide perhaps):

> And an image looms under the fishpond surface
> Where the daft father went down
> With orange duck-feet winnowing his hair [4]

The word "looms" is especially important here for it means "to come into sight . . . in enlarged or distorted and indistinct form; to appear in an impressively great or exaggerated form."[5] Thus it suggests both the nightmarish quality of the image and the importance of the father's death to the speaker.

While the final two stanzas continue to develop the idea of one's ancestors as gruesome ghouls and witch-like skeletons who haunt the living, there is a movement back toward the universal and general. Indeed, the poem seems to have a three-part structure in that stanzas one and two are a general view of decay and death, stanzas three and four zero in sharply on the personal aspects as felt by the speaker, and stanzas five and six move outward again to another general view.

The fifth stanza comments bitterly and fearfully on how the dead loved ones use every family occasion to haunt their living descendants:

> All the long gone da*r*lings: they
> Get ba*ck*, though, soon
> Soon: be it by wa*k*es, weddings,
> Childbi*r*ths, or a family ba*r*be*cu*e

> Any touch, taste, tang's
> Fit for those outlaws to *r*ide home on
> And to sanctuary. . . .

With a brilliant play on words, Plath reveals the bitter irony of the relatives' reversed roles: in life they had been affectionate, loving and loved, as suggested by the words "darlings" and "dears" (in the title); however, in death they are cruel and predatory scavengers or criminals as suggested by the word "outlaws," which is also a play on "in-laws." Any family gathering evokes their memories--and, of course, the facts of their deaths; they haunt not only those gatherings, such as funerals, weddings, and births, obviously connected with the cycle of life and death but also those, such as backyard picnics, which are trivial and innocent. Their presence is simply inescapable at any family get-together.

The inescapability of death dominates the final stanza where the repetition of the harsh "k" sound in conjunction with "r's" and "g's" resembles not only the sound of the clock ticking as every second moves us closer to death but also the sound of nails being hammered into a coffin:

> usurping the armchair
> Between tick
> and tack of the clock, until we go
> Each skulled and crossboned Gulliver
> Riddled with ghosts, to lie
> Deadlocked with them, taking root as cradles rock.

The dead relatives are pictured as usurping, seizing by force, our places in the familiar, domestic world (represented by "the armchair"), pushing us out of life with every "tick / And tack of the clock, until we go" to join them in death. Every person is marked with the sign of death, the skull and crossbones; every one of us is a "skulled-and-crossboned Gulliver."

The poem ends with a devastating image of the living buried at last in the grave: "*Riddled* with ghosts, [we] lie / Deadlocked with

them, taking root as cradles rock." A horrible reversal of the traditional idea of rejoining our departed loved ones after death in a heaven of joy and light! Plath's word choices and sound effects are again superb. "Riddled with ghosts" suggests that we are ultimately shot through with, completely taken over by, our ghostly relatives and that we are "puzzled" or "bewildered" by their mysterious power. The word "Deadlocked" also contains a complexity of meanings. It creates a clear visual image of lying in the grave locked in the tight embrace of the "darlings" who have awaited us. Thus it suggests being locked in death. Literally, the word means to be in "a state of inaction . . . resulting from the opposition of equally powerful persons or factions."[6] Although the state of inaction implied is wholly accurate, this meaning of the word is ironic in the poem because death is clearly the dominant and victorious force. Plath's word usage is often complex because she brings several meanings into play; she may use simultaneously denotative, connotative, and personal meanings as well as meanings of various forms of a word (noun definitions and verb definitions, for example). She also relies heavily on visual and tactile images evoked by her word choices and on the sound effects which they create. "Deadlocked" contains both a serious and an ironic meaning, has a harsh "k" sound, and evokes a visual image of dead bodies lying in a grave locked in an embrace.

The last words of the poem are the most macabre and spine chilling of all. As the recently dead body begins to decompose and "take root" in the earth, the cycle of life to death continues as newly-born babies rock in their cradles. The rocking cradles suggest several things: the regular rhythm recalls the "tick / And tack of the clock" as time moves them toward death; the word "rock" returns us to the "granite grin" of the "museum cased" skeleton with which the poem began and thus foreshadows the future deaths of those who are now just infants; and finally the cradles

contain the descendants of the recently dead who will now ironically become the "dead dears" and haunt those babies as they pass through the cycle of decay and death. The wheel has come full circle with a bitter reversal of roles, for the haunted in life become the haunters in death.

Thus "All the Dead Dears" clearly reveals Plath's skillful craftsmanship. The poem is noteworthy not only for the originality of its conception and presentation but also for the appropriateness and clarity of its images, metaphors, and vocabulary and for the effectiveness of its sound patterns. It is but one example of many which suggests that the value of Plath's poetry is not limited to its bizarre subject matter or its intensely subjective approach but includes its very high degree of technical expertise.

Notes

[1]Quoted in Edward Butscher, *Sylvia Plath: Method and Madness* (New York: Seabury Press, Inc., 1975), p. 204.

[2]Plath, "All the Dead Dears," *The Colossus* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 27. All subsequent references to this poem will be to this edition.

[3]The word "gross" is a slang term meaning "unpleasant," "repulsive," or more generally "terrible."

[4]A source which may have influenced Plath's description of the father is Alfred Noyes' children's poem, "When Daddy Fell into the Pond."

[5]*Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1969.

[6]Ibid.

Grotesque Elements in Eliot: New and Shocking Valuations

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One of Eliot's great themes, as we all know, is modern man's alienation. The expressions of this theme are varied, from "Gerontion's" insistence on the untrustworthiness of rational thought to the twisted faces and disembodied eyes which seem to follow Eliot's characters everywhere. Perhaps Eliot's best expression of man's ever-alienated and ever-insecure position is found in "East Coker":

> There is. . . ;
> At best, only a limited value
> In the knowledge derived from experience,
> The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies,
> Or the pattern is new in every moment
> And every moment is a new and shocking
> Valuation of all we have been.[1]

Eliot's poems through the transitional "The Hollow Men" abound in "new and shocking valuations." A considerable number of the disturbing elements belong to what Mikhail Bakhtin calls the modern grotesque, the negative mode of the grotesque focused on by Wolfgang Kayser. The subject of the grotesque, Kayser says, is the "estranged world."

He explains:

> We are so strongly affected. . . because it is our world which ceases to be reliable, and we feel that we would be unable

to live in the changed world. The grotesque instills fear of life rather than fear of death. Structurally, it presupposes that the categories which apply to our world become inapplicable (184).

Recurrent grotesque elements in Eliot's poems include: images of certain kinds of animals, of smoke and fog, of seemingly disembodied body parts, of masklike faces and marionette or automaton-like characters; and emphasis on the concept of death-in-life. All these elements emphasize the precariousness of man's position in the modern world.

Eliot's characteristic animal images are disturbing ones. Prufrock realizes he might as well have been "a pair of ragged claws / Scuttling across the floors of silent seas." In "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," the speaker tells what has unnerved him. One such thing was a crab in a pool, he says, "An old crab with barnacles on his back, / Gripped the end of a stick which I held him." The ugly crustaceans in these two poems hint of primordial truths. In "Gerontion," the question is posed: "What will the spider do? Suspend its operations, will the weevil / Delay?" Gerontion is asking what good rational thought is, what it can change. The clearly implied answer is that the essentially destructive principles embodied in the spider and the weevil cannot be stopped. Through the ruins of The Waste Land crawl rats which seem more at home in civilization's debris than do the unfortunate human inhabitants. The Hollow Men's voices "Are quiet as. . . rats' feet over broken glass," and to avoid recognition, the Hollow Men would disguise themselves in "Rat's coat" or "crowskin." Kayser suggests that certain animals, nocturnal or creeping ones which inhabit realms apart from man's, are especially suitable to the grotesque (182). This group includes, certainly, the rats, spiders, weevils and crustaceans of Eliot's poems.

But the bat is the animal Kayser calls "the grotesque animal incarnate." He explains its peculiar grotesqueness:

> The very name (Fledermaus). . . points to an unnatural fusion of organic realms concretized in this ghostly creature. And strange habits complement its strange appearance....It is strange even in the state of repose when its wings cover it like a coat and it hangs, head down, from a rafter, more like a piece of dead matter than a living ,thing. (182)

If natural bats belong to the grotesque, Eliot's baby-faced bat in the final section of *The Waste Land* does more so. To the "whisper music" played on the outdrawn long black hair of a woman appear startingly "bats with baby faces in the violet light" which, we are told, "Whistled, and beat their wings / And crawled head downward down a blackened wall. . ." (1. 380-82). Grover Smith reports that Eliot said this imagery was inspired partly by a painting from the school of Hieronymus Bosch, the panel called "Hell" or "The Sinful World." Smith writes: "The relevant detail depicts a batlike creature, with dull human features, crawling head first down a rock wall" (95). Typical of Bosch are sneaking, creeping, and infernal creatures composed of human and animal limbs, which indifferently torment their victims. Kayser says of Bosch's "Hell":

> The victims themselves appear to be unaffected, an indifference that puzzles and frightens the observer. No emotions seem to have been expressed in the picture, neither fear of hell nor human compassion nor the urgent desire to warn and preach. The viewer is in no way instructed how to react to and how to interpret the picture. (33)

Eliot's grotesque images are likely to produce in a reader similar puzzlement as to how to react.

In Eliot's poems through "The Hollow Men," an atmosphere of smoke and fog is pervasive. In "Prufrock," the very evening seems paralyzed. The yellow smoke or fog is eerily catlike, rubbing its back and muzzle, licking its tongue. It is as though the inanimate fog has become blended with the animate world. Blending of animate and inanimate elements always produces the grotesque. Gerontion's reveries and the wanderings of many of Eliot's characters take place nocturnally. The Waste Land's "Unreal City" is viewed "Under the brown fog of a winter day." And it is at the "violet hour" that the true horror of life in the Waste Land becomes most obvious. The smoke and fog-filled world is frightening precisely because it is real, one nightmare there is no waking from. Eliot's smoke, fog and darkness underline man's inability to orient himself in a world which is "unreal" in terms of meaningfulness. In smoke and fog, boundaries disappear. Without boundaries, rational categories cannot be maintained.

Another grotesque image recurrent in Eliot's earlier poems is seemingly disembodied body parts. In "Prufrock," both the eyes and the arms which disturb Prufrock seem to exist separately from their owners. In "Rhapsody," seemingly disembodied eyes are again important images. The streetwalker's eye "Twists like a crooked pin." The speaker has seen "eyes in the street / Trying to peer through lighted shutters." Even the child's eyes reflect nothing. Gerontion sees himself as a "dull head," no body and no soul. "Morning at the Window" is full of disembodied, grotesque images:

> The brown waves of fog toss up to me
> Twisted faces from the bottom of the street
> And fear from a passer-by with muddy skirts

> An aimless smile that hovers in the air
> And vanishes along the level of the roofs. (1. 5-9)

These twisted, floating faces and the hovering smiles bring to mind a Bosch-like scene.

Suggestions of the seemingly human or animate being actually inanimate or hollow is another notion common to the modern grotesque. The image of the mask is one of the common forms it takes. In "Prufrock," the speaker says, "there will be time / To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet." The implication is that modern people have only faces, "masks," that there is nothing behind their prepared faces. In "Rhapsody," even the child seems to wear a mask; the speaker claims, "I could see nothing behind that child's eye." In the "A Game of Chess" section of *The Waste Land*, the question is posed, "Are you alive or not? Is there nothing in your head?" The answer suggested in grotesque images in Eliot's early poetry is "No, nothing."

Marionette or automaton-like characters also give a disturbing sense of the animate and inanimate blended. In " Rhapsody," the empty-eyed child's single action is described: "So the hand of the child, automatic, / Slipped out and pocketed a toy that was running along the quay...." A child behaving automatically is particularly disturbing. In *The Waste Land*, even what passes for passion is automatic. The typist indifferently tolerates her "lover's" sexual advances but is vaguely relieved when he is gone:

> She smooths her hair with automatic hand,
> And puts a record on the gramophone. (1. 253-56).

But it is the Hollow Men who are most alive-but-not-alive. They are human on the surface, but are "hollow," "stuffed," their "Headpiece stuffed with straw." The scarecrow they resemble is a grotesque figure, its essence being the shaping into animate ap-

pearance of inanimate materials. Kayser emphasizes that objects are alienated by being brought to life and human beings by being deprived of it (186). Both forms of alienation happen frequently in Eliot's poems.

Interestingly, while Eliot makes extensive use of the negative grotesque imagery described by Kayser, he rarely uses the folk grotesque mode described by Mikhail Bakhtin. Folk grotesque imagery shows the human body as not separated from the rest of the world. The cyclical, natural life, nourishment, growth and reproduction are central concepts in the folk grotesque. Folk grotesque images tend to suggest the affirmative, even the exuberant. However, in Eliot's early poems, such images are threatening, at least to most of the speakers and characters in the poems.

For example, oral images are commonplace in the folk grotesque. In this imagery system, the mouth is important, Bakhtin tells us, because it is laid open to the outside world, because it is the means of nourishment and because it symbolizes man's triumphant assimilation of the elements (52). However, to the speaker in Eliot's prose poem "Hysteria," the woman's gaping mouth is negative and threatening as he is overwhelmed by her laughter and shaking breasts:

> As she laughed I was aware of becoming involved in her laughter and being a part of it, until her teeth were only accidental stars with a talent for squad drill. I was drawn by short gasps, inhaled at each momentary recovery lost finally in the dark caverns of her throat, bruised by the ripple of unseen muscles. (1-6)

A.D. Moody sees Eliot's speaker as "reduced to a state of nerves by her sexuality" (34). Tony Pinkney's analysis is more explicit: what produces the speaker's hysteria is "his own phantasy of a

voracious and cannibalistic vagina" (19). Pinkney points out that in Bakhtin's terms, the laughter is carnivalesque; it upsets the patriarchal order, as suggested by the old waiter's impatience and embarrassment. The woman's open mouth is a "vagina dentata" image. To the speaker in "Hysteria," it is purely threatening. But Mircea Eliade tells us that this image's meaning is always ambivalent.[2] It is both a threat and a hint, along with the woman's laughter, at possibilities of renewal and return.

Folk grotesque images in Eliot's poems normally describe characters in inherent conflict with decorum and the intellectual. Eliot's Sweeney is more ape than man, a purely physical being. His jaw swells "to maculate giraffe" as he eats, animal-like in "Sweeney Among the Nightingales," and when he smiles and leans into the restaurant window, his form merges with that of the wisteria growing there. Sweeney is a figure of contempt, and through him, the purely physical life is rejected in Eliot's poetry.

Mr. Apollinax is a true folk grotesque figure. His carnivalesque laughter overwhelms the respectable and sophisticated guests at the palace of Mrs. Flaccus. He is compared to "an irresponsible feotus" and to "the old man of the sea" (1. 8,10). Bakhtin stresses the centrality of the concept of the womb and of the stages of life close to birth and death in folk grotesque imagery (26). He also emphasizes the exuberant and liberating effect of laughter in the folk grotesque (48). The poem's speaker first envisions Mr. Apollinax decapitated for his audacity, but then he imagines him triumphant, "grinning over a screen / with seaweed in his hair" (1. 16-17). Mr. Apollinax's vitality renders the other guests flabbergasted and ineffectual. They hint that his pointed ears are a sign of abnormality but the speaker acknowledges that he has "heard the beat of centaur's hoofs" (1. 18). Mr. Apollinax is the centaur, of course in whom the "dryness" of the intellectual has not extinguished the passion of the sensual. Most of Eliot's characters are

agmented, either intellectual or physical beings but not whole
ke Mr. Apollinax.

n Eliot's poems, the boundaries crossed through grotesque im-
gery include those normally perceived as separating life and
eath, male and female, darkness and light, waking and sleep, mo-
on and stasis, reality and fantasy, animal and human, mechani-
l and human, the substantial and the insubstantial. The
nportance of myth to Eliot's poetry has, of course, been widely
scussed. Geoffrey Harpham has recently argued that the
otesque is an "alienated, fragmented and decomposed" form of
yth (51). Harpham cites Karl Kerenyi's contention that myth
rovides a foundation" by allowing a narrative's teller to "find his
ay back to primordial times" (54). Harpham insists that the
otesque's rejection of normal categories parallels the mythic's
nity of essence," in which everything is potentially identical with
erything else (55). If Harpham is correct about the grotesque
eing "fragmented myth," and his arguments are convincing, then
liot's use of grotesque images and symbols constitutes yet
nother form of the mythic in his poetry.

