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A READING OF RICHARD III’S DEBATE WITH ANNE

Louis E. Dollarhide

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When Shakespeare came to write his Richard III in the early 1590’s, he was working against a long tradition of Richard as a man of wit, in the Renaissance meaning, of a shrewd, searching intelligence. This tradition went as far back as a contemporary Latin chronicle that spoke of Richard’s “ingenium excellens,” of his excellent wit or intelligence. The tradition was so strong that it was one of the things favorable to Richard which Tudor historians could not deny. Instead, they explained it away by saying, “Yes, but he used his intelligence for evil ends.” In creating his Richard, Shakespeare seized upon this facet of the character of the historical Richard as the guiding principle of the personage in the play. Into this work Shakespeare poured all the riches of the rhetorical tradition, in which he was perhaps as well schooled as any writer of his time, in order to demonstrate Richard’s acknowledged wit. Besides his use of the oration in a number of ways in the play and the flowers of eloquence, Shakespeare shows Richard overcoming two strongly motivated opponents in closely argued debates, the so-called wooing scenes, with Anne in Act I and Elizabeth in Act IV. In the following pages, I depend heavily on Thomas Wilson, a Renaissance rhetorician, for definitions of Methodus,¹ a term crucial to my thinking, and for other relevant terminology.

In the first of the two impressive wooing scenes, Richard is shown overcoming the objections of one who has suffered greatly at his hands. As chief mourner in the funeral train of her sovereign and father-in-law, Henry VI, whom Richard had killed (III Hen. VI, V, vi), Anne enters to speak a lament over the dead king. She cannot mourn, however, because of her hatred for Richard; and what begins as a lament turns into a vehement curse directed against Richard and ironically against herself. The speech, a dramatic necessity, prepares for the debate itself by enforcing Anne’s hatred of Richard. As she concludes in a fury of anguished cursing, Richard enters. The debate begins after Richard forces the attendants to put down the coffin once more. An important element in their debate is logical and rhetorical contrasts. She uses the term “devil” as a weapon; Richard counters with soothing terms of divinity. She exorcizes him in the manner used against evil spirits. He answers calmly with “sweet saint” (49). She replies with “foul devil” (50) and launches into a speech of eighteen lines, in which she frantically calls down the wrath of God upon Richard’s head. The speech marks the end of the preliminary matter and the opening into the
RICHARD III'S DEBATE WITH ANNE

body of the debate. It does not perform the technical function of
announcing the question for debate, however, and only in the general
sense of its establishing the magnitude of Anne's hatred can it be called
a formal introduction.

Nor does the debate that continues have the orderly give and take of
the formal thesis, the positing of an explicit solutio against an explicit
contradictio. Over all the debate there is a nervous energy and frenzied
air in keeping with Anne's distraught frame of mind. Either
deliberately or unknowingly, Shakespeare passed over the possibilities
for using the exact disposition of the disputation in framing the scene.
The result is an effective yet loosely formed debate, largely logical in
reference.

Unmoved by her imprecations, Richard urges that she does not
know the "rules of charity, / Which renders good for bad, blessings for
curses" (68-69). She answers that he knows no "rules" either of God or
man, and then supplies the major premise of a syllogism for which
Richard supplies the minor and conclusion:

No beast so fierce but knows some touch of pity.

Glou. But I know none, and therefore am no beast.

(71-72)

Ignoring his fallacious conclusion (fallacy of the Consequent), she
seizes upon his admission that he has no pity: "O wonderful, when
devils tell the truth!" (73). But Richard undercuts her once more by
pointing out that it is even "more wonderful, when angels are so angry"
(74). This speech concludes the first step of the argument. The next
four speeches are balanced in pairs by the devices of antithesis,
repetition, and a logical contrast:

Glou. Vouchsafe, divine perfection of a woman,
Of these supposed crimes to give me leave
By circumstance but to acquit myself.

Anne. Vouchsafe, defus'd infection of [a] man,
[For] these known evils but to give me leave
By circumstance to curse thy cursed self.

(75-80)

The key word, "circumstance," is a logical term meaning the adjuncts of
a fact which make it more or less criminal, or make an accusation more
or less probable. Richard pleads for an improper use of evidence: he
would clear himself by circumstantial evidence. Anne counters with the correct use of circumstances, as the adjuncts of a fact which make it more or less criminal. One may be convicted, not acquitted, on circumstantial evidence. This plea for acquittal failing, Richard turns then, in the next pair of speeches, to pray for leave to “excuse” himself:

Fairer than tongue can name thee, let me have
Some patient leisure to excuse myself.

(81-82)

The verb “excuse,” in this sense, meant an attempt to clear a person wholly or partially from blame, without denying or justifying the imputed action. By changing slightly the meaning of the word, Anne answers that the only “current” or acceptable excuse Richard can make is to hang himself. She applies the word in the sense of expiation or justification. This shift of meaning comes out in her next speech. When Richard objects that by such despair (i.e., committing suicide) he would rather “accuse” himself, Anne replies that by “despairing” he can stand excused, or justified, for worthily executing vengeance upon himself, who did “unworthy slaughter” upon others. In other words, his justification can be an expiation, a redemptive act of vengeance.

Having reached a second impasse, Richard drops that line of argument for another. “Say [or let us suppose],” he suggests, “that I slew them not.” Anne turns his statement into a logical enthymeme with, “Then say they were not slain” (89). But they were and Richard killed them. Richard offers another statement, only to have Anne build a second enthymeme upon it:

Glou. I did not kill your husband.

Anne. Why, then he is alive.

(91-92)

But Richard concedes him dead, then attempts to transfer this blame to Edward, his brother. Anne answers vehemently that he lies and then argues from the logical topic evidence to support her charge. Margaret saw him, bloody sword in hand. He would have killed Margaret herself if his brothers had not “beat aside the point.” Passing over the greater charge of the guilt of Edward’s death, Richard admits the lesser charge of attacking Margaret, once more insisting upon his being guiltless. Margaret “provoked” him to the attack by slanderously accusing him. Replying that his “bloody mind” was all that ever provoked him, Anne guides the argument this time.
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Since Richard denies that he killed the prince and since she lacks immediate proof, she turns to a later and less doubtful crime. Did he not kill “this king”? With no equivocation Richard answers, “I grant ye.” A logical term once more, the word “grant” carried the technical meaning of conceding to an actual or hypothetical opponent a proposition to be used as the basis of argument. Accepting the word in this sense, Anne plays upon it through the application of the figure antanaclasis and arguing from notation changes it to mean the bestowing of a petition or request:

Dost grant me, hedgehog? Then God grant me too
Thou mayst be damned for that wicked deed!

(103-104)

She declares the qualities of the king, a form of evidence, as her justification for this petition: he was “gentle, mild, and virtuous.” Once more Richard concedes that he was, and therefore “the better for the King of heaven, that hath him” (105). To this reply Anne can only add that he is in heaven, where Richard can never hope to go. Ignoring her taunt, Richard maintains his line of reasoning, sophisticatedly arguing that if a man is fitter for heaven than for earth, the person sending him to heaven (his murderer) deserves thanks. The fallacy is that of false cause, called by Wilson secundum non causam, ut causam and listed as the third Aristotelian fallacy extra dictione. As if hemmed in by the argument Anne, picking the expression “any place,” argues ad hominem, “And thou unfit for any place but hell” (109). Seizing the opening she has given him, Richard draws closer to his original intent, which he had announced in Scene i, 153-159. There is one place else, if she will hear him name it. “Some dungeon,” she answers. “Your bed-chamber,” Richard returns. Without argument, Anne can only curse him: “I'll rest betide the chamber where thou liest!” (112). It will, Richard concedes—until he lies with her. Secure in her immunity, Anne fervently answers, “I hope so.” To this, Richard places an ominous period: “I know so.” The argument so far has come full circle: it begins and ends with Anne’s cursing Richard and railing ad hominem. And ironically she has placed herself a second time under the curse she lays to him.