The essential trait of the grotesque is the crossing over of nor-
ally perceived boundaries. Which types of "crossings over" a
riter uses (i.e., negative or folk grotesque images) and their
eanings depend partly on factors of prejudice, assumptions, un-
erstanding and perception. Harpham explains:

> Grotesque is a word for that dynamic state of low-ascending and high-descending. Those like Bakhtin who espouse the cause of the low speak of "grotesque realism"; those like Kayser who stand with the status quo speak of grotesque nightmares. (74)

By Harpham's axiom, Eliot's emphasis on negative grotesque images identifies him as a supporter of the status quo and of abstract ideals. Certainly, this is consistent both with the themes of Eliot's poem which have grotesque images and with Eliot's regard for tradition.

Kayser mentions that in historical periods in which the grotesque has found wide acceptance, belief in a perfect and protective order had ceased to exist. He says of the twentieth century's fondness for the grotesque:

> The modern age questions the validity of the anthropological and the relevance of the scientific concepts underlying the syntheses of the nineteenth century. The various forms of the grotesque are the most obvious and pronounced contradictions of any kind of rationalism and any systematic use of thought. (188)

Through Eliot's earlier poems runs a rejection of rationalism and its categorizing tendencies. Rationally, man should expect to be quite at home in "his" world. The negative grotesque elements scattered throughout Eliot's earlier poems repeatedly point to man's being anything but "at home" in his world. Grotesque images drawn from modern life and modern nightmares force many "new and shocking valuations" on Eliot's readers.

Notes

[1]T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays, 1909-1950* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1971), p. 125, l. 87-87. All subsequent line numbers refer to this edition.

[2]Eliade uses this term in discussing the myth of return in two studies: *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries: The Encounter Between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities,* trans. Philip Mairet (New York: Harper and Row, 1967) p. 171, and in *Rites and Symbols of Initiation,* trans. William R. Trush (New York: Harper and Row, 1965) pp. 51-53.

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"Verbal Pickling": Images in the Poetry of Philip Larkin

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The poetry of Philip Larkin is characterized by a rather mundane positiveness created through his sometimes stinging portrayal of common-place people and events in twentieth-century British life. Graham Hough metaphorically categorizes the work of Larkin and other Movement Poets as being part of the traffic on the main highway of British Literature, while the earlier writings of the Modernists, especially those of Pound and Eliot, constitute a detour. Hough further states that the brilliance of the Modernist era is "inimitable and unrepeatable," but that it cannot be developed further and that the time has come to get poetry back on the main road. Writing in 1960, Hough was somewhat pessimistic about the possibility of this return to the "spirit of the language."[1] The accomplishments of Larkin, Amis, Hughes, and others during the ensuing twenty-five years show that British poets have indeed been powerful enough to take and hold a stance that is in line with the kind of reunion Hough envisioned.

Larkin's poetry is uniquely his own, yet it fits into the swell created by the drift and pressure of the whole body of poetry written in the English language for hundreds of years. The roots of Larkin's poetry, like those of the Romantics, are in personal experience. The Modernists, or Imagists, deny the inspiration and re-creation of events and people as the basis for writing. The best known articulation of this theory is found in Eliot's objective correlative; in his words, a poem begins as "a set of objects, a situa-

tion, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked."[2] In contrast, Larkin relies on experience alone to evoke emotion. His recipe for poetry involves a "verbal pickling," whereby the poet sees or feels something and is compelled to find the right combination of words to preserve the sight or feeling for readers.[3] Larkin feels that his obligation as a poet is to the experience itself and the preservation of that experience; his poetry grows out of experiences he has had or those he has observed.[4] Eliot, on the other hand, places emphasis on the poetry itself and the dissociation of the personal emotions of the poet from the work of writing the poem.[5]

The importance of the Modernists and their proximity in time to the Movement writers makes an analysis of the one crucial to an understanding of the other. Larkin and other Movement poets have quite definite reactions to the Modernists. In the 1955 *Poets of the 1950's*, Larkin took on Eliot's objective correlative directly:

> . . . I believe that every poem must be its own sole freshly created universe, and therefore have no belief in 'tradition' or a common myth-kitty or casual allusions in poems to other poems or poets, which last I find unpleasantly like the talk of literary understrappers letting you know they know the right people.[6]

The very nature of the allusions Larkin scorns presupposes readers to be "literary understrappers." He accuses the authors of such poems of writing to remind themselves and erudite readers of what they already know rather than re-creating what they know for those who do not know it. Larkin's theory of writing initially sounds much like Eliot's: the poet becomes obsessed

with an idea that needs expressing, he creates word groups to re-create the idea, and, lastly, readers re-create the idea that the poet originally had. The difference is crucial. While Eliot discounts the personal emotion of the poet as the triggering of a poem, Larkin vows that without this personal preliminary feeling there is nothing to reproduce, and, therefore, no poem to produce.[7] According to Larkin, Eliot's illusory, fragmented references to The Lord's Prayer in "The Hollow Men" and to Shakespeare and Marvell in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" turn these poems into a new kind of bad poetry that does not even try to move the average reader. Larkin charges that Modernist writing, along with Modernist music and art, has no lasting power because all three contradict human life as we know it.[8]

Given Larkin's belief that music should be nice noises rather than nasty ones, that painting should represent what persons with normal vision see, and that great literature uses language in the way normal people normally use it, it is not surprising that the images in Larkin's poetry become more and more concrete and literal with each successive volume.[9] Against the intellectualized art of modernism, which helps man neither to enjoy nor endure, Larkin offers validity (reality) of emotion.

The significance of Larkin's work in the body of English poetry depends in great measure upon the validity of his use of images. A steady progression from the abstract toward the concrete appears in a study of Larkin's four volumes of poetry, beginning in 1945 with *The North Ship*. In his introduction to *North Ship*, written twenty years after its initial publication, Larkin acknowledges that the poems therein reveal his search for a style and that they show his dependence on the music of Yeats' poetry as a pervasive influence. The poems in *North Ship* introduce themes that become refined in Larkin's future writing: an ominous coldness, undercutting, remembered images, and a pull between the wild, free

life (participation) and a mundane, every-day existence (isolation). The labeling of these alternate lifestyles, while providing a convenient tool for discussion, fails to convey the many-sided thrust of Larkin's theme. Larkin himself, the persona, always stands aside and allows the mainstream activities to go by. He deliberately isolates himself from intimate personal entanglements, but as an observer, not a censurer.

Larkin uses his imagination, through presenting images of alternate lifestyles, to show what life is like without imagination. This is not to say that the poet imagines the scenes he depicts. Taking his theory articulated in "The Pleasure Principle" literally, his inspiration to write "XX" in *North Ship* was a girl (a participant) being dragged across a snowy field and, later, two old men (observers) shoveling the snow. From these two concrete images Larkin creates a poem pointing toward the best of his later work. The young girl, full of a wild, sweet joy in living, is nonetheless a neutral, if not negative, force to Larkin. Except for a flickering, quickly-retracted wish to be like the girl, Larkin's only reaction to her is a lethargic observance that she exists.

In the second stanza the snow is everywhere brilliant, symbolic perhaps of the light and life of the girl. But, even ultimate light, or enlightenment, fails to make anything so wild stir in Larkin. The metaphor shifts to building materials in stanza three. The poet observes that his materials are "poor mortar and bricks" that can never create anything more than a man who is "a sack of meal upon two sticks." Exactly what Larkin's mortar and bricks are and why they are inferior is unclear. The sack image is perhaps more negative than the poet intended for it to be, for a sack of meal on sticks is pliable and vulnerable, as the persona most assuredly is not--he resists the influence of the wild, joyful life with strength.

Qualified by "yet" in stanza four, the poet finds that he does respond to the ordinary, everyday sight of two old men shoveling

snow. The picture of the men is more finely drawn than that of the young girl: they are ragged, they work near drifts, they stoop, they cough. More obliquely, in stanza five, the beauty of the men and their work dries the poet's throat and the sight of them affirms the worth of a life filled with silence and old age.

The last two stanzas continue the image of stooping and shoveling related to the poet's life and to his craft--"everything's remade / With shovel and spade," and from this patient endurance the fabulous can be built. The "fabulous," however, Larkin calls first a beast, surely a negative image, and later a snow-white unicorn. The unicorn is the most effective image in the poem, as the poet prays that it may "for sanctuary / Descend at last to me, / And put into my hand its golden horn."

The somewhat limited success of "XX" depends on the commentary on the images rather than the images themselves. "Verbal pickling" is a skill the poet has not yet mastered. The poem does reveal the first of many pictures that Larkin paints of two sides of the same coin. The coin has the same market value regardless of which side faces up. "XX" sets up a pattern that is to be repeated again and again: two paths are presented, the loud, social way of the majority first; the attraction of that lifestyle is acknowledged; the poet pulls back, stands aside, and declines involvement. While recognizing the acceptability of the first path for others, he brushes it aside for himself.

The Less Deceived, published ten years after the immature *North Ship*, presents a more clearly defined Larkin, while continuing the argument with self the poet delineates in "XX." "Reasons for Attendance" concerns itself with the persona, Larkin, looking in on a group of young people at a dance. The dancers represent the same mainstream participants that the young girl in "XX" symbolizes, but here the image is expanded. The window is lighted, the trumpet loud. Larkin's description of the under-25 dancers as

silent and *solemn* sets up the inevitable turn to an alternate, isolated path. If this dance is so fulfilling, why are the dancers not smiling? The poet senses the warmth of the interior and reminds himself that in there he can find "the wonderful feel of girls." He is, literally and figuratively, out in the cold all alone, unglorified, just like the two old laborers in "XX." But, he heeds the call of the "rough-tongued bell" that is, perhaps, art; perhaps man's sense of individuality. Responding to the bell he hears brings him happiness, as others' responses to different bells bring them happiness--or does it? Do the dancers hear the bell at all, or are they merely playing the game, solemnly and silently forcing themselves to pretend they are winning? The speaker is obliquely making a case for his opting for solitude. Then at the last minute, he stands aside and leaves the reader with an unresolved problem: "... both are satisfied / If no one has misjudged himself. Or lied."

In "Reasons for Attendance" the image of the dancers is clearer than that of the young girl in "XX," where the reader must infer that the participant is attractive and compelling. Here Larkin gives more specific details about the dancers and, in doing so, allows for a greater ambivalence. While in "XX" the speaker momentarily prays to be like the girl, in "Reasons" he never seriously contemplates joining the dance any more than the old men would seriously consider chasing each other through the snow. Part of Larkin's early penchant for undercutting still lingers in this volume; he cannot resist the closing "If."

"Toads" continues the participation/isolation theme by equating the toad, which is work, with the less acceptable pattern of behavior exhibited by the old men in "XX." Larkin, with his tongue firmly in his cheek, portrays work first as a reprehensible toad, and then as a brute who is ignored or dispensed with by "lots of folks" who "live on their wits." These ostensibly happy folk include lecturers, lispers, losels, loblolly-men, and louts--an undis-

tinguished crew who seem to like living by their wits rather than by working. Characteristically, Larkin gives over most of the poem to these men with barefooted children and skinny wives eating sardines from a can. He snarls at the toad, saying it ruins his days with its "sickening poison," one of the few abstract images in this poem. In the end, Larkin zeroes in on the loner, "cold as snow," loaded down by "something sufficiently toad-like." Even this negative image conveys the lifestyle of Larkin's choice.

The movement from "Toads" in *The Less Deceived* to "Toads Revisited" in *Whitsun Weddings* is smooth. The latter poem follows Larkin's tried-and-true formula: the opening presentation of two possibilities, followed by a great fuss over the persona's opposing force. This time, however, the participating majority is favored exclusively with blatant negativism. These folk are "palsied old step-takers," "hare-eyed clerks," and "waxed-fleshed outpatients"; stupid, weak people with "nowhere to go but indoors, / No friends but empty chairs." The poet's only concession to the other side of the coin is the observation that what these people are doing "should feel better than work." After all, the park is warm; it has sunshiny grass on which to lie. The warmth of that image is countered in the last two stanzas by a cool, crisp businesslike picture of Larkin's life, complete with incoming mail, telephone calls, and efficient secretary. He wryly observes that eventually he, too, will join the "old toad" in a trek down Cemetery Road. The conflict of selves is emphatically vital in "Toads Revisited," but there is never any doubt about the eventual conclusion. The boring, everyday, mundane existence wins every time.

The poet himself is the persona in all the poems in this study, and thus far the opposing self has been represented by miscellaneous people, almost certainly strangers. "Dockery and Son" definitively focuses on a college friend of the writer, here called

Dockery. In telling Dockery's story, Larkin is inversely telling his own. Remembering Dockery as a withdrawn student from the public schools, Larkin visualizes him becoming a father at age 19 or 20. In this more intimate, specific poem, the poet gives greater credence to the participant's lifestyle than in either of the "Toad" poems. Past and present alternate in the poem, with the scenes in the present emphasizing the satisfied isolation of the speaker: "to have no son, no wife, / No house or land still seemed quite natural." His only response is surprise that he is so different from "the others." Along with the more concrete image of Dockery, this poem contains a great deal of commentary on that image, which is what reveals Larkin the isolationist to the reader. The closing lines convey Larkin's almost stoic acknowledgement of a common end, death. Details about Dockery serve as a backdrop for the unspoken circumstances of the speaker's life. In "Dockery" Larkin's perfected "pickling" technique functions well.

High Windows, Larkin's most recent book of poems, shows the poet at his most powerful: tough, terse, and painfully honest. Larkin is still Larkin, but here his language slices to the bone, his images are startlingly clear, and his tone is refined. "Sympathy in White Major" is a model of the ironic eulogy. The speaker carefully mixes himself a drink: ice falls "chimingly" into the glass, tonic water "voids in foaming gulps" and he mockingly toasts himself: "he devoted his life to others." The chilling irony is almost cruel; then, Larkin the isolationist intrudes. Having his say much sooner and at greater length than in the previously cited poems, he confronts the participants, who "wore [human beings] like clothes," used them, and tossed them aside. The first half of Larkin's double twist comes in the second stanza: "It didn't work for them or me." The speaker plunges ahead, toasting himself with outworn cliches: "a decent chap, a brick, a proper sport"; finally, "here's to the whitest man I know--." Before the reader

mentally fills in the name of the honored one, Larkin intrudes again with the second twist: "Though white is not my favourite color."

The forces at work in this poem are those represented by the girl and the old men in "XX"; by the dancers and the outside observer in "Reasons for Attendance"; by the slugs and the worker in the "Toad" poems; and by a thousand Dockerys and his "alone" former classmate. In "Sympathy in White Major," for the first time, Larkin draws blood, but with a rapier, not a broadsword.

Larkin crowns his succession of participant/observer poems with "Vers de Societe," almost convincing the reader that he has decided to join the "crowd of craps." The poem opens with the speaker's invitation to the home of Warlock-Williams. Larkin crudely replies to himself, "in a pig's arse," and begins to compose his regrets. As in "Dockery and Son," the force opposing Larkin's basic inclination is specific, personal--someone he knows; not an abstract scene or a miscellaneous group. Here, the isolationist refutes the participant in the very first stanza, and the internal argument pulls back and forth for the rest of the poem, seemingly (but *only* seemingly) giving the participant the last word.

The second stanza begins "Funny how hard it is to be alone." (Hard because people badger him to go out, or hard because he does not like solitude any more?) Larkin graphically describes the social scene he is avoiding. The conversation is composed of such drivel as "asking that ass about his fool research"; his dinner partner is, again crudely, a "bitch" who reads only mod magazines. How much better, the speaker avers, to sit by his lamp, listening to the wind and watching the "airsharpened blade" of the moon. Pulling no punches, Larkin likens the rush of society to "Playing at goodness, like going to church / Something that bores us, something we don't do well."

In the final stanza, Larkin realizes that he is no longer young, and that he now has less time to be with others, to join the mainstream.

> Only the young can be alone freely,
> The time is shorter now for company,
> And sitting by a lamp more often brings
> Not peace, but other things.
> Beyond the light stand failure and remorse
> Whispering 'Dear Warlock-Williams: Why, of course--'

Solitude sometimes brings failure and remorse instead of the peace the writer once counted on. Almost, the reader is lulled into believing that Larkin succumbs to old age and society's pressure and accepts the invitation. But the *poet* is not saying "yes," it is failure and remorse who whisper "why, of course," and those two are outside the light of his lamp, where he most certainly is not going to wander. Admitting that these enemies are in the room, waiting to overwhelm him, is as far as Larkin is willing to go.

The bulk of Larkin's work advocates wary stoicism as an approach to life, but his message is not unduly pessimistic. A great deal of potent positiveness, especially in tone, springs from his negativism. Multiple expressions of the poet's preference for isolation imply that the choice is constantly before him. Larkin speaks briefly and seldom, but every poem has something to say --explicit messages realizing his aim of preserving emotion by reproducing it in his readers.

Endnotes

[1]Graham Hough, *Image and Experience: Studies in a Literary Revolution* (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co., Ltd., 1960), p. 8.

[2]T. S Eliot, "Hamlet and His Problems," in *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1932), pp. 124-25.

[3]Philip Larkin, "An Interview with *Paris Review*," in *Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-1982* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982), p. 58.

[4]Philip Larkin, "An Interview with the *Observer*," in *Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-1982* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982), p. 52.

[5]T. S Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London, Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1920), p. 59.

[6]Philip Larkin, "Statement," in *Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-1982* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982), p. 79.

[7]Philip Larkin, "The Pleasure Principle," in *Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-1982* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982), p. 80.

[8]Philip Larkin, "Introduction to *All What Jazz*," in *Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-1982* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982), p. 297.

9 Larkin, *Paris Review*, p. 72.

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Fitzgerald and the War Novel

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Although Scott Fitzgerald considered the writing of novels his serious artistic calling, he only completed four during his more than twenty years of writing. Critics attribute this shortcoming to various factors, the most frequently mentioned ones being: his drinking, his wife's distractive influences, and his lack of self-discipline. However, judging from some of Fitzgerald's own comments, an important deficiency was his own narrow range of experience, which caused him at times to use and re-use material unboundedly. He even resented his wife Zelda's attempts to write fiction based on their lives, claiming that all such material belonged to him as the family provider. In a letter to his daughter he explained: "So many writers, Conrad for instance, have been aided by being brought up in a metier utterly unrelated to literature. It gives an abundance of material and, more important, an attitude from which to view the world. So much writing nowadays suffers both from lack of an attitude and from sheer lack of material, save what is accumulated in a purely social life" (*Crack-Up* 301). And in his introduction to the Modern Library Edition of *The Great Gatsby* (1934), Fitzgerald wrote that when he started *Gatsby*, he "had recently been kidded half haywire by critics who felt that my material was such as to preclude all dealing with mature persons in a mature world. But, my God! it was my material, and it was all I had to deal with" (*In His Own Time* 156).

One of the experiences which Fitzgerald regretted not having had was war. Although he received a commission and spent ap-

roximately sixteen months in the United States Army, he never ːft the country, having the misfortune of being at the port of em- arkation when the armistice was signed. Shortly before receiv- ıg his commission, he wrote to his cousin Ceci: "Every man I've ıet who's been to war--that is this war--seems to have lost youth nd faith in man unless they're wine-bibbers of patriotism which, f course, I think is the biggest rot in the world" (*Letters* 414). lonetheless he seems to have strongly regretted missing combat ecause of the abundance of writing material he felt deprived of. lis use of war material was limited to brief references in *The reat Gatsby*, and a visit to the battlefield in *Tender Is the Night*; owever, he did use some of his army camp experience in *The eautiful and Damned*, "The Last of the Belles," and "I Didn't Get ıver," which was based on the swamping of a ferry boat loaded ith troops which took place on maneuvers near Camp Sheridan, labama (*Afternoon of an Author* 169).

Fitzgerald's interest in war goes back further than World War I. ı Maryland, Scott's father, Edward Fitzgerald, guided Con- ːderate spies during the Civil War; and Mary Surratt, Edward's rst cousin, was hanged for conspiracy in Lincoln's assassination *Some Sort* 11-12). So it is no surprise that Scott grew up listen- ıg to his father's stories of the Civil War or that he was influenced y them; two of his earliest apprentice stories, "A Debt of Honor" nd "The Room with Green Blinds" (both published at St. Paul's .cademy) and an early play, *The Coward*, were concerned with ıe Civil War and Lincoln's assassin. Also, a later Lardneresque ːory with a Civil War setting, "The Night before Chancel- ɔrsville," appeared in *Esquire* magazine in 1935.

During the twenties Fitzgerald thought a great deal about the ar he had more or less missed. He read widely about it and col- ːcted stereopticon slides of the battlefields (*Scott and Ernest* 14), ɔme of which he visited at least twice during the twenties (Le

Vot, 209). He was fascinated by pictures of mutilated soldiers; in 1927 Fitzgerald wrote to Ernest Hemingway: "I have a new German war book, *Die Krieg against Krieg*, which shows men who mislaid their faces in Picardy and the Caucasus--you can imagine how I thumb it over, my mouth fairly slithering with fascination [sic]" (*Letters* 302). Matthew Bruccoli suggests that Fitzgerald's failure to get overseas during the war made him feel that "he had missed a test of his manhood" and caused him to worry "about how he would have behaved in battle" (*Scott and Ernest* 14). But Hemingway suggested a more artistic reason: "The reason you are so sore you missed the war . . . is because war is the best subject of all. It groups the maximum of material and speeds up the action and brings out all sorts of stuff that normally you have to wait a lifetime to get" (Le Vot, 220). Fitzgerald's concern over his lack of war experience was intensified by his friendship with Hemingway, who, with a flair for self-promotion, set himself up as a war hero, although his service as a Red Cross ambulance driver in Italy was rather brief, and by his friendship with Thomas Boyd, who served with the United States Marines in France and received the Croix de Guerre.

Fitzgerald's interest in and admiration of war fiction is clearly seen in his well-known essay "How to Waste Material," the first half of which is a general commentary on American literature of his day, the second half being a highly favorable review of Hemingway's *In Our Time*, which dealt primarily with the life of Nick Adams but also includes such war pieces as "On the Quai at Smyrna," "A Very Short Story" (which adumbrates *A Farewell to Arms*), "Soldier's Home," and seven vignettes dealing with war. In the first part of the essay, Fitzgerald reveals his interest in war stories: "Of all the work by the young men who have sprung up since 1920 one book survives--*The Enormous Room* by E.E. Cummings. . . . Two other books, both about the war, complete the

possible salvage from the work of the younger generation--*Through the Wheat* and *Three Soldiers*, but the former despite its fine last chapters doesn't stand up as well as *Les Croix de Bois* [by Roland Dorselbes (Paris, 1919)] and *The Red Badge of Courage*, while the latter is marred by its pervasive flavor of contemporary indignation." (*In His Own Time* 147). Not only does this passage show that Fitzgerald thought that the three best books written since 1920 by young Americans were war novels, but it also shows that he was familiar with other war novels of World War I and earlier ones.

Fitzgerald had reviewed both *Three Soldiers* and *Through the Wheat* for the newspapers. At the beginning of his review of *Three Soldiers* he states: "With the exception of a couple of tracts by Upton Sinclair, carefully disguised as novels but none the less ignored by the righteous booksellers of America, *Three Soldiers* by a young Harvard man named John Dos Passos is the first war book by an American which is worthy of serious notice. Even *The Red Badge of Courage* is pale beside it. Laying *Three Soldiers* down I am filled with that nameless emotion that only a piece of work created in supreme detachment can arouse" (*In His Own Time* 121). After some sarcastic remarks about the public's reading taste and a few strong deprecatory words about "the war masterpiece of the Spanish Zane Grey" (Vincente Blasco-Ibanez's *The Four Horseman of the Apocalypse*), Fitzgerald "heartily" recommends *Three Soldiers* to the more serious reader. The book will, he states, lay before the reader "the whole gorgeous farce of 1917-1918" revealing these "obnoxious prigs (the Y. M. C. A. men) charging twenty cents for a cup of chocolate and making shrill, preposterous speeches full of pompous ministers' slang" and the Military Police "ferociously 'beating up' privates for failure to salute an officer." The reader will also "see filth and pain, cruelty and hysteria and panic, in one long three-year nightmare and he

will know that the war brought the use of these things not to some other man or to some other man's son, but to himself and to his own son, that same healthy young animal who came home two years ago bragging robustly of things he did in France" (122). But in spite of his admiration of the book, Fitzgerald, who was an excellent and perceptive critic of other writers' works, did find flaws. While pointing out that the book is "all very careful work" and that "there is none of that uncorrelated detail, that clumsy juggling with huge masses of material which shows in all but one or two pieces of American realism" (123), Fitzgerald criticizes Dos Passos' portrayal of the protagonist: "It is with this John Andrews . . . that John Dos Passos allows himself to break his almost Flaubertian detachment and begin to britling-ize the war. This is immediately perceptible in his style, which becomes falsely significant and strewn with tell-tale dots. But the author recovers his balance in a page or two and flies on to the end in full control of the machine" (122). Fitzgerald adds that Andrews is "a little too much the ultimate ineffectual, the Henry-Adams-in-his-youth sort of character," who appears too frequently, especially in the works of H.G. Wells and his imitators (123). He concludes by suggesting that anyone wanting "to cultivate the rudiments of literary taste should compare John Dos Passos' *Three Soldiers* with Owen Johnston's *The Wasted Generation*, which Fitzgerald calls "a desperate attempt to do what John Dos Passos has done" (123-124).

Two years later Fitzgerald reviewed *Through the Wheat* by Thomas Boyd, a St. Paul reporter and bookshop owner whom Fitzgerald got to know in 1922 while he and Zelda were awaiting the birth of their daughter. Although younger than Scott, Boyd had seen action in France, and at this time was writing *Through the Wheat*. In his review for the *New York Evening Post*, Fitzgerald enthusiastically acclaimed the book. He began by comparing

Boyd's prose with Conrad's, praising its realism: "At first the very exactitude of the detail makes one expect no more than another piece of reporting, but gradually the thing begins to take on significance and assume a definite and arresting artistic contour.... Finally, without one single recourse to sentiment, to hysteria, or to trickery, the author strikes one clear and unmistakable note of heroism, of tenuous and tough-minded exaltation, and with this note vibrating sharply in the reader's consciousness the book ends" (*In His Own Time* 143-144). He commends the unity of the book and praises Boyd for not allowing his work to be influenced by either "patrioteer or pacifist," adding: "Dos Passos and Eliot Paul filtered the war through an artistic intellectualism and in so doing attributed the emotions of exhausted nations to men who for the most part were neither exhausted nor emotional" (144). He concludes: "This is not only the best combatant story of the great war, but also the best war book since *The Red Badge of Courage*" (144). Fitzgerald obviously had not changed his mind two years later, when he wrote a letter to Maxwell Perkins stating that he had recently re-read *Through the Wheat* and still thinks it "marvelous," adding: "Together with *The Enormous Room* and I think, *Gatsby*, it's much the best thing that has come out of American fiction since the war" (*Dear Scott* 116). Fitzgerald also praised Boyd's collection of war stories, *Points of Honor*, stating that while the preface is "faintly pretentious," the stories themselves are "great" (*Dear Scott* 99).

The war novelist with whom Fitzgerald was more closely associated than Boyd was Ernest Hemingway, whose literary career Fitzgerald had sought to promote since the pamphlet *In Our Time* was first called to his attention by Edmund Wilson. Fitzgerald's suggestions to Hemingway concerning *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms* are well known. And although his comments did not relate very much to the war aspects of the novels, we know

that Fitzgerald did think highly of them. Fitzgerald's comments to Hemingway on *A Farewell to Arms* are honest evaluations and suggestions for the writer and reveal his concern for the dialogue and praise for the style, although at one point he does warn Hemingway not to leave the war behind: "Seems to me a last echo of the war very faint when Catherine is dying and he's drinking beer in the Cafe" (Mann, 148). Hemingway, who resented other people's advice even when he took it, was piqued by this comment; in 1951 he wrote to Arthur Mizener, "I have a letter in which he [Fitzgerald] told me how to make *A Farewell to Arms* a successful book which includes some fifty suggestions including eliminating the officer shooting the sergeant, and bringing in, actually and honestly to God, the U.S. Marines at the end" (*Scott and Ernest* 83-84). If Fitzgerald did suggest this, and there is no evidence to show that he did, Hemingway did not follow the advice, the only mention of the war at the end being when Frederic Henry reads of the break through on the British front while he is glancing at the back of a man's newspaper in the cafe after the baby has been born dead (*A Farewell to Arms* 329).

The most direct criticism of Hemingway's war novels is seen in Fitzgerald's comments on *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. When this novel was first published, in 1940, Fitzgerald wrote to Hemingway: "It's a fine novel, better than anybody else writing could do .... The massacre was magnificent and also the fight on the mountain and the actual dynamiting scene. Of the sideshows I particularly like the vignette of Karkov and Pilar's Sonata to death--I had a personal interest in the Moseby guerilla stuff because of my own father. The scene in which the father says goodbye to his son is very powerful. I'm going to read the whole thing again" (*Crack-Up* 284). However, despite his letter to Hemingway, Fitzgerald did not think as highly of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* as he did of Hemingway's earlier war novel. In his

notebook he wrote, "It is a thoroughly superficial book which has all the profundity of *Rebecca*" (*Scott and Ernest* 145). And to Zelda he wrote: "Ernest sent me his book and I'm in the middle of it. It is not as good as the Farewell to Arms. It doesn't seem to have the tensity or the freshness nor has it the inspired poetic moments . . . . It is full of a lot of rounded adventures on the Huckleberry Finn order and of course it is highly intelligent and literate like everything he does. I suppose life takes a good deal out of you and you can never quite repeat" (*Letters* 128). Sheilah Graham says that Fitzgerald told her: "Its not up to his standard . . .; he wrote it for the movies" (Graham, 159).

Other letters written throughout his life abound with references to war novels, histories, and biographies of war leaders. In a letter to Judge John Biggs, a Princeton friend, Fitzgerald mentions James Anthony Froude's *Julius Caesar*, Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, Guedalla's *Wellington*, Burne's *Lee, Grant and Sherman*, Hayes' "book on Lincoln," and two of the movies he worked on in Hollywood--*Gone With The Wind* and *Three Comrades* which was based on Erich Maria Remarque's novel, which Fitzgerald called "a book that just falls short of being first rate" (*Correspondence* 482). In a letter to Edmund Wilson written in 1922, Fitzgerald says that Wilson's "The Death of a Soldier" is "about the best short war story yet" (*Crack-Up* 263). Writing to John Peale Bishop in 1929, Fitzgerald, praising Bishop's novelette "The Cellar," calls it "one of the best war things I've ever read--right up with the best of Crane and Bierce" (*Crack-Up* 274). In one of his letters to Hemingway, Fitzgerald praises *The Spanish Farm* and *Sixty-four, Ninety-Four*, two of the novels in *The Spanish Farm Trilogy, 1914-1918* by the Englishman R. H. Mottram: "Wonderful war books. Much better than Ford Maddox Ford. In fact the best thing I've read this summer" (*Letters* 297). In another letter to Hemingway, previously mentioned, Fitzgerald speaks of the *Memoirs* of

Ludendorf and Ludwig's *Bismarck*, as well as *Die Krieg against Krieg* (*Letters* 302). He also told Hemingway that his favorite story in *Men Without Women* after "The Killers" was a war story, "Now I Lay Me Down" (Letters 301).

Fitzgerald's letters to Maxwell Perkins published in *Dear Scott/Dear Max* often refer to war novels or war-related works. Others not previously mentioned include *War and Peace*, which he apparently began reading in June 1924 (73), Ford Maddox Ford's *No More Parades* and *Some Do Not* (126), John W. Thomason's *Fix Bayonets* (140), *What Price Glory?* (140), James Boyd's *Drums* (a novel of the American Revolution published by Scribners in 1925), and unnamed Frenchman's *Evasione d' Aviateurs* and two sequels (155), Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (156), *Documentary Preparation for the German Break-thru in 1918* (163), *Memoirs of Baron de Marbot* (204), Horace Green's *General Grant's Last Stand* (234), and *Decisive Battles: Their Influence upon History and Civilization* by J. F. C. Fuller (263). He also suggested to Perkins that Scribner's publish a series of war books--a suggestion which Perkins declined, stating that they were already involved with enough war-related books (163-165).