Richard’s positive “I know so” marks the end of one movement of the debate and the initiation of a second climactic one. He has announced, though obliquely, the question or thesis. From here on he carefully directs the line of thought. He is the master of the show. “But, gentle Lady Anne,” he begins:
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To leave this keen encounter of our wits
And fall something into a slower method,
Is not the causer of the timeless deaths
Of these Plantagenets, Henry and Edward,
As blameful as the executioner? (115-119)

The “slower method” in these lines is cited by the editors of the Oxford English Dictionary as an example of the general meaning of “the order and arrangement in framing a particular discourse in literary composition.” How closely it is here related to the Latin word Methodus is very clearly shown in Richard’s line of reasoning. Methodus, a branch of logic or rhetoric, taught how to arrange thoughts and topics for investigation, exposition, or literary composition. To Thomas Wilson it was the way or “method” of handling a single question; in a thorough analysis, he said, “every single question” was “eight ways examined.” In the preceding part of the debate (43-114) the first three steps of Methodus have been satisfied. By experience (the king’s body bleeding before Richard) and authority (Margaret’s testimony) Richard’s guilt has been established; and by definition it has been established that he is guilty of homicide. Then by division, Richard has narrowed his guilt to the unquestioned murder of the king. He denies Margaret’s testimony. But all of this has been established in a somewhat chaotic manner, as Richard and Anne leap from first one then to another point of argument. Now, taking things completely in hand, Richard would turn to a “slower method,” a more deliberate, calmer, better organized manner of reasoning.

As if Shakespeare had the steps of Methodus in mind as he wrote the scene, he has Richard proceed in his question to the important fourth “way,” the examination of the efficient cause and the final cause. As an illustration of the distinction between efficient and final causes Wilson had stated that God is the efficient cause of all good laws while the final cause, or end, is that one live uprightly in observation of His holy will. Since he cannot hope to prove himself innocent of crime, Richard’s purpose is to implicate Anne by subtle means in the very crime of which he stands accused and thereby mitigate in her own mind the guilt he bears and the hatred she gives him. His immediate purpose in his question is to make Anne grant him the undeniable proposition that the efficient cause is as “blameful” as the final cause. Is not the causer as guilty as the executioner? Anne parries the thrust by ignoring the specific question and naming Richard himself both cause and effect, and in so doing she passes over his distinction between efficient and final cause and introduces the fifth step of Methodus, effect: “Thou was the cause, and most accurs’d effect” (120). Richard, however, maintains his distinction over her objection and in reply states the efficient cause
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(Anne’s beauty), final cause (Richard’s machinations), the effect (Murder), and, the sixth step, that which follows the effect (his gaining her love):

Your beauty was the cause of that effect;
Your beauty, that did haunt me in my sleep
To undertake the death of all the world
So I might live one hour in your sweet bosom. (121-124)

And on the basis of this arrangement of argument Richard carries the debate through to completion and victory. To Anne’s unsettled “If I thought that, I tell thee, homicide, / These nails should rend that beauty from my cheeks” (125-126), Richard answers that she should not if he stood by; as the sun is to the earth her beauty is his day, his life. Anne curses his day and life. Richard warns her not to curse herself for she is both. This leads, through another interchange, into a repetition of the idea of cause and effect. The interchange consists of parallel, though antithetical, definitions, of the term “quarrel.” Confessing finally to the murder of Anne’s husband, he maintains that he did it to help her to a “better husband.” “His better doth not breathe upon the earth” (140), Anne answers. In his reply, arguing from notation with the figure syllepsis, Richard is guilty of the simplest form of logical fallacy, equivocation (called homonymia by Wilson), where a single word is used in several senses. He shifts the meaning from an absolute (“better husband”) to an accidental attribute: “He lives that loves thee better than he could” (141). “Name him,” Anne challenges. Once more Richard agrees. “The self-same name,” Richard returns, calling attention to the ambiguity; “but one of better nature.” Once more the play on the word “better.” To her question, “Where is he?” Richard answers, “Here.” Out-argued, amazed, momentarily beyond words, Anne spits at him. “Would it were mortal poison for thy sake!” she exclaims. Richard remarks on the paradox: “Never came poison from so sweet a place” (147). But Anne will not be won by this flattery. “Out of my sight!” she cries; “thou dost infect mine eyes” (149). Once more Richard, taking her own words, turns them back upon her. Her eyes have infected his. And with that, he returns to and restates his original argument based on efficient cause. But first it was the genus “beauty”; now he particularizes. It is her eyes, a species of that beauty. When Anne cries, “Would they were basilisks, to strike thee dead!” (151), he agrees: “I would they were, that I might die at once, / For now they kill me with a living death” (152-153). Anne has given him the entrance into his climaxing speech, in which he rounds out the argument he had first set in motion with his initial question.
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Her eyes have drawn tears from his “manly eyes,” even when he has not wept to hear of Rutland’s and his father’s deaths. He has never sued to anyone, yet from her he begs forgiveness or death. Dramatically he lays his unsheathed sword in her hand, and kneeling, bares his breast to her. Then in the conclusion he brings his argument to its destined point. He frankly confesses his guilt not only in the death of Henry but in the death of Edward as well; but in confessing this guilt, he drives home the still more important point, that Anne herself shares in his guilt:

Nay, do not pause; for I did kill King Henry,
But ’twas thy beauty that provoked me.
Nay, now dispatch; ’twas I that stabb’d young Edward,
But ’twas thy heavenly face that set me on.

(180-183)

When she lets the sword fall, he knows her defeat is complete, that she has accepted his premise. He ends the speech by confronting her with a dilemma: “Take up the sword again, or take up me” (184). She has accepted the fallacy of his argument; she now accepts the alternatives of the dilemma as the only solutions. “Arise, dissembler!” she tells him.

Once Anne is led to believe that Richard is actually stricken with her beauty, he has made her the efficient cause of the deaths of Edward and Henry VI and has implicated her in his crimes. This fact is shown clearly in the dialogue immediately following the speech. Anne has refused to stab him, though his breast is bared and the naked sword rests in her hand. Though she wishes him dead, she states, she cannot be his executioner. Richard dares even more. Then bid him kill himself, he offers, and he will do it. “I have already,” Anne replies wearily. “But that was in thy rage,” Richard reminds her—and then the speech which rounds out and completes the “slower method” he had begun with the question: Is not the causer as guilty as the executioner?

Speak it again, and even with the word
This hand, for which thy love did kill thy love,
Shall for thy love kill a far truer love;
To both their deaths shalt thou be accessory.

(189-192)

The whole argument has led up to that last line—“To both their deaths shalt thou be accessory.” Anne is caught: to the death of Edward,
8  RICHARD III’S DEBATE WITH ANNE

according to Richard’s sophistry, she is already accessory. She has spoken the word herself: “I would not be thy executioner” (186).