It is doubtful that Fitzgerald's interest in war literature lessened in his later life. Writing to Edwin Knopf, story editor at M-G-M, in 1940 (the year of Fitzgerald's death), Fitzgerald suggested a movie based on two of his Civil War stories. In his letter Fitzgerald stated:

> There are two Civil Wars and there are two kinds of Civil War novels . . . . the romantic, chivalric, Sir Walter Scott story like *Gone with the Wind*, *The Birth of a Nation*, the books of Thomas Nelson Page and Mary Johnson. But there is also the realistic type modeled primarily on Stendhal's great picture of Waterloo in *La Chartreuse de*

Parme, Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, and the stories of Ambrose Bierce. This way of looking at war gives great scope for comedy without bringing in Stepin Fetchit and Hattie McDaniel as faithful negro slaves, because it shows how small the individual is in the face of great events, how comparatively little he can do even to save himself. The Great War has been successfully treated like this--*Journey's End* and *All Quiet*--the Civil War never (*Letters* 597).

It was this realistic approach to war that so interested Scott Fitzgerald, and it was its violent death and bloodshed that fascinated him. There is very little doubt that if Fitzgerald had actually been in combat, he would have taken advantage of the experience and written at least one war novel, and probably numerous short stories about war. Perhaps he would have written one of the greatest American war novels, or at least the best since *The Red Badge of Courage*.

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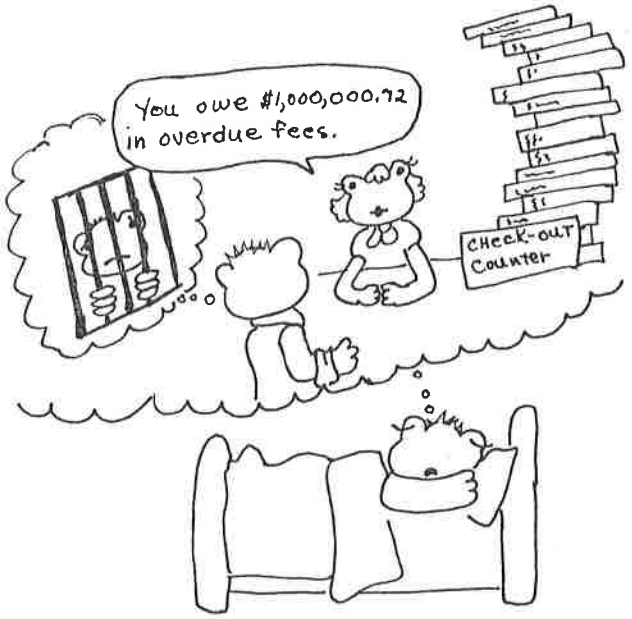

Victorian Popular Fiction and the "Condition of England" Question

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The following statement from Thomas Carlyle's essay "Signs of the Times," published in 1829 captures the essence of--as it was commonly termed--the 'condition of England' in the Victorian era: "Wealth has more and more increased, and at the same time gathered itself more and more into masses, strangely altering the old relations, and increasing the distance between the rich and the poor" (60). As all of us are aware, most of the novelists whose works we teach in our courses in Victorian fiction deal to some degree with this issue--that of the great imbalance of wealth and the reluctant misery of much of the population.

In my paper, I will contend that certain other novelists--those not usually found on our course syllabi--treat the poverty, the abominable living and working conditions, and the general misery of the laboring class with an abandonment, a complete freedom from restraint, not found in the "literary" novelists of the day such as Dickens and Gaskell. I will suggest that the largely forgotten writers of Victorian popular fiction deserve our attention because, owing to their minimal concern with theories of fiction, history flows through their novels more freely, with less distortion, than through the works of authors more concerned with "the art of the novel." Focusing on the best-selling writer of the Victorian period, George William MacArthur Reynolds, I will suggest that in his work--as in the work of the popular novelists generally--we see a reflection of the immediate and pressing social concerns of

the times that is accurate enough to warrant close scrutiny by the student of literature and the social historian. As Tania Modleski's recent study *Loving with A Vengeance* examines Harlequin Romances and soap operas with a view to a better understanding of American culture, so a study of George Reynolds and other popular Victorian novelists should give us greater insight into the complex social relations of the Victorian period.

It is generally accepted that Reynolds was the most popular English novelist of the Victorian age--perhaps of any age: in his obituary (600) it is asserted that by the time of his death in 1879 he had written more fiction than any other English author. On the grounds of his immense popularity, he seems a logical choice as representative popular novelist.

A brief biographical sketch seems in order here to substantiate my contention that Reynolds was not an opportunist but a committed partisan of the laboring class, a man who, born into a middle class family, abandoned for a time the usual bourgeois Victorian amenities for what seems to have been a rather bohemian existence--a lifestyle that helps account for his freedom from the fear of the "lower orders" that critics have found in the social-problem fiction of Dickens, Disraeli, and Gaskell. More importantly--as I hope to demonstrate--his early and committed involvement in the labor movement indicates the fixing of his allegiance in the working class.

George William MacArthur Reynolds, born in 1814, was the son of a distinguished captain in the Royal Navy, who intended his son for a military career and enrolled him at the Royal Military College at Sandhurst. However, not finding military life to his taste young George soon left Sandhurst--still in his teens--for a tour of Europe, which turned into a residence in Paris, where be found work in a bookselling and publishing business. It seems likely that the revolutionary spirit of the Paris of that time (the

early 1830's) helped to develop in Reynolds the sympathy for the working class which was to become a dominant force in his life and writings (Hunter 226).

While living in Paris, he wrote a sensational novel entitled *The Youthful Impostor*, published in London in 1835 (Obituary 600); Having returned to live in London in 1836, be soon gained notable popular success with several romantic novels and an enormously successful imitation of Dickens entitled *Pickwick Abroad*, published in weekly parts. This success convinced him that the penny weekly number was the publishing method most suitable for his fiction (Hunter 226, 228). Not yet was social protest an important element of his work, but he had found his readership: the burgeoning audience of the working class, newly literate and hungering for something--anything--to read.

Fiction, however, was about to become a secondary interest for Reynolds; for, after two additional penny novels, both published in 1840, he devoted the greater part of his time and energy to politics (Obituary 601). He became head of the foreign intelligence department of the *London Dispatch* and began to write for that paper articles expressing sympathy with European revolutionary movements. His attacks on the French King Louis Philippe were so violent that he was dismissed from his position with the *Dispatch* (MacDonald 929); and in 1848, the year of his departure, he appeared in public for the first time as a political leader (Gammage 293). The occasion was a Chartist meeting in Trafalgar Square on March 6, called by this seminal labor association to demand the immediate repeal of the income tax, which the workingmen considered unjust because imposed without their representation. When agents of the law declared the meeting illegal and the original leader refused to take the risk of presiding, Reynolds leapt into the breach and acted as chairman. An indication of his political tendencies at this stage can be seen

in the passage at this meeting, not of the motion involving the income tax, but instead a resolution--not on the agenda at all but introduced and pushed through by the forceful Reynolds--announcing the Chartists' support of the revolution in Paris. When the meeting broke up, Reynolds was accompanied to his home by a great crowd, whom he addressed from his balcony (Gammage 293-4). The meeting had proven an excellent opportunity for his emergence as a political leader and champion of the working man and woman.

Reynolds's active leadership in the Chartist movement continued for several years and included numerous speeches at meetings, one of which (as reported in the London Times of July 24, 1849) was greeted with such "tremendous cheers" when Reynolds called Louis Napoleon a "humbug" and a "rank impostor" that the chairman had to step in and restore order ("Peace and War Agitators" 597). In 1850, Reynolds was elected to the executive committee of the Chartist organization at the head of the ballot, garnering some two hundred more votes than the popular demagogue Feargus O'Connor--thus refuting a statement by his contemporary W. E. Adams that Reynolds had no strong following among the rank and file (Gammage 358). It seems clear that he was no mere opportunist but a deeply committed and hard-working member of the Chartist organization. His resignation from the executive committee in 1851 seems to have been motivated, at least in part, by his impatience with the slow progress being made by the Chartist movement, which by this time had lost its original impetus (Hunter 232).

During the years of his Chartist activity, Reynolds continued to write and held several editorial positions. In May, 1850, he had founded *Reynolds's Weekly Newspaper*, which, according to a contemporary account, was "the leading Radical journal, advocating republicanism, ridiculing royalty, and exposing the malpractices

r crimes of the aristocracy" (Obituary 601). And by this time he ad begun to use fiction as a forum for exploring the "Condition f England" question and to suggest answers.

Certainly the most astounding of his works of fiction--in length t any rate--was *The Mysteries of the Court of London*, the eviathan of penny novels, which began to appear in weekly numers in 1849 and did not end until 1856, four and a half million ords later (Hunter 232). This, like his other serialized novels, ad fantastic sales: it was not unusual for each number of a eynolds novel to sell 100,000 copies (Altick 364). The follow-ıg estimate of Reynolds's popularity, taken from his obituary, ems reasonable: "We are, perhaps, not far from the truth when e describe the deceased as the most popular writer of our time. ickens, Thackeray, and Lever, had their thousands of readers, ut Mr. Reynolds's readers were numbered by hundreds of ıousands, perhaps by millions" (600).

It would be misleading to suggest that Reynolds attracted and ıaintained these millions of readers--most of whom were of the orking class--through social and political commentary alone. lis work is, above all else, the fiction of sensation, richly deserv-ıg the name "Penny dreadful." The focus is on suspense and on ıst-moving, violent, sexually titillating action; in the author's bag f tricks are flogging, extortion, seduction, rape, suicide, murder whatever could be counted on to excite his audience. Because e outwardly denounces crime, sexual immorality, and cruelty hile at the same time exploiting them, he has been accused--with ood reason, one fears--of having an "elastic attitude" towards ıorality (Dalzis 1 39). On this head, perhaps the best justifica-on one can offer is that, in Reynolds's opinion, the end justified ıe means.

At this point, I would like to beg the question: let me ask the eader to accept, along with me, an essentially favorable reading

of Reynolds's motivation. Few motives, we must admit, are absolutely pure, without taint of venality, and our author obviously had as one aim the selling of books. Nevertheless, his years of devotion to the Chartist cause support very strongly the view that his advocacy of the workingman's cause in his fiction was undertaken genuinely and sincerely, not just as a pandering to popular taste.

In most instances, the method used by Reynolds to bring social commentary into his sensational tales was the simple and not very subtle one of allowing the depiction of a scene of misery to lead him into a straightforward denunciation, in the omniscient narrator's voice, of the unjust social system which fostered such misery. He believed that nothing more subtle was necessary: no imagery, such as the "mad, melancholy elephants" Dickens (in *Hard Times*) used to represent the engines of the factories, was employed by Reynolds to express his ideas. Nor did be attempt a philosophical analysis of the problem as George Eliot would have done. As he states in *Mysteries of the Court*, "the Working Men of England require not sophistry--much less metaphysics--to account for the evils which they endure. The causes are too palpable--too glaring--too apparent" (2: 18). An example of his straightforward approach (and his declamatory style) is the following passage from *The Mysteries of the Court*:

> 0 working men of England! how many thousands--how many hundreds of thousands of ye have had your families go down into the streets to beg? Rise early--toil hard all day--eat of the scantiest and drink of the poorest the while --go to bed late--rise early again--pass through the same wretched routine of crushing labour and semi-starvation day after day,--and what is the result? Ye cannot keep yourselves and your families from misery and wretchedness. No --destitution and then beggary or the workhouse come at last,--and your end is either death on a dunghill, or death in

an Union with the blessed certainty of a common deal coffin and a pauper's grave .... (2: 17-18)

Passages of sweeping denunciation such as this--which remind one of his speeches as a Chartist leader--are enforced by others which present vivid, minutely detailed pictures of individuals of the class of suffering poor. The following--admittedly sentimental--depiction of a young vendor on the early-morning streets of London--also taken from *The Mysteries of the Court*--typifies Reynolds's method:

> The water-cress girl, shivering in the scant clothing and with her naked feet and ankles of a livid red as if they were raw, could scarcely give forth the usual cry that proclaimed her presence, so spasmodically did her teeth chatter; and as the poor wretch dragged her weary form along, gazing anxiously at the house-doors to see whether the servants were coming out to buy, each bleeding foot left its ensanguined trace on the pavement. (1: 14)

It is unlikely that many of Reynolds' newly literate working-class readers--who we suppose were probably not nicely discriminating--would have objected to the purple prose of this passage; rather, its undeniable vividness must have moved them to an emotional experiencing of the abuses which their social class was suffering. And if the modern reader doubts the veracity of Reynold's portraits of the poor, he need only compare them with the factual accounts of Victorian journalist Henry Mayhew, who in a series of newspaper articles (*London Labour and the London Poor*) presented documented exposes of the appalling living and working conditions of the urban poor.

The cause of these conditions is usually presented by Reynolds as part of a set-piece of criticism: the villain is usually the "do-nothing aristocracy," to use Carlyle's phrase. "What do your lords

and baronets know of the poorer classes?" Reynolds asks in *The Mysteries of the Court*; "What notion can they possibly have of the causes of that terrible depravity which exists, in such widely spread and infinite ramifications, amongst those whom they denominate *the lower orders*? They make grand speeches upon the immorality of the millions ... : but they do nothing--absolutely nothing--to establish a remedy" (1: 123).

But whereas Carlyle--in works such as *Past and Present*, which had appeared just a few years before *The Mysteries of the Court*--urges as a solution to the problem a kind of "Tory paternalism," an acceptance of responsibility for the welfare of their workers by the "Captains of Industry, " Reynolds holds forth no such solution. The aristocracy--landed and industrial--are the villains, not the potential saviors (although on occasion an uncharacteristically benevolent aristocrat does appear to do a bit towards the alleviation of misery).

What *does* Reynolds present in the way of solutions to the problem? The answer is, not very much: concrete remedies are scarce to nonexistent in his fiction, with little more than hope for a truly democratic government as a way out. The vague wish expressed by one of his downtrodden working-class characters indicates his failure to come to grips with a practical solution: "If," says Virginia, a starving seamstress, "there were but a just government, an honest legislature, and a good social system in this country, wonders might be wrought with the working classes" (*Seamstress* 96). Reynolds was primarily concerned with arousing his working-class readers--to some sort of action, we may suppose, directed towards increased representation in government--by setting forth vividly, concretely, and with burning indignation his conception of the appalling condition of England in the Victorian age.

My claim for Reynolds--and I might have made similar claims for William Harrison Ainsworth, or Renton Nicholson, or Mary Howitt, or any one of a score of other popular novelists--is not that his work is *great* literature but that it is *important* literature: important because of its phenomenal success, its unsurpassed appeal to an unsophisticated working-class audience, and its apparent reflection, without sophisticated artistry, of its readers' most serious concerns. It is significant not aesthetically but culturally, as any phenomenally successful canon in the realm of popular culture must be. And it provides another point of entry into a complex, still not well understood age that has much to tell us about our own.

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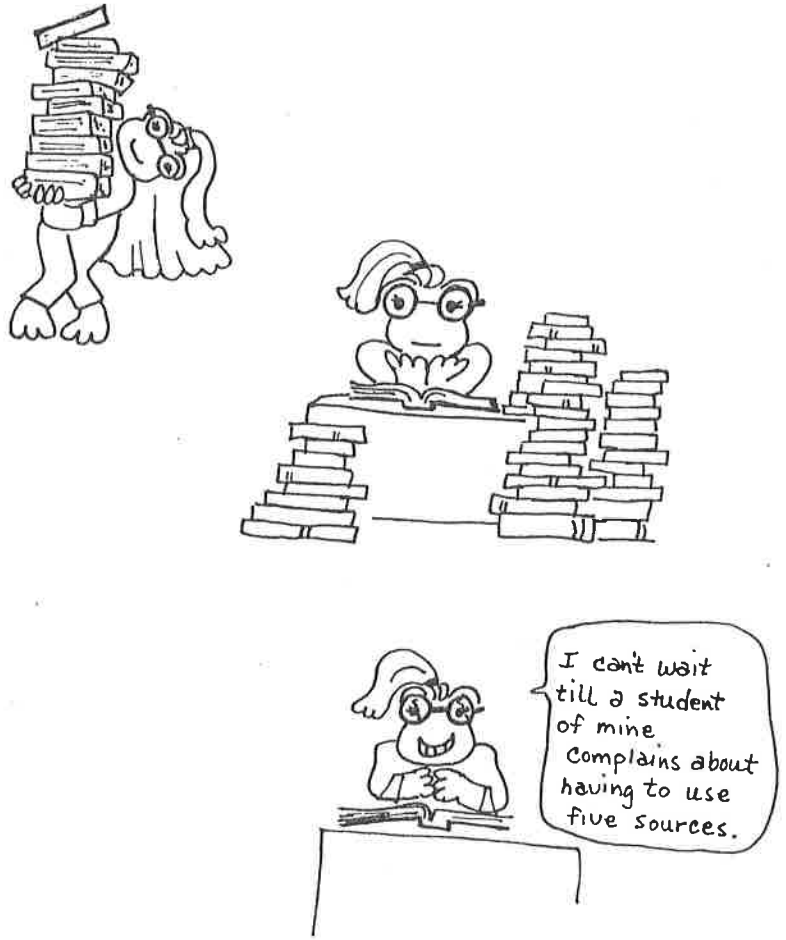

The Saintly Sinner of The Wilderness:The Literary Transformation And Criminal Conversion of Joseph Thompson Hare, The Natchez Trace Highwayman.