The argument is over, the debate ended. Now she can only sigh, “I would I knew thy heart”; and Richard replies with what is, in a way, one of the most terrible lines in the play, terrible in its heavy irony, in its merciless disregard for petty humanity, in its brief glimpse into Richard’s true character. “I would I knew thy heart,” Anne says. And he answers, “‘Tis figur’d in my tongue” (194). Anne “fears” but does not recognize that both heart and tongue are false. If she had but followed his reasoning she would have known. The irony lies in the fact that Richard tells her the truth. The editors of the Oxford English Dictionary cite this use of the verb “figure” as meaning generally to portray or represent by speech or oration; but in doing so they overlook a fine logical subtlety which there is reason to believe Shakespeare had in mind. In describing the processes of the perfect argument or syllogismus Wilson uses the term “figure” to mean the three ways of placing the medius terminus (“double repeate”). A “figure” he defines as a “lawfull placying of the double repeate, in the .ii. proposicions.” It is not by mere chance that the basic fallacy of Richard’s whole argument beginning with the question he puts to Anne is dependent upon the placing of the middle term, the efficient cause:

The “causer” is as guilty as the “executioner.”
Anne’s beauty is the causer.
Anne is guilty of Richard’s crimes.

Technically the term is “placed” correctly according to the “first figure” in Wilson; i.e., it appears first in the major and last in the minor; but the fallacy lies in Richard’s proposing that Anne’s beauty is the efficient cause and then in his subtly passing from an adjunct to the subject (Anne herself) as if no breach of logic had been made. Richard’s strength lies in his ability to lead Anne to accept the proposition and the conclusion. Throughout this part of the debate Richard argues that Anne’s beauty drove him on and then in his conclusion he turns the guilt on Anne herself. The whole argument rests, then, in the questionable middle term, and thus Richard is only too accurate in saying to Anne, “‘Tis figur’d in my tongue.” In a less circumscribed and technical sense the word “figure” applies to the whole web of sophistry which Richard, the “bottl’d spider,” has woven for his victim; but it applies clearly enough in the primary and limited sense as a startling reference to the inherent weakness of Richard’s argument.
NOTES

1 The eight “ways” under Methodus, according to Wilson, were: 1) Whether a thing is or no. This question was often proved by experience or authority (the topic testimony). 2) What a thing is. This comes from the topic definition. 3) The parts and several kinds considered. This would include division and partition (the topics genus and species). 4) Examination of the causes, especially the efficient cause and final cause, or end of anything. 5) Examination of the effect, the office or “proper working.” 6) Examination of what happens after the effect, or which have great affinity, or liklihood to be. 7) Examination of what things are disagreeing. 8) Examination of whose authority on which the law is based. “And this ordre both Tullie hath followed in his boke de Officies, and also Aristotle in his Ethickes hath done the like, to the great admiration of al those that be-learned.” Rule, F 33-F 35. (In the edition used, the pagination is out of order, though the content appears in correct order. F 36 follows V 33.) Since the examination of “causes” figures so prominently in the debate, it might be well to examine them briefly. Aristotle learned four: the efficient cause, the force, instrument, or agency by which a thing is produced; the formal cause, the form or essence of the thing caused; the material cause, the elements or matter for which a thing is produced; and the final cause, the purpose or end for which it is produced, viewed as final cause, the purpose or end for which it is produced, viewed as cause of the act. OED. Wilson centers upon the two most significant causes as the customary procedure—the efficient cause and the final cause or end. Thomas Wilson, The Rule of Reason (London, 1552).

The following terms are also central in my analysis:
Antanaclasis—a figure which in repeating a word shifts from one of its meanings to another.
Enthymeme—an abridged syllogism, with one of the premises implicit.
Invention—the finding of matter for composition, a branch of rhetoric.
Syllepsis—the use of a word having simultaneously two different meanings.
Syllogism—a perfect argument consisting of a major, minor, and conclusion, a pattern of deductive reasoning.
Thesis—the thirteenth exercise for composition in the Aphthonian Progymnasmata, the handbook for composition in Elizabethan grammar schools. Thesis was the first exercise to allow students to write and speak on both sides of a question.
Topics—the places of invention, such as definition, comparison.

A somewhat different version of this study was read at the annual meeting of the Mississippi Philological Association, 28 January 1984.
CLYDE KENNETH HYDER: SCHOLAR, TEACHER, FRIEND

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“He’s brilliant!” exclaimed a fellow graduate student when I inquired about the young professor scheduled to teach the Chaucer course for which I had just registered. “I understand that when he took his Ph.D. orals at Harvard, his committee dismissed him after a half hour because he knew everything.” Such, I was to learn, was the reputation of Clyde Kenneth Hyder, who had joined the English Department at The University of Kansas in 1930. As I was to find out later, it was actually a grueling three-hour examination in which he had distinguished himself, with emphasis on linguistics as well as literature. At that time Harvard still had a rigorous program that included Old and Middle English, Old French, and Gothic. According to a member of Hyder’s committee, it was the first time that a candidate had answered every important question to the examiner’s satisfaction.

A recent college graduate with one year of high-school teaching behind me, I was earning my M.A. in summer sessions. It was fortunate that my first term introduced me to a professor who, as teacher and scholar, would serve as a model in my search for a place in academe. The Chaucer course delighted me. Hyder’s conduct of class discussions was leavened by humor. His command of literary background was impressive. From his vast store he drew fascinating illustrations, sometimes obscure or esoteric to us students. There was emphasis, to be sure, on such mechanical matters as language and pronunciation, but never to the exclusion of Chaucer’s literary craft. From his continuing research Hyder repeatedly introduced us to newly uncovered knowledge. Often he enlivened his critical comments with amusing tidbits certain to titillate those who appreciated subtle humor. In short, “gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche.”

After my first rewarding summer I enrolled for another course with Hyder the following year, nineteenth-century English poetry. This time his scholarship and erudition impressed me so much that I decided to make Victorian literature my area of specialization. I have never regretted that decision, for I have had Hyder’s continued encouragement and advice. My high regard for him has been reinforced by testimony from other students. One in particular praises him as a “genuinely learned man” who always “maintained his integrity and intellectual honesty. Unlike some professors,” continues this student, “even brilliant ones, he never allowed his judgment to be warped by current
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critical theories and passing intellectual fashions. He refused to compromise his brilliance by a lazy pretense to knowledge" outside his ken. Above all, he was patient and understanding, never begrudging the time when students stopped after class to discuss points raised in his lectures.

Once I had completed the requirements for an M.A. and was offered a three-year instructorship in English at The University of Kansas, I had an opportunity to observe Hyder as a colleague. Though he was not one to monopolize departmental meetings, he occasionally injected just the right remark when discussion bogged down. I respected his judgment and always felt free to turn to him for suggestions when I presented new materials to my introductory classes in literature.

In later years, as my articles and books materialized, I often turned to Hyder for help. By this time I had consulted enough bibliographies to be impressed by the frequency with which his name appeared in the Victorian sections. For, with the publication of Swinburne’s Literary Career and Fame in 1933 (reprinted, 1963), to be followed in 1937 by The Best of Swinburne (with Lewis Chase), he had early earned a reputation as a leading authority on Swinburne. The first book filled a pressing need at the time, for it examines the critical traditions which had beclouded Swinburne’s fame and summarizes his own reaction to that criticism. In 1962 Hyder expanded the subject of the poet’s reaction to personal criticism in Swinburne Replies, where he restored some of the passages actually written by Swinburne and identified the allusions. Recognition of his reputation as a leading authority on Swinburne was indicated by his being asked to write the chapter on the poet for The Victorian Poets: A Guide to Research, edited by F. E. Faverty (Cambridge, 1956; revised and enlarged, 1968); and by the comments in Kirk H. Beetz’s “Introduction” to Algernon Charles Swinburne: A Bibliography of Secondary Works, 1861-1980 (1982).

While I was still at The University of Kansas, one of Hyder’s articles in PMLA won considerable praise from his colleagues: “Wilkie Collins and The Woman in White” (1939). A pioneer in exploring Collins’s secret liaisons and their relationship to his fiction, it was to blaze trails for such probing biographers as Kenneth Robinson and Robert Ashley. In 1958 a special seventy-fifth anniversary issue of PMLA listed this article as one of the sixteen most useful and influential to have appeared in its pages.

In the forty-five years since leaving The University of Kansas, I have continued to enjoy the benefits of Hyder’s friendship. Only someone with his patience and interest in former students could have responded so graciously to my repeated requests for recommendations whenever I applied for grants and fellowships. In addition, often volunteering to read my article and book manuscripts before they were
submitted for publication, he tactfully suggested revisions or called attention to sources that I had overlooked.

That Hyder would ultimately distinguish himself as scholar and teacher was already apparent during his boyhood. Born 4 January 1902, he spent his early years on a farm near West Plains, Missouri. There, stimulated by the magazine *American Boy*, ordered for him by an aunt, he read everything his home and school libraries had to offer. One book to make a lasting impression was Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, which he still regards highly. By the time he was ready for high school his parents had moved to town. Here he was influenced by his classes in English and Latin. Hoping to make journalism his vocation, he wrote for the school paper and briefly substituted as editor of the local newspaper. On his graduation from high school at the age of sixteen he won a scholarship to Drury College in Springfield, Missouri.

In college he continued his journalistic activities, editing the *Drury Mirror* and the yearbook, as well as contributing to various periodicals, two of his pieces appearing in the humor magazine *Judge*. As an undergraduate assistant in the English Department he graded student papers while carrying the usual schedule of courses and extracurricular activities. In spite of this formidable load, he still somehow made time to experiment with intricate forms of artificial French verse, and to pursue unassigned reading of the literary masters.

After graduating from college in 1924, having lost one full year because of emergency surgery, he taught English in high school for two years. Though his teaching load was heavy, six large classes the first year (including one course in ancient history and one in vocational civics), he carefully marked all theme assignments. He stressed writing skills and held his students to high standards.

Money saved from teaching enabled him to enroll for graduate studies at Harvard University on a St. Louis Harvard Club Scholarship. There were further grants and scholarships to bolster his finances, like the summer travel grant that paid his way to England, where he worked in the British Museum and the Bodleian Library. The example of a distinguished cousin, Hyder E. Rollins, who did not join the Harvard faculty until Hyder had completed most of the courses required, had helped him to decide to become a university teacher. Though not one of his professors, Rollins often gave him valuable advice and encouragement. Other notable professors to influence him were George Lyman Kittredge, with whom he studied Shakespeare and the popular ballad; F. N. Robinson and J. S. P. Tatlock, who shared the teaching of Chaucer and Middle English; and John Livingston Lowes. Lowes later directed Hyder’s dissertation. Oliver Elton was a visiting professor who taught principles of criticism. Hyder heard the lectures of Irving
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Babbitt, as well as those delivered by another visitor, Gilbert Murray, the classical scholar.

After a year as Instructor in English at The University of Texas, Austin (1926-27), Hyder returned to Harvard to finish his graduate work. Though he had completed his dissertation before accepting a position at The University of Kansas and departing for a summer in England, he decided not to take his orals until he had done further reading. As has been shown, that was a sound decision.

Hyder was to continue his career at The University of Kansas until 1968, when he retired early to nurse his wife during her lingering last illness. She was a former graduate student whose Master's thesis he had supervised.

A considerable portion of his tenure Hyder devoted to editorial work. As chairman of the Graduate Committee he was the logical choice to edit (1935-67) the Humanistic Studies, a series published by the University. From 1942-44 his teaching was interrupted by service with the U.S. Army Air Force, most of which he spent in Australia as a cryptographer. On his return to the University in 1945 he was offered the editorship of the newly founded University Press. From 1953 until his retirement he was both editor and director. The magnitude of his responsibilities would stagger many a scholar today. In addition to assuming major responsibility for the Press, he continued to teach two courses each semester (later reduced to one), read papers submitted for undergraduate honors, chair the Library Committee, and supervise graduate work in investigation and conference. He even found time to serve as special consultant to the New Century Cyclopedia of Names, as editorial consultant for a few years for PMLA, and for a longer period as a member of the advisory board for Victorian Poetry.

To attract authors for the Press, Hyder consulted MLA directories and the annual lists of Guggenheim fellows, inviting scholars with promising projects to submit their manuscripts. From the first he resisted any pressure to build the reputation of the Press by increasing the number of titles published. He insisted that the books meet high standards, firmly rejecting manuscripts that did not measure up, even when it was not politic to do so. A press catering to someone's need for tenure, he believed, had abused its true mission of contributing to knowledge. Like Matthew Arnold he was averse to "the grand name without the grand thing."

Limited space permits the mention of only a few titles published by The University of Kansas Press during Hyder's editorship: Bertram Colgrave's translation, with notes, of The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great, by an anonymous Monk of Whitby; John E. Hankins's Shakespeare's Derived Imagery; Alan Dugald McKillop's Early Masters of English Fiction; Katherine L. Mix's A Study in Yellow: The
Yellow Book and Its Contributors; Harold Orel’s Thomas Hardy’s Personal Writings; Robert Riegel’s American Feminists; Ralph Wardle’s Oliver Goldsmith; Kathleen Williams’ Jonathan Swift and the Age of Compromise; and Carl R. Woodring’s Victorian Samplers: William and Mary Howitt. Among publications on non-literary subjects were W. C. Stevens’s Kansas Wild Flowers; and The Treatise on Invertebrate Paleontology, edited by Raymond C. Moore and brought out in collaboration with the Geological Society of America.

That virtually no typographical errors appeared in books published under Hyder’s editorship must be attributed to his reading all final proofs at least twice. Not one to pass on tedious tasks to assistants, he always did such taxing work himself. Nor did he ask anyone to prepare indexes for his own books.

Authors published by Hyder invariably applaud his industry, as well as his accuracy. Typical is the following testimonial:

I was astonished at the painstaking care with which he checked out the accuracy of all footnotes (he did not spot-check; he went over them all, frequently looking up the original works to make sure there had been no misinterpretation of the sources). Later I learned that he did much the same for all manuscripts. Such diligence, of course, limited the number of books he could publish in a year, since he watched each manuscript through all the phases of production . . . . I think it is a reasonable conclusion . . . that all who worked with Hyder remember him as one of the great editors of their experience; for many (including myself), the greatest.