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Early on the morning of September 10, 1818, Joseph Thompson Hare was led from his cell into the prison yard of the Baltimore city jail. Roughly an hour later, after the prayers of several ministers, and after hood and halter had been adjusted, he was "launched into eternity" as a crowd of fifteen thousand watched. The many people who witnessed the spectacle of his execution were impressed with his fearless defiance of death. Hare, one of early America's most notorious and most successful highwaymen, died as he had lived: boldly, violently, and--at least for some--heroically. According to one report, "Hare retained his courage and fortitude to the last, and with a firm step approached the place of execution" (58). While lamenting the "perversion of talents" which marked his life, the report concluded that Hare "was a man of great personal courage and determination [who] possessed great acuteness of intellect (58-59).[1]

Hare's death, however, did not end his life. Refusing to die either ignominiously or completely, he chose to use his death as a final act of self-creation. His bold confrontation with the hangman was intentional. In the ritual drama of execution, he chose his public role and acted out his part with calculated courage. He wanted the spectators to remember that he had approached death with "a firm step." Hare refused to accept death as simply the conclusion of life; rather, he exploited it as the commencement of his legend. While awaiting death, he had worked hard at his final self-creation. Once he became resigned to his fate, once his escape attempt failed and his execution became inescapable, he set himself to the task of perpetuating his life in prose.

Shortly after the execution, *The Dying Confession of Joseph-Thompson Hare* was published in Baltimore, soon followed by a second edition in the same city and as well as a separate narrative account of Hare's trial. Before the year was out, a German translation was published in Philadelphia and a third edition was published in New York. Hare's literary life was kept alive when a Philadelphia publisher reissued his narrative for a fifth time in 1847. Adding supplementary material, including an execution account and letters from witnesses, Hare's narrative now appeared under the more sensational title, *The Life of the Celebrated Mail Robber and Daring Highwayman, Joseph Thompson Hare*. Certainly Hare had achieved some small measure of immortality; while awaiting death he had indeed succeeded in turning life into legend.

In the original narrative a short "Note By the Publisher" testified that Hare's narrative "was written by him, in his dungeon; and when he was in daily expectation of being notified of the arrival of his death warrant, and of the hour of his execution." In order to emphasize the truth of his narrative, the publisher further stated: "As a dying man, who . . .was soon to appear before the bar of his Creator and Judge, he could have no motive for concealment or misrepresentation" (Hare, Dying 22).In the final paragraph, Hare also asserted the truthfulness of his narrative: "I have employed myself, in my confinement, in writing this confession, which I solemnly declare to the world, and will repeat it under the gallows, is a true and faithful history of my life and adventures" (46). Obviously, both publisher and author felt the

ɔed to bolster the narrative's veracity. After all, Hare described ıring highway robberies from Boston to New Orleans, the most ıccessful of which took place along the Natchez Trace. On this ve hundred miles stretch of wilderness road from Natchez to ashville, Hare and his accomplices took thirty-eight thousand ɔllars in gold and silver in only three months.[2] Taken together, ıe money from all of his robberies totaled more than one ındred thousand dollars, a remarkable sum for the time.

But it was the character as well as the events that required the ıspension of disbelief. Except for what is stated in the narrative, ːtle is known concerning Hare's life, so that the character is the ːimary authority on the man.[3] What is known, however, tends ɔ prove that Hare's self-description is generally reliable. Never- ıeless, his self-characterization is a highly imaginative creation. rom out of the chaos of his life, the soon-to-be-executed high- ayman selected and arranged his character to become one of merica's first and most successful good Bad Men. He shaped is life into one of our most original anti-heroes, a man who car- ed pistols but who detested violence,who kindly returned gold nd watches to his victims when they complained, and who, after wilderness conversion, preached the gospel to his fellow rob- ers. In order to turn life into legend, he appealed his case on a ighly imaginative, rather than on a civil, level.

Yet Hare did not take credit for his creation. Sincerely devout, t least according to the narrative, he credited God for directing is life. There was, he affirmed, a purpose, a spiritual sig- ificance, guiding the wild course of his life. The "firm step" with hich he approached his death, for example, was not the result f bravado, but of reverence. As stated in the narrative, he elieved that his execution had been ordered by Providence; he vas convinced that his failure to escape, was wisely ordered by

his Creator" so that he could provide an appropriate example for all those tempted to lead a highwayman's life (57-58).

Freely mixing ministry with robbery, Hare shaped his life-story into a criminal conversion narrative, a highly popular colonial genre that had been originated by Puritan ministers and later sensationalized by Yankee printers.[4] Following the established formula of the genre, the different directions and developments of his life were all related, ultimately displaying the process of conversion and the irresistible power of grace. As in the narratives of so many other condemned but converted criminals, Hare's pious acceptance of his death sentence resulted in a promise of paradise. By offering a suitable warning to all sinners, dying penitently was thus a means of glorifying God. Such devotion in the face of death assured readers that, if God could save even a miserable sinner like a condemned criminal, He could surely save ordinary people like themselves.

Yet unlike Puritan narratives, which concentrated on the spiritual life, Hare's narrative was more concerned with his worldly activities and was far more sensational. Narrative emphasis shifted effortlessly from crime to conversion, combining the two extremes into one life. And appropriately, his conversion befitted his profession. One night after he had robbed a man along a lonely stretch of wilderness road, Hare, like Paul on the road to Damascus, was suddenly struck with a dazzling, bewildering vision. This was the first of several divine visions which finally culminated in the assurance of salvation. Although he fell back into sin and robbed again, his faith in the power of his visions never wavered. As he shaped his life into narrative, he dramatized the force of these visions as much as he did on the boldness of his crimes. Significantly, in giving credence to his conversion, he made special use of his setting, the Southern

wilderness, placing his experiences in a more symbolic Christian context.

Like the Biblical prophets, Hare's moral battle took place in the wilderness. Born on a farm in Chester County, Pennsylvania, in 1780, he surrounded himself with the dense Mississippi forest by the time he was twenty-one, where he struggled between spiritual corruption and spiritual fulfillment. Following the formula established by earlier criminal narratives, Hare described himself as a wild youth of "ungovernable spirit" who quickly became "notorious. . .as a desperate fellow" (6). His wildness was ill-suited for the peaceful, pastoral countryside of Pennsylvania. Deciding that he must look out for himself, and "without caring much in what way," he went to Philadelphia and signed on as a common sailor on a ship bound for New Orleans (6).

With its crowds of Spanish and French, Indian and Black, and with ships and flatboats continually arriving and unloading, New Orleans was a more appropriate environment for Hare's "ungovernable spirit." Surrounded by water and wilderness, its economy was prospering and its taverns were full. Knowing little else, he quickly fell into corrupt practices and joined the city's low life. "In New Orleans", he stated, "I suffered a good deal of trouble; for I had no money but what I made by dangerous thieving and gambling." Although he joined "the Governor's guard," he was more interested in breaking laws than he was in maintaining them. "At this time," he continued, I associated myself with some desperate fellows who were in the habit of knocking people down in the streets, and robbing them" (6).

Quickly, however, New Orleans became too hot for Hare, especially after one of his victims appeared before him and demanded that, as a member of the Governor's guard, he go out and hunt for himself. But he had already developed an alternative.

> But now as we feared we should get notorious in New-Orleans, and saw every few days a company start from New-Orleans on horses, and were told they carried a great deal of money with them through the Choctaw and Chickasaw nations to Kentucky, Tennessee, and Pittsburgh; we thought we should do better on the highway. (7)

After a couple more muggings had convinced him that "it was slow and dangerous work. . .to make money in the city of New-Orleans," he and his two accomplices took to the highway, riding north to Natchez and along the Trace (7).

Wilderness has always had symbolic, religious significance. From the Bible as well as from folk tradition, it was a place of inherent evil, the setting for violence, a savage, Satanic, and unregenerate state. But it could be as well a place of refuge, a sanctuary isolated from worldly corruption where those seeking spiritual guidance could draw close to God. Once separated from all worldly intrusions and surrounded by Creation, religious insights were possible, even direct confrontations with God. Moreover, the wilderness was a battleground where individuals struggled to overcome evil; its hardships and hazards became part of a divine plan to purge and humble people, thus preparing them for paradise. When Hare surrounded himself with the Mississippi-Tennessee wilderness, he indeed found it to be an evil, brutal place where he struggled to resist its savagery. But the wild, desolate forests also provided the robber with a refuge from worldly corruption, a place of religious insight, and a testing ground where he was purged, humbled, and prepared.[5]

One greatest dangers of wilderness life was succumbing to its wildness and reverting back to a savage state. Without the usual restraints of civilization, individuals had to keep their own savagery in check. For Hare, this was a severe test. He was sinful, but he struggled not to become savage. When he and his ac-

complices committed their first robbery, he had to restrain his friends from murdering their victims. Chancing upon four men, Hare boldly stepped into the road with pistols drawn, while the other two prepared to fire from the underbrush. At this moment the wilderness seemed especially oppressive and threatening.

> The dry cane made a great crackling; it was so thick in that spot, that a man could not be seen ten feet from the road. It was a cloudy day, and everything looked very black and gloomy, and the sound of the cane, though it did not frighten me, made me feel very strange and out of the way; my two men said that we had not painted our faces, which we ought to have done, and that we should be known, and it was better to murder the rascals, than let them live and tell tales on us. An oldish man spoke and said, "for God's sake spare my life." I told him it was well thought of. (8)

As the old man begged for his life in the name of God, Hare succeeded in convincing his companions that their four victims were not a threat. Commenting on the scene, he declared: "I had to work to save their lives" (7).

Wild himself, Hare nearly succumbed to the savagery of the wilderness. Throughout the first half of the narrative, his grasp upon humanity seemed at best tenuous. In a number of ways he and his accomplices came to resemble beasts of prey which fed upon wilderness travellers. Appropriately, for their camp they chose an inaccessible cave surrounded by tall cane. Hare stated that "these cane brakes are very much frequented by wild animals of all sorts, and the beasts of prey, particularly wild cats, and are kept clear of generally" (8). Furthermore, Hare and his robbers came to resemble what was then another savage symbol of the wilderness, the Indian. For their next robberies, Hare explained that "we painted our faces like the Indian when he is going to war" (11). On a certain physical level, this wild life exhilarated Hare.

"I never felt more strong and hearty," he stated, "than I did at this time; I felt as if I could overcome any savage that walked the wilderness" (13).

On a spiritual level, however, he still found the wilderness disquieting. Due to what he called the "mournful, rustling noise "of the wind through the cane at night, he had trouble sleeping (9). Yet it was not the sounds of the wilderness that bothered him the most, but the lack of familiar sounds. Traditionally, part of the wilderness test was the hardship of isolation; good Christians proved their faith by renouncing worldly pleasures and by enduring the loneliness of the wilderness. Although he refused to totally surrender his humanity, Hare could not yet endure the oppressive isolation of the forest. This was a test he failed. After several more robberies, which brought his share to over thirteen thousand dollars, he was ready to flee the wilderness for the pleasures of the city. Upon returning to his cave one day, he stated:

> I found my two men very tired of staying out here in the wilderness--says one, "I am as well off as I wish to be just now," and says the other, "well or ill off, I can't stand it here any longer: I must go back to a town and enjoy myself." I was very well agreed myself, for I had money enough to support me for some time, and was tired of staying in the woods. (15)

For the next several months they posed as gentlemen, lavishly treating themselves in Nashville, Knoxville, Lexington, Louisville, and back in New Orleans. According to Hare, "we lived very well" (16). This period of debauchery, however,was equally a part of the conversion process. The imperfect soul was not expected to overcome every trial and temptation. What was expected was that the individual would emerge from these bouts of corruption

with a greater awareness of sin and with greater humility. And so it was for Hare. At the end of his descent into worldly pleasures, he twice revealed signs of his nascent sanctification. The first instance occurred when one of him men was caught breaking into the trunk of another boarder at their boarding house. To keep the affair quiet, Hare agreed to pay a bribe of thirteen hundred dollars. His companion, however, proposed a less expensive way to insure the man's silence.

> My robber said there was a cheaper way to quiet his tongue, and wanted to take his life: but I would not consent to it. I told him murder will out: that God never forgave a murder: that nobody ever led a quiet life, that had any thing to do with a murder. I told him the stories in John Wesley's Magazine, about God's punishment of murder and adultery; but he said they were old women's stories. (17)

Just how long he had been reading Wesley's Methodist magazine was not mentioned, and even though his friend ridiculed the stories,Hare succeeded in preserving the man's life. At the same time he worked to keep his friend from committing murder, he as well worked to keep the man from abandoning his young wife. Hare further stated:

> My highwayman, who I have just mentioned, married a Spanish girl in New-Orleans, who belonged to the nunnery. She was eighteen years of age, a handsome figure, dark complexion, black eyes and very black hair, and of a lovely countenance . . .Two months after he was married, he told me he had a mind to leave her: that her ways were strange to him, and that he could get an American girl, that would suit him better. I told him that if I had a girl of her looks I would set as much store by her, as an angel from heaven, and that it was the next crime to murder for a man to leave his wife--He left her however.(17)

Hare's sermonizing did not stop the abandonment; yet he did take an active moral position in seeking to save this "angel from heaven."

The next period in Hare's life bore a strikingly similar resemblance to that which had just preceded it--except with two significant exceptions. Once the stream of money had begun to run dry, much drained by incessant gambling, the three robbers decided to return to the wilderness and again prey upon travellers. Although Hare commented that "I did not like this kind of life," he cautiously prepared for a second wilderness immersion (17). Not wanting to return to the same area, he and his two accomplices chose to rob along the road from Baton Rouge to Pensacola. Like beasts of prey, they once more found a cave for their camp. And similar to his first immersion, Hare expressed an uneasiness over his savage surroundings.