In addition to assuming full responsibility for seeing each work through the press, Hyder wrote two books of his own, both of them biographies. The first, Snow of Kansas: The Life of Francis Huntington Snow, with Extracts from His Journals and Letters (1953), was of special interest to the alumni of The University of Kansas, for Snow, a scientist, had been one of its first teachers and later became its chancellor. The suggestion for this biography came from Deane W. Malott, who was Chancellor of the University when Hyder began his connection with the Press. This biography introduces some interesting information about Snow’s years at Williams College and during the Civil War. The second biography, George Lyman Kittredge: Teacher and Scholar (1962), covers a large amount of material gleaned from letters, diaries, and a vast repository of documents in the Harvard Library. Extracts from this book were carried in the Harvard Alumni Bulletin.
Since his retirement Hyder’s productivity has continued impressive. Besides reviewing a number of books and publishing occasional notes of ancillary literary interest, he has brought out a major article on Matthew Arnold and two more books on Swinburne: *Swinburne: The Critical Heritage* (1970), recently reissued in paperback, and *Swinburne as Critic* (1972). Both books were published in London by Routledge & Kegan Paul. At present he is busy on a project that has already occupied him a long time and may keep him busy for several more years. Currently referred to as *A Book of Days*, its addition to the already staggering volume of scholarly books produced each year is justified in Hyder’s own words:

I am keeping in mind what I could have been glad to know many years ago—something applicable to English and American life. Since works of literature often have a relation to calendar customs and since literature reflects life, I have not felt that what I am doing is irrelevant to literary study.

Interspersed with his scholarly activities is one which, he declares, has been “a delight and solace” since boyhood—gardening. For this he credits his parents’ early training, which led him to value the double reward, nutritional and aesthetic, in the cultivation of plants. In season his letters never fail to mention his success with certain crops, raised in such abundance that they could well supply his whole neighborhood. Though he has recently given up his home in Lawrence, Kansas, and is now living with his daughter and her family in Greenwich, Connecticut, his physical exertions continue. With the vigor of a much younger man he has cleared tracts of roots and stones and converted them into productive plots.

Another pleasurable activity to which he devotes considerable time is his continuing correspondence with friends and former students. Not satisfied with mere notes, he types many single-spaced pages teeming with topics of current interest, critiques of articles and books recently read, and comments on human frailties and eccentricities that irk him. As prolific a correspondent as the Victorians and doubtless influenced by them through long association, he writes leisurely and entertaining letters, especially when he vents his indignation on those who would banish the generic man (under the presumption that it has a gender attribute) and substitute person, as in chairperson. The linguistic and historical ignorance of such rabid would-be reformers arouses his ire.

Another source of his indignation is the incompetence of those high-school English teachers who have been certified upon taking the required courses in education without mastering the subject they are to
teach. His impatience extends to university teachers as well. He believes that they must interpret literature with common sense, not as something “purely aesthetic.” Many need to get rid of “their notions about literary theory, with its growing accretion of jargon (as if it were a science)” and see it “in relation to life, to the knowledge it embodies, its historical bearings, or any meaning from an ethical point of view.”

When Hyder reminisces, he contrasts the past with the present. Life seemed much simpler when he was a boy, when even a trip to Colorado was an adventure, when the air was pure and there was no acid rain, when summer Chautauqua was the chief entertainment, when doctors would travel eight miles or more to visit a patient. But Hyder does not live in the past. Quite the contrary, for he is concerned with the current shortcomings of our national leaders, with our staggering national debt, with our loss of moral fiber. He enjoys watching his grandsons grow up in today’s world. Routinely he keeps in touch with friends, both new and old. Many who know him can testify to the satisfaction he has taken in finding ways to cheer those in illness or trouble.

Former students, colleagues, neighbors—all value Clyde Hyder, not only for his wide-ranging achievements but for his tendency not to take himself too seriously, for his honesty in assessing his own career, for his philosophic acceptance of a changing world. He epitomizes Matthew Arnold’s ideal, the “even-balanced soul/ . . . Who saw life steadily, and saw it whole.”
WHY THE PRIOESS'S GAUDS ARE GREEN

Richard Rex

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In what has become the most quoted essay ever written about Chaucer, John Livingston Lowes demonstrated some seventy years ago that the phrase “simple and coy” used in the portrait of the Prioress was a stock description for the romance heroine. Although there has been less than universal acceptance of Lowes’s statement that Chaucer was delighted by the Prioress’s imperfect adherence to a religious calling, his essay remains unchallenged insofar as it relates the irony in this portrait to poetic conventions of courtly love. “Nowhere else,” writes Lowes, “does Chaucer use with more consummate skill the subtle connotations of words and phrases than in his portrait of the Prioress. And the key of the whole is set at once by the famous second line….not only this line but the entire description is steeped in reminiscences of the poetry of courtly love.”

Chaucer’s irony is achieved through a variety of devices, such as understatement or overstatement, omission, repetition, inappropriateness, incongruous juxtaposition, and ambiguity. The way this works in the Prioress’s portrait is too well known to require reiteration. One aspect of his irony, however, has not received the attention it deserves although it forms part of the climax of this portrait and complements Lowes’s observation concerning Chaucer’s use of courtly love terminology. I refer to ambiguities of color symbolism in his description of Madame Eglentyne’s rosary, which was “of smal coral” and “gauded al with grene.” Critics have questioned the purpose of the gauds but no one seems to have wondered why they were green, or why the beads were red; for in Chaucer’s day the substance coral was synonymous with the color red.

Francis Manley argues that Chaucer relied on a particular property of coral as a love charm for ironic effect, while John Block Friedman presents the case for medieval belief in the apotropaic power of coral. I would not deny either possibility, either of which would deepen the irony, except to point out that among its other properties coral was also said to ward off thunderbolts, to cure gout or sore eyes, even to assist in childbirth, and that neither interpretation explains why the gauds are green.

Notwithstanding Chaucer’s probable familiarity with at least some of the apotropaic or magical powers of coral as recorded in medieval lapidaries, we can be much more certain about his knowledge of color
symbolism; and, given the care with which descriptive details are chosen in the General Prologue (as Lowes believes, nowhere more consummately than in this portrait), it is unlikely that he chose his colors randomly. Indeed there is every reason to expect the rosary, as a religious symbol, to be the focal point for reference to the Prioress’s faith.

Chauncey Wood rightly asserts that “the first three portraits prepare us to expect a description of the nun’s garb, and also to anticipate a sign in that clothing, just as in the earlier portraits.” But when he concludes that Chaucer hardly touches upon the Prioress’s array as a sign of her “condicioun” I think he overlooks the very sign he expected to find and that Chaucer surely provided. As Gail Gibson aptly states, “array in the context of a medieval pilgrimage is not only the sociological clue to mankind’s ‘condicioun’ and ‘degree’...but is an image for the acceptance of the Christian life or its rejection.”

The appropriateness of the colors red and green for a nun’s rosary may be taken from the use of red throughout the Middle Ages to symbolize caritas, or Christian love, and martyrdom, and the use of green to symbolize faith, hope and charity. Robert Grosseteste thus explains why the Castle of Love is painted with these colors:

The grene colour...
Is the treuth of our lady that aye was stedefast.
The rede colour...
Was brenmand loue of God and man.