> About 80 miles from Pensacola. . .we found a cleft of rocks, that formed an admirable cave which no man visited before, I expect, since the flood. . . There was a great many swamps in the neighborhood, filled with Alligators, very large and made a great noise. Sometimes they cried like a young child, and sometime they made a noise like thunder. . .They are very ugly creatures and will attack a man when they are very hungry. We never had any battle with them, though I was much afraid of them. (18)

Despite the eerie sounds of the alligators, and despite living in a wilderness totally untainted by man, Hare now accepted his environment. Unlike his first wilderness immersion, he did not express any feeling of revulsion at his isolation. In fact, he embraced it. When given the chance to go to Pensacola, he chose to remain in the cave by himself. Deciding that two should travel to the city

r supplies, he wrote: "I was the one to stay home, and I don't
ıow why it was, I felt very much pleased with my situation, and
d not wish to leave the woods: they were as pleasant to me as
e land of Canaan flowing with milk and honey, to the children
Israel" (18). For Hare, surrounded by creation that reflected
ıthing but its Creator, the wilderness had begun to resemble
radise. Although his friends were gone nine days, he expressed
impatience or loneliness. Nor did he express any envy or
ılousy when they returned and declared: "we have had a
easant time of it at Pensacola: we have danced the fandango
th a fiddle and a tambourine, and seen the pretty girls" (19).
Hare's stay in this antediluvian wilderness lasted about the two
ınths, during which they again committed several successful
bberies. From the rich Spanish merchants journeying between
ıton Rouge and Pensacola, they took nearly thirty thousand dol-
's, more than enough money to bankroll a second descent into
ırldly pleasure. Significantly, however, Hare once more
parted from the original pattern. Although stating that their
me passed with great pleasure," he expressed an indifference
r such "pleasure."
ıt the end of five months of lavish life in Pensacola and another
o months in New Orleans, the three robbers needed to
plenish their stock and decided to again venture near to their
st area. "We determined now to get some cave between Knox-
le and South West Point," Hare explained, "as we thought it
ıuld be a good place to rob" (26). But this third and final im-
ersion into the wilderness was brief and from a criminal point
view, entirely unsuccessful. Spiritually, however, Hare found
:hes greater than any he had known before.
eaving his two companions at a tavern in Knoxville, Hare
ıvelled alone to Nashville, and upon his return he "fell in, and
ined company with a drover, on his way to the state of Vir-

ginia"(26). He soon robbed the man and rode off, but before the night was over he was arrested and jailed. According to Hare,

> About nine o'clock, the night I robbed the drover, as I was riding along very rapidly, to get out of the reach of pursuit, I saw standing right across the road, a beautiful white horse, as white as snow, his ears stood straight forward, and his figure very beautiful. I never saw so white a horse as he was. When I approached him, and got within six feet of him, he disappeared in an instant, which made me very uneasy, and made me stop and stay at a house near that all night. My seeing him was the cause of my being taken, for had I not seen him, I should have rode all night, and thus got out of my pursuer's reach. (29)

Astonished by this dazzling vision, Hare added, "I think this white horse was Christ, and that he came to warn me of my sins, and to make me fear and repent" (29).[6]

Hare's vision literally arrested his flight from both justice and salvation. And once arrested, he was soon sentenced to eight years in the penitentiary, where he indeed expressed his penitence. Like the wilderness, the prison was an evil, savage state. "When I got there," he wrote, "the gloomy place struck me with horror. It gave me sorrow to see the objects of distress all around me, with despair painted on their faces: Hell could not have a darker shade on my mind" (29). Given this foretaste of damnation, Hare struggled to save his soul. Mistreated and starved, afraid that he might die in such misery, he sought relief in the only comfort he had. Describing his stay in hell, he stated: "I felt despair for I found it was impossible to escape, and I thought that if I was compelled to stay there . . .I should never come out alive. . .I saw a great deal of misery, and there were a good many deaths that must have been caused by bad usage. I thought my only chance was to make my peace with heaven"(30).

Using the New Testament, Hare looked for salvation through repentance, surrendering himself to Christ. Before long, his attempts proved successful, for suddenly one night he experienced a moment of spiritual awakening. "It was changed," he proclaimed,"--The dark room was made a light one, and the great God was my God . . . my soul filled with joy and peace" (30). This moment of joy was soon followed by several more, each progressively more intense and more dramatic. Once he asserted that Christ spoke to him: 'I thought I heard him say, "if you follow me, I will lead you to the regions of glory"' (30). Thus encouraged, he redoubled his efforts and was rewarded with further revelations, for he soon heard Christ promise: "I have a crown of everlasting life for you." This was followed by what he called "many beautiful visions in my sleep," during which Hare stated he "often heard God speak" (30). His prison visitations finally culminated when, while lying on his bed one night, he was visited by his guardian angel: "I saw a beautiful sight, such as I never saw before. It was a beautiful woman, whose sweet looks I was charmed to behold. She told me her name was Hosanna, and called me Joseph, and said, "I am come as a messenger of peace to you"(31). Hare's sweet angel convinced him of his election. As an emblem of God's bountiful love, the penitent thief had again been rewarded with paradise.

With Christ's help, Hosanna's visitations, and an entire chorus of angels signing to him over the prison, Hare survived his sentence; at the end of five years he was paroled. Yet despite both good intentions and spiritual visitations, he soon returned to the highway. Once he was released from his "fiery furnace," he directed his steps towards Baltimore, where he was determined to lead a quiet, honest life. But after working "six months very steady at the tayloring business," he stated that he "could not make a living unless it was a very poor one" (31). Dissatisfied, he

travelled to Albany, New York, but found himself in a worse situation. "Here I was in great distress and poverty," he declared, "and I fell to bad courses again, gambling and so on, and I began to feel my good resolutions fading away" (32).

Tempted by an evil companion, Hare returned to his old trade, but there were a number of differences between the unconverted and the converted highwayman. For one thing, Hare's justification had changed. In explaining why he returned to robbery, he stated that he found it "very hard to live in a state of poverty" (32). Once his evil companion told him that they were not so much robbing as they were attempting "to share money evenly," he added: "I thought [to] myself, that to rob a rich man, would not be any great crime before Heaven" (32). Not only did Hare return to the highway determined to rob only those who could afford it, and thus more evenly distribute the young nation's prosperity, he as well returned equally determined never to use his pistols as anything but dramatic props. "I had made up my mind," he stated, "never to shoot any man for any money under heaven. . .I had followed the highway long enough to know that I could take a man's money without hurting him; and some men," he added knowingly, "have more than ever they will have use for" (32).

There is another clear, if not comical, indication of the highwayman's sainthood. Before his conversion, as he struggled to resist the savagery of the wilderness, Hare became aligned with Satan. As the antithesis of western civilization, wilderness had always been regarded as a land of spiritual darkness. From the beginning, the American wilderness in particular became associated with Satan in the minds of the Puritan settlers, who often referred to the Indians as devils.[7] During his wild, unregenerate state along the Trace, Hare, like the Indians he imitated, was also described as devilish. In the midst of one robbery, for example, Hare stepped into the road and threatened: "the first man that

ɔved should be blown to hell" (8). After a couple more robries he even posed as a devil. To force a slave trader to stop d surrender, he declared: "I was the devil, and would take him hell in a second, if he did not drop that gun off his shoulder, d his pistols too, if he had any" (14).

ɔespite these and similar references, Hare did not send anyone hell. In fact, the only time he fired a gun in the entire narrae was at the slave trader in self-defense, after the man had first ened fire, blazing away at Hare's head. Moreover, as comical d clumsy as the contrast might sound, during the very first robry after his imprisonment and conversion, Hare used a rather usual warning to intimidate his victims. Instead of threatening ɜm with hell, he stated: "I told them we were highway robbers, d that if they attempted to put their hands upon their arms, we ɔuld send them to heaven" (33).

ıevitably, Hare's particular highway travelled on led to the ltimore prison yard.[8] But the closer he approached death, the ɔre saintly he appeared, having by now vanquished the savagery the unregenerate self. His last crime, the robbery of a United ates mail coach, was nearly more parody than reality. After sufring another imprisonment, he emerged with the idea that he ɔuld now rob letters rather than people. Enlisting the aid of two others and "a man by the name of Alexander, an honourable ief," he barricaded an isolated stretch of highway between Balnore and Philadelphia. When the mail coach arrived shortly ter midnight, he was more solicitous than threatening.

> They came down, and I stept up to the passenger, and told him not to be scared,--that he should not be hurt, and that if he had ten thousand dollars with him, he should not have a cent taken from him. . .I told the passenger I was sorry I did not know he was coming that evening, for I would have waited till another night. (43)

Such sympathetic regard continued throughout the robbery, a three hour period during which the robbers broke open the mail searching for money. When the passenger complained that "the rope hurt his arm," Hare allowed him to be untied (44). When he and his robbers were about to leave, he had the man retied but personally checked to make sure "it would not hurt him" (44).Although admiring the man's elegant gold watch, he kept his word and took neither it nor anything from the man: "I told him from his appearance, I expected a merchant, and had perhaps fifty thousand dollars in his trunk that was still on the stage,--but I would not take it" (44).

What Hare did take was nearly seventeen thousand dollars in assorted bank bills, from which his personal share was $7,500. With this money, he once more attempted to transform himself into a gentleman. Yet unlike his earlier excursions into polite society, when he bought carriages and slaves, fine suits and gold watches, he was apprehended before he could even alter his appearance. Having always had an eye for fine clothes, Hare went to a tailor's shop soon after he reached Baltimore.

> I had bought one plaid cloak lined with crimson silk at the price of thirty-five dollars, and one coat in the style of an officer's, at the price of seventy-five dollars, very dashy, and a number of small articles to the amount of thirty dollars more: when two men, whom the owner of the shop had sent for, suspecting that we were the mail robbers, came in and apprehended us. (45).

Back in the more sedate east, far removed from the wilder western cities, Hare was not allowed to pose as a gentleman.[9] In the supplementary material which followed his narrative, it was stated that "two men [Hare and a younger brother] were arrested

in a shop where they were purchasing clothes to a greater amount in value than, from their appearance, it seemed probable they could have honest means of paying for" (48). Hare's vanity, then, his wish to be something better than he actually was, brought him to the gallows.

In his colorful but unreliable book, *The Outlaw Years The History of the Land Pirates of the Natchez Trace* (1930), Robert M. Coates mentioned the similarities between pioneers and outlaws. Robbers like Hare were "creatures" of the wilderness, "the bitter fruit of the same wild seed that bred the pioneers: they reflected, but in a more savage fashion, the same ruthless audacity and fierce implacable energy which its loneliness inspired in their more honest fellows" (17). Certainly Hare was a creature of the wilderness, sharing many of the same drives and beliefs with the more honest people he encountered along the Natchez Trace. But his ambitions were more urgent; refusing to wait a lifetime for the rewards money could buy, he seized whatever crossed his path. In effect, although wild and anti-social, he was another version of the self-reliant self-made man.

Hare's disregard for social hierarchy was evident through the text. At the beginning of his career, he chose his victims in the streets of New Orleans according to the powder in their hair as well as the jingle in their pockets. At another point, after he had decided to level the unequal distribution of wealth, he stole the New York governor's best horses simply because he felt that he also deserved a fine pair of horses. Moreover, his obvious fondness for fancy clothing and lavish lifestyles represented his belief that, despite his low status, he was entitled to enjoy the highest levels of society. His returning to the highway after conversion also displayed this defiance. When he first stopped the mail coach, for example, Hare explained that "all I wanted was the South Carolina mail; that these gentlemen held so many blacks,

that the loss of a five hundred dollar note would not hurt them" (43).

Hare's grasping for expensive goods and gentleman status was stopped when he reached for a plaid cloak with a crimson silk lining and a "dashy" officer's coat. Yet he would not be stopped. When denied earthly rewards, he immediately stated his claim for spiritual rewards; when denied earthly existence, he cleverly, consciously appealed for both literary and heavenly existence. Despite the indignity of execution, he continued to express his pride. While affirming his vision of a "crown of everlasting glory in the world to come," he declared: "My offenses have been great and many. For the last fourteen years of my life, I have been a highway robber, and I have robbed on a larger scale, and have been more successful than any robber either in Europe or in this country, that I ever heard of" (45-46).

Hare wrote his narrative to overcome death, to literally transform life into legend. Whether or not the man actually experienced grace or was visited by beautiful angels is not as important as the way he shaped and arranged his life in prose to establish that he was blessed--that he was not lowly, obscure, or savage. Those who convicted and condemned him were not executing him; they were promoting him to a higher realm of existence

Footnotes

[1]All quotations from Hare's narrative will be taken from the 1847 Philadelphia edition. Although woodcut engravings and sensational supplementary material were added to enhance

reader appeal, the text in this edition is the same as the previous editions and matches the 1818 original.

[2]For information on the early history of the Natchez Trace, see Daniels, Stanton, the *Travel Guide*, and Young.

[3]Hare's status as a legendary frontier outlaw is unmistakable, as his "historians" have often rearranged and enhanced the events of his life to better fit their romantic notions. For colorful but unreliable discussions of Hare, see Coates, Hopkins, and Tripplet. In addition to the first 1818 narrative, see also Coale's original *Trials of the Mail Robbers Hare, Alexander and Hare* for more accurate information on Hare. Coale's narrative of the trials contains testimony which corroborates many of Hare's statements. Yet no matter how accurate Hare was in discussing his life, the character and the man should not be confused.

[4]For a discussion of the criminal conversion genre in early America, see Williams.

[5]For valuable discussions of the wilderness in the American experience, see Carroll, Huth, Nash, Stilgoe, and Cronon.

[6]Not a casual image, a white horse is indeed associated with Christ. See Revelations 19.ll as well as 6.2.

[7]The Puritan references to the Indians as devils are innumerable.For brief discussions of the Puritan view, see Carroll. See also Berkhofer and Pearce.

[8]At one point Hare attempted to lead an honest life. Stuffed with the plunder of several robberies, he married a young woman of respectable family and, after acquiring the necessary props of respectability, moved to Boston. Unfortunately, he was soon robbed by one of his own neighbors, leading him to declare: "I intended to take as much money from the Yankees, as I had lost among them." (39).

[9]Hare often changed costumes and roles according to circumstance. He was particularly fond of wearing an officer's

uniform when he wanted to pose as a respectable gentleman. Hopkins, however, offered a remarkable anecdote in which Hare, assuming the name the Reverend James Thompson, arrived at an Easter camp meeting in a fancy carriage and wearing "a scarlet coat, knee breeches, silver buckled shoes, and a tricorn hat" (Hopkins 131)...Despite his colorful entrance and dress, Hare preached a sermon, collected donations from the men, and stole the purses of the women.

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Creating and Re-creating the Myth of New Orleans: Grace King and Alice Dunbar-Nelson

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Grace King's first published story, "Monsieur Motte," which appeared in 1886, was in effect an answer to the challenge made to her by Richard Watson Gilder, editor of the *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*.[1] When she had attempted to explain that the Creoles of New Orleans were hostile to Geroge Washington Cable because he "proclaimed his preference for colored people over white and assumed the inevitable superiority... of the quadroons over the Creoles," Gilder responded: "If Cable is so false to you, why do not some of you write better?"[2] Her stories were written in part to correct what she considered the inaccurate portrayal of Creoles in Cable's works. She considered herself a realist and wrote from her own experience. She wrote to Fred Lewis Pattee in 1915: "I am a realist a la mode de Nlle Orleans. I have never written a line that was not realistic--but our life, our circumstances, the heroism of the men & women that surrounded my early horizon--all that was romantic."[3] Grace King's realism was, nevertheless, as all realistic writing is, a product of her perceptions as influenced by her particular social, cultural, and personal identity. Her realistic stance must be viewed in terms of her position as a white Southern woman in late nineteenth and early twentieth century America, a Protestant trained in French Catholic schools, who championed the cause of the Creole in New Orleans.

Alice Dunbar-Nelson was also a native New Orleans writer. Her first book of stories and poems was published in 1895, ten years after Grace King's stories began to appear. As an Episcopal Creole-of-color born after the Civil War, a graduate of public schools, Straight University, and Cornell University, she was writing out of a different tradition than Grace King, although there are many parallels.[4] While Dunbar-Nelson was twenty years younger than King, she was still much influenced by George Washington Cable. Her early stories were largely descriptions of New Orleans Creole culture. In a letter to her, Paul Laurence Dunbar, then her admirer, not yet her husband, wrote that she had the talent to compete with Cable "for his laurels." The landscape that both Cable and Alice interpreted lived for him also, even though he had never seen it.

> Do you know that New Orleans. . .seems to me to be a kind of romance land. Its very atmosphere must teem with stories and its streets and byways be redolent of dramatic incidents that linger as a sort of perfume from a fragrant past.[5]

Grace King and Alice Dunbar-Nelson, like George Washington Cable, worked with the romantic materials of Louisiana history to create fiction and history. King was the first woman to write histories of the South; in her *New Orleans, The Place and the People* (1895), she portrayed the city as "the most feminine of women, always using the standard of feminine distinction," "a city of blood and distinction, 'grande dame,' and when occasions demand, grande dame *en grande tenue*."[6] Dunbar-Nelson also, in addition to her fiction, poetry, and later drama, tried her hand at history. Her two-part study, "People of Color in Louisiana," which appeared in the *Journal of Negro History*, 1916/1917, was

an attempt to clarify, to even a minor extent, the contribution of the *gens de couleur* to Louisiana history. As she wrote:

> It is a theme too large to be treated save by a master hand. It is interwoven with the poetry, the romance, the glamour, the commercial prosperity, the financial ruin, the rise and fall of the State. . . His history is like the Mardi Gras of the city of New Orleans, beautiful and mysterious and wonderful, but with a serious thought underlying it all."[7]

The feminist perspectives of King and Dunbar-Nelson make their treatment of the Louisiana culture and landscape quite different from Cable's vision and purpose as a cultural historian, but they each in distinctive ways contribute to the myth of New Orleans.