Amadeus of Lausanne similarly describes the Virgin’s apparel as “green in the faith and hope of the eternal,” and red “betokening the love of God and of one’s neighbor,” just as Dante depicts caritas in red, hope in green. In Ameto, perhaps drawing on Dante, Boccaccio depicts Fortitude (who bears witness to Faith and Charity) as wearing a rose-colored robe with green lining, while Deguileville’s Pilgrimage of the Lyf of the Manhode depicts the “Scrippe” of Faith as “of greene selk and heng bi a greene tissu,” spotted with drops of blood in token of martyrs, “for colour that is red up on greene chaumpe it is wel fair.”

A Wycliffite account of John’s vision in the Apocalypse employs precious stones to the same effect:

John saw how a seete was put in heuene, as it were a trone, and a lord sittyenge peronne, as it were Iesu Crist. And he pat sat vpon pis seete was licly in colour to pes two stonys: iaspis is pe furste stoon, pe whiche stoon is grene of colour, and sardynys pe secounde stoon, of reed colour as
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he brennyde. And pes two tellon to men pat Crist oure lord is ful of counfort, as grene colour makup men glad and bryngup counfort to per ygen; pe reede colour techep men how Crist counfortup mennis charite, and makup hem boolde to be martiris, and schede per blood for his loue.12

Although jasper could be found in nine different colors, each with its own attributes, the best jasper according to lapidarists was green in token of divine grace, and of faith, hope and charity:

Seint John seith vs in pe Appocalipe pat in pe fundement of pe heunely kyngdome of Jerusalem pe Iaspe is first, and perfore hit signifieth thre vertues pt shulde be in every gode man. Iaspe is pat stone pat is cleped feith, the second hope, & pe thridde charite, & he pat grene Iaspe beholdeth ayeins day, of pe feith of Ihesu Xrist he shulde haue mynde.

Thus Wyclif understood green jasper to represent charity.13

A fourteenth-century mystic, Mechtild of Hackeborn, who relates red to martyrdom, and green to innocence, faith and charity, applies the symbols alternately to clothing and to stones—the emerald and ruby, but also the “rede stonys of coralle” by which “sche vnderstode the rede passyoun of his humanyte.”14 In Pearl the emerald is a symbol for unfading faith; the ruby a symbol for Christ’s martyrdom.15 Lydgate for the same reason refers, in one of his poems, to “emeraud greene” as “voie of doubilnesse,” and to the ruby (“among martirs”) as “trouthe’s chamioun,”16 paralleling Eglentyne’s lament for the little clerigeon in her tale as “this gemme of chastite, this emeraude./ And eek of martyrdom the ruby bright.” Obviously the symbolism of these stones depends upon their color.

Having in mind the symbolic appropriateness of red and green for a nun, wherein lies their ambiguity? It stems from the use, in secular contexts, of red—the color of the rose—as a symbol for ardent or carnal love,17 and the use of green to symbolize inconstancy or “doubilnesse.” In characteristic medieval fashion, in bono has its parallel in malo. Just as the rose in Christian tradition symbolized martyrdom and was the flower of the Virgin,18 in secular love poetry it was the flower of Venus and symbolized carnal love.19 Chaucer alludes to both traditions when he names his prioress “Eglentyne,” after the wild rose, and provides her with a coral rosary. Among substantives used habitually in fourteenth-century comparisons was coral, in the expression “lips like coral,” which was equivalent to saying “lips red as
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coral” or “red as rose.”20 Chauntecleer’s comb, for example, is “redder than the fyn coral,” and is surely indicative of his amorous inclinations. The most prominent feature in the Ellesmere artist’s depiction of the Prioress is the red rosary on her left arm, which may be compared to an identical rosary worn by Dame Abstinence-Strained in a manuscript illustration of the Roman de la Rose.21 The rosary provides a visual connection to the Prioress’s lips, so “softe and reed,” complementing the ambiguity of the motto on her brooch.

Coral rosaries appear frequently as bequests in medieval wills, attesting to their popularity, and as Friedman observes “seem to have been the fashion in aristocratic fifteenth-century households.” In fact they were already so fashionable in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries—obviously prized more for adornment than for religion—that they were denounced by both the Dominicans and Augustinians.22 Perhaps by the middle of the fifteenth century much of the moral criticism had waned. In 1450 Sir Thomas Cumberworth provides in his will for the distribution of rosaries to the heads of eleven religious houses, “likon of yam a pare of bedys of corall as far as that I haue may laste, & after yiff yam gette beds.” To his nephew’s wife, Dame Agnes Constabull, he leaves “a pare bedes of corall gawdid with gold & a ryng with A diademund yerin, & my boke of the talys of cantyrbury.”23 In 1463 coral beads are mentioned in the sumptuary laws of Leipzig, which forbade maid-servants from wearing or carrying them, just as the Provost of Paris in 1459 confiscated, along with other jewelry, a coral rosary belonging to a prostitute because such adornment should only be worn by “honest” women.24 Presumably the real offense committed by both the Parisian prostitute and the maid-servants of Leipzig was that they dared to ape the dress of fashionable ladies. But the moral issue had not been laid entirely to rest even by the end of the fifteenth century: the French preacher, Olivier Maillard, thunders against coquettes who wear “les patenotres en or ou en gect” and jewelry “du corail,” affirming (as summarized by his biographer) that “les objets de piété n’avaient d’autre valeur que celle d’un ornamento et d’un objet de luxe. Le chapelet, la croix d’or, les patenotres d’or valant 50 ducats fisaient partie intégrante de la toillette féminine.”25

The role of rosaries as jewelry among fashionable women in Chaucer’s milieu may be seen in a letter written by Lady Zouche (related by marriage to Chaucer’s friend Sir William Beauchamp) to a friend in 1402: “I would a preyde 30w pat 3e wolde haue ordeyned me a peyre bedes of gold for my lady my moder with ye queynest pater nosterster yat 3e kan fynde wat so euer they coste.”26 An idea of the “coste” may be had from the value assigned two such rosaries (both coral) listed in a London grocer’s inventory for 1391. One of these, at
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23s. 4d., compares to a pound of silver valued at 26s. in the same inventory.27 Sumptuary legislation enacted in 1363 had prohibited all but the highest men of state and clergy from wearing brooches of gold; when this legislation was reaffirmed in 1406 it extended (or clarified) the prohibition to include both brooches and rosaries of gold. Although jeweled or coral rosaries are not specifically mentioned, certainly they fall within the intent of the law. Whatever the practical effect of this legislation, there can be no question about the intended illegality of the brooch on the Prioress's rosary, and it is just possible that the two references to "ouches ou bedes d'or" in the 1406 law reflect a practice, by those ostentatiously inclined, of wearing one ornament on the other.28 Gower's sacrilegious gay blade (CA V, 7066), in order to attract women at Mass, "his croket kembd and theron set/ A Nouche with a chapelet."29

While the vanity implied by the Prioress's use of coral beads is an essential part of Chaucer's irony, there is perhaps a deeper irony related to the rose-chaplet origin of the rosary. Eithne Wilkins has pointed out the linking symbolism in Jan van Eyck's Virgin of the Fountain, "where the matching colour of the coral ave-beads and the roses clearly enough establishes the connection between the beads and the rosarium."30 The association of coral prayer-beads with the rose-chaplet, states Wilkins, became explicit in art during the fifteenth century. An earlier example may be found in the lower margin of a fourteenth-century manuscript of Joinville's Vie de Saint Louis (ca. 1360) where the garland about to be received by a kneeling lover from his mistress appears to be made of coral beads rather than roses.31 In any case Flügel cites the use in Old French of the expression "pater-noster chapelet rosaire."32 Thus the Prioress's rosary in addition to its obvious religious function may also, in this word-portrait of a romance heroine, have been intended to suggest the similarly shaped red chaplet employed ubiquitously in medieval art to symbolize acceptance of a lover's suit.33

The carnal meaning of the rose, inextricably associated with its color, is the subject of the Roman de la Rose, while the chaplet "of roses reed" that adorns both Ydélnes and the God of Love in this work (Romaunt 565-6, 905-8) appears again in the Knight's Tale (1102-4), the Legend of Good Women (228) and the House of Fame (134-5), as it does in Machaut's Dit dou Vergier (181), Lydgate's Troy Book (II, 5723) and Reson and Sensuallyte (1572-4), a translation of the Echecs Amoureux. In a gloss to the Echecs the rose is identified with "amorous life...or that which principally seeks carnal delight"34—a gloss perfectly in accord with Lydgate's explanation (TB II, 2534-5)
that red roses signify “herty pou3tis glade/ Of 3onge folkis pat ben amerous.”35

The color red seems to have been used with this symbolism in mind in Chaucer’s descriptions of the Wife of Bath and Absolon, both of whom are red of hue and wear red stockings. Noting this, Haldeen Braddy in one of the few attempts to sort out Chaucer’s use of color symbolism concludes that “more than coincidence is suggested by the almost identical depiction of these two similarly amorous characters.”36 He might have noted that the same idea informs the description of another amorous character, Sir Thopas, whose lips are “red as rose;/ His rode...lyk scarlet in grayn”—and that the Wife embarks on her “visitacions” dressed in “gaye scarlet gytes” (D 559).

Braddy argues that Chaucer follows Machaut in using green to signify infidelity. Several passages are pertinent. In the Squire’s Tale, Canace, having heard and sympathized with the falcon’s misfortune, constructs a cage covered on the inside with blue velvet to signify that women are true, and painted green on the outside to show that male birds are false:

And by hire beddes heed she made a mewe,
And covered it with veluettes blewe,
In signe of troughe that is in wommen sene.
And al withoute, the mewe is peynted grene,
In which were peynted alle thise false fowles. (643-7)37

In Anelida and Arcite (146) several colors are grouped together, with green signifying “newfangenesse,” or disloyalty. Blue is the color for loyalty. Arcite, whose “herte was elleswhere, newe and grene” (180), later appears to Anelida in a dream “clad in asure.../ For to be trewe” (330-2). Equally explicit is the poem Against Women Unconstant with its telling refrain: “In stede of blew, thus may ye were al grene.”

Braddy points to an identical line in Machaut’s Le Voir Dit and suggests, since both poems concern the same general idea, that Machaut was Chaucer’s model. A similar line appears in La Louange des Dames (193). Elsewhere, this poem provides what amounts to a treatise on the significance of colors in courtly love poetry:

Qui des couleurs saroit à droit jugier
Et dire la droite signefiance,
On deveroit le fin asur prisier
Dessus toutes; je n’en fais pas doubtance.
Car jaune, c’est fausseté,
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Blanc est joie, vert est nouvelleté,
Vermeil ardeur, noir deuil; mais ne doubt mie
Que fin azur loyauté signifié.38

With this list as a model it is easy to imagine the substance of the
courtly love-debates, using different colored inks, initiated by Charles
VI in the year 1401.39

Were Braddy correct, we would have to assume that Lydgate in turn
adopted the symbolism of these colors from Chaucer and Machaut when
describing the deception of women (TB I, 2088-92):

But, trust me wel, al is but apparence.
\(\text{Pei can schewe on, and another mene,}\)
Whos blewe is li7y died in-to grene;
For vnder floures depeint of stabilnes,
\(\text{Pe serpent dareth of newfongilnes.}\)

Or the Goddess Fortuna in the *Fall of Princes* (VI, 43-6):

Hir habit was of manyfold colours:
Wachet bleuh of feyned stedfastnesse,
Hir gold allaied like sonne in wattri shours,
Meynt with liht greene for chaung and doublinesse.40

Or, again, the fickle Delilah (*FP* I, 6446-7): “In stede of bleu, which
stedfast is and clene/ She loued chaunges off many dyuers greene.”

Considering the use made of symbolic blue and green by Froissart
and Deschamps, as well as by Lydgate, it is unlikely that Machaut was
Chaucer’s sole model. Moreover, Ydleness in the *Romaunt of the
Rose* (573) wears green as do followers of the quickly fading flower in
*The Floure and the Leaf*, and Rosiall and Lust in *The Court of Love*
(816, 1059). Boccaccio and Gower demonstrate that they, too,
understood the secular symbolism of this color: in a tale from the
*Decameron* (7.9) a young wife about to be unfaithful to her husband
appears before dinner guests dressed in a green velvet robe, while in the
*Mirour de l’Oemme* (17893-8) gay widows wear green to attract new
lovers to their bedrooms. Whatever the case for literary influence, it is
significant that so many poets adopt identical symbolism for these
colors. Huizinga points out that by the fifteenth century the symbolic
meaning attached to blue and green had become “so marked and peculiar
as to make them almost unfit for usual dress.”41

Insofar as Madame Eglentyne is linked by inclination and the
terminology of love poetry to the court rather than the convent, it
would have been difficult for Chaucer’s audience, steeped in the
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symbolism of blue and green, not to wonder about the appropriateness of her green gauds, which ought, perhaps, to have been blue. Blue, after all, was Mary’s color—the color of heaven—ubiquitous in religious contexts such as Pearl, Usk’s Testament of Love (II, xii, 45-7), The Castle of Love, Julian of Norwich’s Book of Showings, or the Mirour de l’Omme in Gower’s statement that “par l’un colour [blue] est entendu/Constance en le service dieu.” Green, on the other hand, might easily assume in religious contexts the satirical connotations it bore in secular contexts; it is so described in the Summa Virtutum de Remedii Anime (with which Chaucer was intimately familiar) when Gregory glosses Matthew 23, stating: “The hypocrite is green in the color of saintliness without bringing forth good deeds.”

Why, then, are the Prioress’s gauds green instead of blue? The answer, I believe, lies with the intentionally ambiguous description of the rosary. Irony is achieved by omission, in the fact that Chaucer did not choose either heavenly blue or virginal white, and by the ambiguities inherent to the colors red and green within a context intentionally suggestive of courtly love poetry. Simply by his choice of colors Chaucer transforms a well-known symbol of religious devotion into one deliberately suggestive of carnal appetite and hypocrisy. Jean Leclercq’s observation concerning color symbolism in monastic tradition is equally relevant to the Prioress: “All these interpretations may appear far-fetched in a period when the symbolism of colors and precious stones is scarcely used except by poets. But for the ancients they were founded on reality.” Madame Eglenyte’s rosary, such as Chaucer paints it, is not only the most conspicuous aspect of her array, but is arguably the most conspicuous sign in the General Prologue.

NOTES


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6Gail McMurray Gibson, “Resurrection as Dramatic Icon in the Shipman’s Tale,” in *Signs and Symbols in Chaucer’s Poetry*, p. 106.


9*Magnificat: Homilies in Praise of the Blessed Virgin Mary by Bernard of Clairvaux and Amadeus of Lausanne* (Kalamazoo, 1979), p. 73.


15Blanch, pp. 60, 64 and 71-2.