Cable was very much a social reformer, and his works, even when allegedly written for their romantic value tend to be written as social or political criticism. Even though Cable based most of his characters in the early writings on actual persons he had known, it is also always clear that the characters are carefully delineated to represent ideas and all the various stratifications of caste.[8] As Donald Ringe has pointed out, many of Cable's stories and novels have "a double center," and the dialectic between two characters is the real subject of the work, as, for, example the dialectic between Honore Grandissimes and Frowenfeld, or John Richling and Doctor Sevier.[9]

The stories of Grace King and Alice Dunbar-Nelson are, on the other hand, told from a more traditionally feminist perspective--more personal, subjective, descriptive. Grace King describes the nature of her *Balcony Stories* in the introduction, "The Balcony," as "experiences, reminiscences, episodes, picked up as only women know how to pick them up from other women's lives. . .

ınd told as only women know how to relate them."[10] Many of the tories are oral texts in which the women speak themselves.[11] Each story has also its peculiar pathos. One story written as oral liscourse is "Mimi's Marriage."[12]

The story is told by Mimi as she sits in her bridal chamber, lressed in a long white negligee, and addresses her friend Louise: But you know, Louise," she begins, and goes back in time to the beginning of her dilemma, when she was not yet ten years old and he first decided that she "should marry a tall, handsome *brun*, vith a mustache and a fine barytone voice" (pp. 39-40). Whenever she speaks of her father, she calls him *Poor Papa*. He lidn't know about her dream; he really didn't know a number of hings. After the war when his second wife, Clementine, tried to nake ends meet with their eight children, he did not know that he children did not have shoes or enough food to eat or that the Americans next door were often feeding the children. The narrator was not sorry when "poor papa" died. . "Men can't stand ıumiliation. We are made to stand things; they have their pride" (p. 46). The story comes back to the beginning. She has married he American neighbor's brother, for practical reasons, and tells ıer friend how she wept for hours after the wedding in the same room were they sit talking, when she realized that she had not fulfilled her dream, her *brum*. "He, Loulou, it occurs to me, that if you examined the blue bows on a bride's negligee, you might always find tears on the other side; for do they not all have to marry whom God sends? It is the end of dreams, marriage" (p. 53). Many of King's stories are told from the perspective of a woman talking to other women. Throughout the narration, there are many asides and interpolations, which represent a typical feminine discourse to an acquaintance.

Alice Dunbar-Nelson occasionally follows a similar strategy in her stories. For example, in "A Story of Vengeance," the narrator

tells the story of her love, rejection, and revenge to her friend, Eleanor, beginning the narration with: "Yes, Eleanor, I have grown grayer. I am younger than you, you know, but then, what have you to age you?"[13]

The prevailing theme in much of Grace King's writing is the impoverished aristocracy of the post-Civil War South. In such stories as "Mimi's Marriage," "A Drama of Three," "La Grande Demoiselle," "The Old Lady's Restoration," King portrays characters devastated by the changes of fortune brought about by the war. As the narrator of "The Old Lady's Restoration" describes New Orleans:

> Each city has its own roads to certain ends, its ways of Calvary, so to speak. In New Orleans the victim seems ever to walk down Royal Street and up Chartres, or vice versa. One would infer so, at least, from the shops and windows of those through fares. Old furniture, cut glass, pictures, books, jewelry, lace, china. . ." (180).

In all of her stories the women are much more prepared to face the hardships and humiliation brought about by social change than men, who are caught up so fully in their code of honor and pride.

The themes of love, marriage, and the role of women recur in the works of both Dunbar-Nelson and King. Both of them would later in their lives become more strongly influenced by feminist ideology, but even in their early stories the question of a woman's roles as wife, daughter, and career woman arise. The strength of Dunbar-Nelson's female characters, such as La Juanita, who tells her grandpere that she is going to marry an *American* and eventually wins him over to her view, or the woman in the story "At Eventide," whose ambition to become a singer is a Tempter that eventually destroys the marriage because of the rigidity of the

husband, raise the questions that women posed at the turn of the century and brought to the consciousness of the American public about the rights of women. In a city that Cable also portrayed as a community which "recognized the supreme domination of 'the gentleman' in questions of right and of 'the ladies' in matters of sentiment"[14] and where a woman in poverty was not troubled by 'how to make a living, but how to get a living without making it,"[15] such feminist perspectives of a patriarchal society as those of Dunbar-Nelson's and King's were in great demand.

In writing about New Orleans during post-Reconstruction days, Cable wrote: "It was impossible that a novel written by me then should escape being a study of the fierce struggle going on around me...".[16] Because of his position on civil rights for blacks, Cable felt obliged in 1886 to leave the South and make his home in the North. In portraying the life of New Orleans realistically, as Grace King intended to do, she, of course, had to come to terms with the racial situation in the city. One such attempt is her story "The Little Convent Girl"; another is "The Crippled Hope."

"The Little Convent Girl" is a typical story of miscegenation. Unlike comparable Cable stories ("'Tite Poulette" and *Madame Delphine*),[17] the quadroon mother is veritably ignored; the emphasis is almost totally on the eighteen year-old daughter of the interracial union, who is an ideal convent girl--demure, disciplined, unemotional. The narrative point of view is mainly the ship company's observations of the girl. The only clues that she was not white are, until the end of the story, that her hair had a tendency to be curly and her complexion was sallow. The mother is not described at all; we simply hear the ship's crew whisper in shock, "Colored", when she boards the ship. The resolution of the story--the girl's suicide by jumping overboard, rather than attempting to deal with her difficult situation--is extremely

dramatic, emphasizing the impossibility of such a situation for a person of her caliber.

Both detailed portraits of Negroes in *Balcony Stories* are silent and passive women. Both are sympathetically drawn, and there is the suggestion that the little convent girl is much more complex than she appears. Her fascination with the captain's story of the great river which, he said, flowed directly under the Mississippi River was a catalyst to her in the act of suicide. As Robert Bush has pointed out:

> The buried river image suggests the unconscious and therefore the almost impenetrable mystery of ourselves. . .She is the most passive of creatures except in the final fact of drowning herself--a profounder action than perhaps any of the other characters is capable of.[18]

In "A Crippled Hope" King also draws a sympathetic portrait of a black character, this time an African slave, not a *gens de couleur*. The baby who was not wanted because she had suffered an injury to her hip when dropped by a negligent mother grows up to be in great demand by everyone because of the nursing skills she develops. The negro slave-trader won't sell her, however, because in the slave market, she has become essential to his business; she is his "insurance." Although Little Mammy is sympathetically portrayed, she becomes little more than a stereotype of the loyal servant in the context of the negatively drawn Negro characters, and epigrammatic generalizations, that King uses to portray Negro life. Little Mammy's mother was a "good-for-nothing . . . sold as readily as a vote" (p. 108). "A Negro baby, you know, is all stomach, and generally aching stomach at that" (p.110). "Nothing equalled a negro-trader's will and power for fraud"(p. 108).

prisingly, race is very rarely mentioned by Alice Dunbar-Nel-
n *Violets and Other Tales* (1895) and *The Goodness of St. Roc-*
(1899),[19] but short-hand references to neighborhoods and
t names as well as descriptions, such as "dusky-eyed fiance"
tle Miss Sophie") or the "small brown hands" (Sister
pha), reveal the probable racial identity of the characters as
le of color. In a period of increasing racial hostility and
nce, why would a black woman write so evasively about her
acters? From her perspective, Creoles of color led everyday
, for the most part like other Louisiana Creoles, and she
e stories of their lives and passions. Apparently, also, Dun-
Nelson did not believe that her reading audience was ready
lmit the full-dimensional lives of her *gen-de-couleur.* Thus
voided descriptions of the major social issues of the 1890's,
as the lynchings of blacks, the increasing segregation of
ols and public accommodations, the court cases concerning
identity and civil rights, which later became the subjects of
ssays, poems, and stories.

he story "Little Miss Sophie" (*Violets*), the protagonist is a
le-of-color (Dunbar-Nelson classifies her simply as a
le), whose lonely, monotonous life as a seamstress is full of
ery to her neighbors. The narrator, who speaks from the
pective of a neighbor looking in on Miss Sophie's life, is
niscent of Cable's style of narration, especially in "'Sieur
rge" or "Jean ah-Poquelin" of *Old Creole Days*. Miss Sophie
aying in church when a wedding party arrives; she stays to
y the ceremony and finds that it is her white lover of five years
who is getting married. After the wedding, she overhears
hbors talking about the unfortunate circumstance of the
g man, whose business has failed, yet he is unable to inherit
ncle's wealth because he does not have the family ring neces-
for identification. He had given the ring to Miss Sophie; she

had pawned it to be able to give her father some comfort before his death. Now she resolved to raise enough money to recover the ring from the pawn shop in order to return it to her lover and save him from financial disaster. Everyone watches as she carries increasingly bigger black bundles of clothes to sew and skimps on fuel and food until she becomes a mere waif. Her work had always been "her only hope of life," but now the object becomes even more the meaning of her life--so much that when she finally recovers the ring on Christmas day, she dies with it "clasped between her fingers on her bosom--a bosom white and cold, under a cold happy face. Christmas had indeed dawned for Miss Sophie." (p. 59).

The stories of *Violets* and *The Goodness of St. Rocque* tend to be just such sentimental tales made up of dramatic incidents in the lives of typical Louisiana characters as Miss Sophie; Sister Josepha, the young, unhappy nun of uncertain racial identity; the black "Praline Woman" (*The Goodness of St. Rocque*), who provides satirical commentary along with her candies as she sells them in the French Market; the young Creole woman, Manuela, who wins her lover back by using *voudou* charms.

Grace King, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, and Cable all added characters and situations to the myth of New Orleans. Cable had already introduced portraits of Louisiana Creoles and Creoles-of-color to the Northern reading audience. Grace King was one of many Louisianians who criticized his characterizations of Creoles, making Northerners think that they were a hybrid race, intolerant and foolishly arrogant. Knowing the situation much more from the inside, King felt that her portraits would be more realistic. Her portraits of Creole women were more fully drawn than Cable's, while her portraits of men often tend to be sympathetic, but critical. King's descriptions of blacks as either loyal servants, nurses, mammies or frauds and good-for-nothings did not ap-

proach the depth or breadth of Cable's characterizations. In Dunbar-Nelson's early works she characterizes Creoles-of-color as Creoles living everyday lives--picnicking at Milneburg, buying a voudou charm to win back a lover, going out to Rampart Street to watch the Indians on Mardi Gras. When she wrote stories about the plight of octoroons and quadroons her characterizations are very similar to those of Cable, but her political statements are muted, drawn faintly, not with the deft, bold strokes of Cable as social critic. Later when she left New Orleans and became a journalist and essayist in Delaware her writings became much more politically and socially critical and race-conscious.[20] She left the assimilationist level and became the "emergent black woman," in the terms of Mary Helen Washington, who had come to a sense of self-and racial definition.[21]

Notes

[1]The story "Monsieur Motte" was originally published in the *New Princeton Review* (Jan. 1886). See Robert Bush, ed.,*Grace King of New Orleans: A Selection of Her Writings* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), p. 53.

[2]For a description of Cilder's challenge, see Grace King, *Memories of a Southern Woman of Letters* (New York: Macmillan,1932), pp. 58-60.

[3]Letter from Grace King to Fred Lewis Pattee, Jan. 19, 1915; quoted in Robert Bush, ed., *Grace King of New Orleans*, p. 398. Also quoted in Fred Lewis Pattee, *The Development of the American Short Story* (New York and London: Harper, 1923).

[4]See biographical information in Gloria Hull, ed., *Give Us Each Day: The Diary of Alice Dunbar-Nelson* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984), pp. 122-23; 125.

[5]Letter from Paul Lawrence Dunbar to Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Feb. 16, 1896, *The Paul L. Dunbar Papers*, ed. Sara S. Fuller, Microfilm ed., 1972. The full collection of the Dunbar Papers is in the possession of the Ohio Historical Society.

[6]Grace King, *New Orleans: The Place and the People* (New York: Macmillan, 1895), Introd., xvi, xxi.

[7]Alice Dunbar-Nelson, "People of Color in Louisiana, Part I,: in R. Ora Williams, ed., *An Alice Dunbar-Nelson Reader* (Washington, D. C.: University Press of America, 1978), pp. 176-77.

[8]George Washington Cable, "My Politics," in Arlin Turner, ed. *The Negro Question* (New York: Doubleday, 1958), pp. 2-25.

[9]Donald A. Ringe, "'The Double Center': Character and Meaning in Cable's Early Novels," *Studies in the Novel*, 5 (Spring 1973), 55-62.

[10]Grace King, "Balcony," in *Balcony Stories*, 1892; rpt.(Ridgewood, N.J.: The Gregg Presss, 1968), p. 2.

[11]Clara Juncker discussed Grace King's stories as oral discourse in her paper "Grace King: Discourse of Femininity,: presented at the Louisiana Women Writers Symposium. New Orleans, La., Loyola University, Seeptember 19, 1986.

[12]Grace King, "Mimi's Marriage" in *Balcony Stories*, pp. 39-53. All Grace King stories discussed here are from this edition of *Balcony Stories*; page notations will be given parenthetically in the text.

[13]Alice Dunbar-Nelson, "A Story of Vengence," in *An Alice Dunbar-Nelson Reader*, ed. R. Ora Williams, p. 28. Future references to Dunbar-Nelson's stories will be from this edition; page notations will be given in the text.

ɜeorge Washington Cable, *The Grandissimes* (New York: ɔners, 1880; rev. ed., 1883), p. 226.
ːable, *The Grandissimes*, p. 370.
ːable, "My Politics," ed. Arlin Turner, *The Negro Question*, p.

Tite Poulette" was first published in *Scribner's Magazine*, Oc-ɪr 1874, and later in *Old Creole Days* (New York: Scribner's,)). *Madame Delphine* was published by Scribners, 1881.
ːobert Bush, *Grace King: A Southern Destiny* (Baton Rouge: isiana State University Press, 1983), p. 152.
ılice Ruth Moore, *Violets and Other Tales* (Boston: Monthly iew, 1895); Alice Dunbar, *The Goodness of St. Rocque* (New k: Dodd, Mead, 1899).
ee Gloria Hull, Introd. and passim.
Mary Helen Washington, "Teaching Black-Eyed Susans: An ɪroach to the Study of Black Women Writers," in Gloria T. l, Pat Bell-Scott, and Barbara Smith, ed., *But Some of Us Are ɾe* (Old Westbury, N.Y.: The Feminist Press, 1982), pp. 213-

Satiric Self-Signification in Fielding's Journey From this World to the Next

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Henry Fielding lived a full life, and perhaps no one before Johnson was so completely identified with London and the English personality. But, as readers of his works have long recognized, Fielding was also a mental traveller, roaming the English countryside in his novels and finally dying in a foreign country on a last, futile search for health. Throughout his travels he kept a sharp eye out for the flaws of human nature, and applied his satiric wit to the depiction of folly regardless of its form. In this paper I will investigate the tension between Fielding's theory of satire and accepted eighteenth-century practice, and then consider how the satire found in a little read early work, *Journey From this World to the Next,* challenges the theoretical basis of his greatest novel, *Tom Jones*.

Satire and irony were terms used in the eighteenth century to cover a broad range of comic techniques. George R. Levine made this point several years ago in his study of irony in Fielding's works, *Henry Fielding and the Dry Mock*, by remarking that "irony came to be considered synonymous with 'any kind of satiric attack'" (p. 14). The same is true of satire. Today, of course, satire refers to a form of humor intended to reform aberrant behavior, but initially, the range was much wider. A discussion of satiric modes in eighteenth-century literature necessarily begins with the more general definition and only after establishing the range of the subject focuses on particulars.

t, satire is a matter of language, relying on fixed standards of
vior and modes of expression that have wide commonality
ghout a population. As such, it is conservative, relying on a
: world view against which the abnormality of the subject
s in stark relief. Lacking a fixed standard, the satirist's ob-
such as Dryden's in "Absalom and Achitaphel" or Milton's
s to satirize Satan, especially in the battle in heaven se-
ce in *Paradise Lost*, must break off, admitting defeat because
:andard cannot be known nor has yet valorized in public
ory.

observation leads to a second point. Satiric effect depends
led expectations. Pope's Dunces, Swift's Modest Proposers,
Dryden's MacFlecknoes become objects of satire only after
authors draw attention to fixed standards of writing, con-
or moral behavior and then introduce their subjects to suf-
comparison. However, satire has two sides--there is always
parison between the object and the revealed standard or
e of evaluation causing the audience to compare and thus
the standard under the same satiric review as the object.
isually, the absence revealed by the satirist is consciously
ved. The audience becomes aware of an absent presence
taposition and comparison. Shadwell "stands confirmed in
upidity" only after Dryden has convinced his audience that
hn Dryden, embodies true standards of poetic good sense.
lly, in effective satire, the audience must clearly see the dis-
on between true and false values. The presentation must
y reveal the values of the age, or the satirist must establish
ition so emphatically that there is no danger that the
nce will misjudge the satiric object. Failed satire is, at best,
ut as Defoe might testify after his experiences with "The
est Way with Dissenters," it could be dangerous also.

Obviously, Henry Fielding, a seasoned combatant in the literary wars of the eighteenth century, knew how to utilize satire for best effect; yet the satiric paradigm of moral-ethical terms he uses to establish the thematic center of *Tom Jones* ultimately destablize the plot, hiding moral chaos and ethical indecision under a veneer of fantastical improbability. One reason Fielding violated accepted theory is suggested in an earlier, little read work, *Journey From This World To The Next.*

Perhaps the most obviously stated themes in all of literature occurs when the always astute Squire Allworthy, mistaking a cold for terminal illness, calls Tom into his presence: "Allworthy then gently squeezed his Hand, and proceeded thus. 'I am convinced, my Child, that you have much Goodness, Generosity, and Honour in your Temper; if you will add Prudence and Religion to these, you must be happy: For the three former Qualities, I admit, make you worthy of Happiness, but they are the latter only which will put you in Possession of it' (p. 185, Norton Critical Edition). As countless commentators since the eighteenth century have pointed out, the novel then proceeds to demonstrate how Tom does acquire these qualities and as a consequence gains Sophia and Paradise Hall.

Unfortunately, the highly praised plot does not support Allworthy's credo, and the emphasis on an ethic of benevolence and Tom's natural impulses actually have little to do with the final resolution of the work. Tom gains Sophia not because he loves her, not because he has added prudence and religion to his temper, but because a former lover happens to be in a position to come forward at an opportune time. She not only reveals the truth of Tom's birth but also goes before Allworthy with evidence that Tom is actually his heir. A more worthy Tom, the natural son of Jenny Jones, could never have expected Squire Western to sanction marriage to his daughter, and a Tom more evil than

il, but Allworthy's acknowledged heir, would have had Sophia matter of course. The moral/ethical foundations of love and evolence are irrelevant to the social context of the novel. The or conflict, the failure of Fielding's social vision to incorate his ethical views, is never resolved. Just as Lord Fellamar, n hearing that Tom is not a bastard but a gentleman, expresconcerned at having been misled, so the reader, when realizthat the ethical views presented in the work have little to do ı the ultimate resolution of the plot, also question why they e misled.. Fielding asks his readers to believe that Tom wins hia and gains Paradise Hall because he has added prudence religion to the qualities of honor, goodness and virtue that ıprise his temper, but he achieves both through good luck, and d not matter to the resolution of the novel what qualities he ;essed.

is problem is much more clearly illustrated by looking at an ier work, *Journey from this World to the Next*, which appeared art of the second volume of the *Miscellanies* published in April 3.

'aul Hunter has argued that Fielding saw himself in the tradi- of the great Tory satirists, an Horitio at the bridge, holding ‹ the tides of darkness that threatened to engulf the age. That ding failed in this endeavor to maintain the standards of den, Swift and Pope does not matter, what does matter is his mpt to uphold a standard in an age what was rapidly losing its ·ician Augustan values to the debased sentimentality of lernity. Although such a position, if consciously held, would e as a worthy object of satire, one must agree that Fielding learn much satiric technique from these masters. The two niques he mastered and used most frequently were synecıe, using a part to represent the whole, and the mock heroic, g the heroic stature of the ancients to debase the feeble an-

tics of the moderns. Both of these techniques are important in reading *Journey from this World to the Next*. In the first part of the work, Fielding replaces the traditional guardian of the gates, St. Peter, with Minos, a mythical king of Crete, who for his just rule, was made supreme judge in the underworld after his death. Secondly, he fastens upon the character of Julian the Apostate, a renouncer of Christianity, as the single figure to represent all men and their quest for eternal salvation. Although there is much local satire, and some of the 'vanity of human wishes' motif found in the Anne Boleyn section, synecdoche and mock heroic form the satiric center of the work.

Journey from this World to the Next is divided into three parts. Part 1, consisting of chapters 1-9, deals with the death of the narrator, which from several references appears to be Fielding himself, and recounts his journey to Elysium and some experiences after arrival there. The second part, covering chapters 10-25 of the first Book, contains a narrative of the numerous transmigrations of the soul of Julian the Apostate. The Third Part, numbered chapter 7 of the nineteenth Book, is a history of Anne Boleyn. Of these parts, the second is unfinished, breaking off in the middle of a sentence. The third part is complete, but has little narrative tie to the first two parts. In order to justify the incompleteness of the work, Fielding falls back on the standard eighteenth-century rational for fragmented productions by pretending that the printed book was a portion of a larger work, most of which had been destroyed. The original manuscript had been left by a lodger in lieu of rent. Fielding, thinking the work had some moral and philosophical value, along with the approval of Parson Adams, rescued the works and offered them as part of the *Miscellanies*. Although there is some question as to the time Fielding actually wrote the piece, strong internal evidence sug-

:s that the work was composed sometimes between March 1 and June 1742.

ıe work did not receive a warm reception, and according to lding's first biographer, Murphy, Fielding's enemies charged ı with 'an intention to subvert the settled notions of mankind ɔhilosophy and religion'(Cross, I, 403). Apparently some ɪers were scandalized by his light treatment of such topics as th, the Judgment, and the heavenly state. Fielding declared : the allegory was not designed 'to oppose any present system, o erect a new one of my own' (Preface).

ilber Cross thinks the work fails, not so much because of lding's religious expression or because he produced a poor k but because his audience did not appreciate what he was at-ıpting to accomplish. According to Cross, Fielding's "accounts Cromwell, Anne Boleyn and the Emperor Julian become, as y were intended, an ironic rendering of history" (I, 402). He ı thinks the Julian part fails because the narrative is out of portion, the humor lags, the style labors. He says, "Fielding w all of this, and stopped, leaving the tale incomplete" (I, 403). thinks the work is misunderstood because it reflects Fielding's timent of history as opposed to literature. "His quarrel with ory was that it may tell you when an event takes place but that ı helpless when it proceeds to the motives of the actors. . . . lding here gave his version of certain episodes in general his-ɾ. Events as such he was careless of, and changed them at will, ɪ him the characters were the main thing"(I, 402).

ıis long digression on the content of *Journey* points out a tral critical concern--the importance of self-referentiality ıin the text. The question is not whether literature has mean-outside itself, should one accept the standard Cross/Dutton ɛrpretations of the work in terms of historical social satire and ıy or is there another approach that will provide an equally

valid reading of the text? One way to arrive at Fielding's personal satiric vision is by focusing on the mode of discourse instead of the effect of that discourse. Having suggested above that satire might be approached as a form of metaphor by which differing realms of experience are joined or juxtaposed to form a new conception of reality, we can see that the semiotic model also provides answers to several perplexing questions concerning the rupture of plot and theme in *Tom Jones*. Fielding's use of the mock heroic and synecdocheal techniques are of aposiospetic significance. They reflect a moment of indecision, becoming textual vortices around which contending signifiers orbit. By focusing on these techniques in *Journey*, we become aware of the warring forces of signification in the text. These are indicated by the tension between the literal and figural, between explicitly foregrounded assertions and illustrative examples, deliberate obscurity, and most obviously in the figural self-interpretation that occurs in the author's preface and the opening parts of the work. Although many passages could be cited to support these examples, the most significant, the recurring tension found in both works, centers on the sets of key signifiers found in these two texts.

If we return briefly to the above quotation from *Tom Jones* the question becomes, How do these five attributes--generosity, honor, goodness, prudence and religion--three primary and two supplementary, generate tension within the text? The first three seem to be asymptotically self-referential. Their value derives from a local field of reference, signifying a ideological code that, within the text, is determined by interactions among members of the same class. Not that a landlord cannot be as parsimonious with his resources as a country squire; however, when the reference transcends the local plane, intersecting with other planes, the reference becomes a matter of theological rather than ideological significance. For example, Tom's acts of goodness to

Black George become ideological demonstrations--a secular value--and are satirized in the text, but because Tom's actions demonstrate compassion, a religious quality, the satire directed toward the worthy vs the unworthy poor is deflated. In a like manner his relationships with Molly Seagrim, Lady Bellaston and Mrs Waters are a matter of, and described in terms of, Goodness, Generosity and Honour, yet his relationship with Sophia--a relationship that has constantly had to overcome Tom's virtuous excesses--only hints of prudence and religion. These values--prudence and religion--are the supplements that devalue the qualities of goodness, generosity and honour essential to Fielding's stated theme. Although the conclusion to the novel, as stated above, does indicate these qualities are harmonious, the logic of the plot denies such a reading.

The first difference we notice between *Journey* and *Tom Jones* is the addition of qualities necessary to insure happiness. As pointed out above, there are five qualities in *Tom Jones*. There are only two in the earlier work. In the introduction to *Journey*, Fielding, in the guise of saviour of the text, justifies the inclusion of such a fragmented work in the volume because he finds the unknown author "every where teaches this Moral, That the Greatest and truest Happiness which this World affords, is to be found only in the possession of Goodness and Virtue" (p. 6)

Yet, if we can accept a reading that Fielding and the author of the *Journey* are the same, we note that his death debases traditional religious values. Souls are able to visit the cause of their death, and the recently dead author learns he "must locate *Fever on the Spirits*, being the Disease which had delivered me from the Flesh" (p. 20). After attempting to find his disease, he is told by a porter that "the *Maladie Alamode* was the Lady, to whom I was obliged" (p. 22). After more searching, he finally meets the lady. "She was a thin, or rather meagre Person, very wan in the Countenance, had no Nose, and many Pimples in her Face" (p. 23). The narrator had obviously died of venereal disease, certainly not a recommendation for his virtuous life.

He then passes before Judge Minos at the gates of Elysium where he observes other spirits being judged. He learns that the conception of goodness and virtue are defined differently here than they were in his previous life. He observes the following judgment:

> "The second exhibited, that he had constantly frequented his Church, been a rigid Observer of Fast-Days. He likewise represented the great Animosity he had shewn to Vice in others, which never escaped his severest Censure; and as to his own Behavior he had never been once guilty of Whoring, Drinking, Gluttony, or any other Excess. He said, he had disinherited his Son for getting a Bastard.--Have you so, said *Minos*, then pray return into the other World and beget another; for such an unnatural Rascal shall never pass this Gate" (p. 40).

Minos, the judge, chooses the virtue of natural impulse at the expense of religious teachings. This redefinition of virtue and vice is immediately repeated by the next encounter at the gate. He observes a very beautiful spirit who said "she hoped there was some Merit in refusing a great Number of Lovers, and dying a Maid, tho' she had the Choice of a hundred. Minos told her she had not refused enow yet, and turned her back" (p. 41).

Now it was his turn to stand in judgment:

> "The Judge then address's himself to me, who little expected to pass this fiery Trial. I confess'd I had indulged myself very freely with Wine and Women in my Youth, but had never done an Injury to any Man living, or avoided an Opportunity of doing good; that I pretended to very little Virtue more than general Philanthropy, and private

Friendship.--I was proceeding, when *Minos* bid me enter the Gate, and not indulge myself with trumpeting forth my Virtues" (p. 46).

ıfter the author passes through the gates of Elysium, he receives immediate reward. He writes,

I presently met a little Daughter, whom I had lost several Years before. Good Gods! what words can describe the Raptures, the melting passionate tenderness, with which we kiss'd each other, continuing in our Embrace, with the most extatic Joy, a Space, which if Time had been measured here as on Earth, could not be less than half a Year" (p. 47).

is after this meeting that the author, along with a friendly nale spirit and his daughter retire with Julian the Apostate and ten to the account of Julian's many reincarnations. Julian, the nperor who had renounced Christianity, had to return to earth veral times to gain his salvation, and

"to act in the different Characters of a Slave, a Jew, a General, an Heir, a Carpenter, a Beau, a Monk, a Fidler, a wise Man, a King, a Fool, a Beggar, a Prince, a Statesman, a Soldier, a Taylor, an Alderman, a Poet, a Knight, a Dancing-Master, and three times a Bishop before his Martyrdom, together with his other Behavior in his last Character, satisfied the Judge, and procured him a Passage to the blessed Regions."

his story is never ended in the text, breaking off in mid-sentence. However, the text itself does give some indication of the ısion being generated by Fielding's use of the mock heroic ode. The digression is too long, too mundane, and finally too ring, for even the most immature author. Its excesses call attıtion to its fictionality, and this is the first clue as to its importance. Andrew Wright points out a characteristic of Fielding's artistry is that "By directing our attention to the apparatus of his fiction, he reminds us of its fictive quality" (p. 195). If so, what we see is a model for fiction that is outside the historical tradition that Fielding would have known.

No doubt, as Wilbur Cross points out, Fielding did have a quarrel with the truth of historians; however, there is no reason to believe that he doubted the theoretical basis of the historians of his day, who, taking their guide from Augustine's *City of God* and *City of Man* had based their temporal ordering of events on a linear model that mirrored time as the march of God's mind. In fact, the plot of Christian time, and the plot of the novel, share the same temporal structure--a beginning, a middle, and an end--a model that reflected received christian orthodoxy from the thirteenth through the nineteenth century. Fielding, an acknowledged master of the use of time in his novels, and certainly one of the best read men of his age in classical as well as contemporary works of literature and history, consciously breaks this model in *Journey* and seriously violates the cause and effect logic of events presented over time in *Tom Jones.* The question, finally, is why? What causes him to alter the received orthodoxy of his day, to violate his aesthetic sense, and finally to risk the censure of the public in order to give the recurring events in the many lives of a rather obscure theological, historical character? Finally why would Fielding, by use of mock heroic and scynodche, cause his reader to have questions concerning the christian myth by making the pagan myth so attractive?

In order to provide an answer, we should look at events of Fielding's life immediately preceding the writing of the first part of *Journey.* Fielding's private life had reached a state of total despair during the winter of 1741-42. He writes, "I was last Winter laid up in the Gout, with a favourite Child dying in one Bed, and

Wife in a Condition very little better, on another, attended
ı other Circumstances, which served as very proper Decora-
s to such a Scene" (p. xvi, *Miscellanies*). The decorations he
ıks of are personal worries concerning his failure to repay a
ı and the impending lawsuit before him.

bert Camus was once asked why he was an atheist. He replied
it was impossible to believe in a God that allowed children
ıffer. I do not mean to suggest that Fielding shared the same
iment. In fact, given the historical development of language,
doubtful that Fielding could have conceived of the term
eist" in its modern sense. Yet, he does demonstrate the skep-
m associated with eighteenth-century Deism, and we find
ıughout the first section of *Journey* a doubt and a note of
iety, the same note that both Freud and Heidegger describe
reaction of objectlessness. In this respect, *Journey* becomes
-referential; Fielding is refusing to accept the finality of death
the completeness of a final judgment that underscore the
istian conception of reality. The daughter he loved is dead,
wife dying, and he, suffering through the despair and anxiety
lebt and physical pain, has Jobean questions concerning the
ness of such a supernatural system and the value of morality
ethical behavior in this world. He admits his sins, but he con-
cts a scenario using a mock heroic format that allows his
ılar virtues to out weight his religious shortcomings and that
ws him to be reunited with his beloved daughter. The com-
ison of religious mythologies, Christian vs. Pagan, suggested
ıse of the mock heroic and scynodochal forms, is a question-
of the moral order, a questioning that, given his own or-
doxy, he no doubt wished to assuage. In order to do so, he
d on the story of Julian the Apostate, a character who in the
s of the pious should be damned but who Fielding allows to
ieve grace through his secular virtues, but Fielding is not sure

of such theology, so he sends the character back to live again, a satiric signifier, floating free, living throughout his many lives the process of signification. The process fails, so the account breaks off in mid-sentence; however, the doubt lingers, surfacing to ask the same questions of the orthodox moral order and to disrupt the temporal conception of salvation and achievement of Paradise Hall in his masterpiece, *Tom Jones.*

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