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17Examples would be Lady Meed's "red scarlet" robe in Piers Plowman (II, 15); Machaut's description of Love's colors in Remede de Fortune (901-10), in which red signifies "amoureus ardures"; a reference in the Court of Love (172-4) to the devotees of Venus whose mantles are painted "with flames red as fire; Outward to shew their inward hooft desire"; the fountain of red marble in Boccaccio's Amorosa Visione; Venus's "cote y-lacyd al of Red" in Lydgate's Reson and Sensuallyte (1556); and the red sleeve given Lancelot by the Maid of Astolat to wear as her token in the tournament at Camelot. The Works of Sir Thomas Malory, ed. Eugène Vinaver, (Oxford, 1973), 2: 1067-8. For examples of this symbolism in medieval art see Paul F. Watson, The Garden of Love in Tuscan Art of the Early Renaissance (Philadelphia, 1979), pp. 18, 25, 31, 96-7 and 111-12.

18See Charles Joret, La Rose dans l'Antiquité et au Moyen Âge (1982; rpt. Genève, 1970), pp. 245-58; Barbara Seward, The Symbolic Rose (New York, 1960), pp. 22 ff.; and Eithne Wilkins, The Rose-Garden Game: A Tradition of Beads and Flowers (New York, 1969), pp. 105-25, who states (p. 106): "Although the development began in the twelfth century, it was especially during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that the rose, rose-bush, rose-garden, and rose-garland were used, with almost monotonous persistence, in Marian symbolism."

19See Seward, The Symbolic Rose, pp. 11-14 and 19; Lydgate's Temple of Glas, ed. J. Schick, EETS ES 60 (1891; rpt. London, 1924), p. 99n; and Guy de Tervarent, Attributs et Symboles dans l'Art Profane, 1450-1600: Dictionnaire d'un Langage Perdu (Genève, 1958), s.v. rose. D. W. Robertson Jr. points out that the rose for Rabanus Maurus could have meanings either in bono or in malo—as an unfading flower of martyrdom or as a means to describe heretics who "crown themselves with garlands of roses obviously associated with lechery and idolatry."


21Friedman, p. 304n.

22Wilkins, pp. 48-9.


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25Alexandre Samouillan, Olivier Maillard: Sa Prédication et Son Temps (Toulouse, 1891), pp. 312 and 320.


30Wilkins, p. 184; and see pp. 185-8 and 169-72.

31Reproduced in Bibliothèque Nationale, Manuscrits à Peintures en France du XIIIe au XVIe Siècle; Supplément au Catalogue des Manuscrits (Paris, 1955), plate XV.

32Ewald Flügel, “Prolegomena and Side-Notes of the Chaucer Dictionary,” Anglia, 34 (1911), 393. Hinnebusch states that the thirteenth-century habit of the English Dominicans included “a belt of leather, from which the friar suspended his handkerchief, knife, and purse, and the lay-brother his paternoster chaplet. The Rosary was added to the habit at a later date.” William A. Hinnebusch, The Early English Friars Preachers (Rome, 1951), p. 244. Thus the term “paternoster chaplet” was familiar in England from the thirteenth century.

33See, for example, Watson, plates 22, 27 and 71; Jurgis Baltrąšaitis, Réveils et Prodigues: Le Gothique Fantastique (Paris, 1960), fig. 32; and D. W. Robertson Jr., A Preface to Chaucer (Princeton, 1963), figs. 23, 25, 59, 60 and 63. An example of the sexual connotations of the chaplet in literature may be taken from the refrain of a thirteenth-century French ballade:

Bergeronnette
tres douce compaignete,
doneiez moi vostre chapelet
doniez moi vostre chapelet

Edgar Piguet, L’Evolution de la Pastourelle du XIIe Siècle à Nos Jours (Bâle, Switzerland, 1927), p. 159.

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38 La Louange des Dames, ed. Nigel Wilkins (Edinburgh, 1972), Ballade 176. See also Remade de Fortune, 1901-10.


42 For additional examples see James Woodrow Hassell Jr., Middle French Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases (Toronto, 1982), B112 and V75.


THREE WORLDS IN SIDNEY’S DEFENCE

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Sir Philip Sidney’s A Defence of Poetry, probably written in the winter of 1579-1580, is the greatest of all Renaissance critical statements. The criticisms of the Italians Mazzoni and Tasso in the 1580’s bear a close resemblance: the Neo-Platonic philosophy of the Florentine Academy informs its crucial arguments; mannerist stylistics can be discerned; the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Horace and Scaliger are directly evident; and the sixteenth century’s concern for legitimate fiction finds advancement in it.¹ Its salient affinities, however, especially in its philosophy of practical wisdom, are with the intellectual milieu of the Northern Humanists.² The greatness of A Defence of Poetry, as Walter Jackson Bate has stated, is in its embrace, expression and transcendence of its historical context to such a degree that is signally presents “the basic source and inspiration of the classical tradition” and the new birth of that powerful vision of human perfectability in literature, philosophy and the arts which is the quintessence of the Renaissance.³

This vision of man dominates A Defence of Poetry and is central to it. It is a complex image, most strikingly dramatic and autobiographical, acting in the historical “first world” of courts and camps, and it is also creative, professional, abstract and representative in the “second world” of human knowledge, art and literature. Ultimately, it is a sublime image of man’s capabilities, an heroic conception from the “green” or “golden world” of poetry.⁴ The relationship of these three worlds constitutes the patterns of Renaissance imagination in A Defence of Poetry.

Sidney’s experience at the court of Maximilian II begins in history. It is depicted as an historical representation. At the same time, the Defence itself is beginning in historical fact, and later, when Sidney commences his survey of “the state of the art,” he again will have history for his point of departure. Yet the reminiscence about riding lessons with Jon Pietro Pugliano shifts rapidly from an historical setting to the subjectivity of Pugliano himself, and we are made intimate with what is, for him, a unified philosophy that he projects upon reality. Moreover, this “second world” of Pugliano’s contains another “place of withdrawal” within his subjective field.⁵ These are the three significant fields of reference to be distinguished in the Pugliano paradigm—“first world,” “second world” and “green world”—
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and I employ the Bergerian trinity because it permits distinctions among the categories of history, art and imagination. Berger discusses the twofold identification of “normal world” and “green world” that Northrop Frye presented in his essay, “The Argument of Comedy” (1949). Frye, for instance, would identify the Forest of Arden in As You Like It as the “green world,” but Berger modifies Frye’s suggestion that the sanctuary of Duke Senior is at one remove only from a so-called “normal” or “first-world.” Berger’s positioning of the field of artifice as the “second world” between the “first world” of history and the “green world” of imaginary settings at another remove within a work of art allows for identification of those consciously designated and counterfactual forms created by Renaissance artists, and, I believe, by Sidney in his Defence, to demonstrate the relationships among fiction, representational reality, and reality.

The protean Sidney himself implicitly posits three spheres in his “nature,” “second nature” and “another nature” that “the poet...doth grow....” As a man of action, he is the opposite of his portrayal of the moral philosopher with his “contempt of outward things” (Defence, p. 83), and his positive delight in worldly matters, a genuine Renaissance attitude, is ubiquitous to the Defence. More importantly, the earthly, objective world is the field of human realization. Sidney, like Aristotle with whom he concurs, champions praxis above gnosis (Defence, pp. 83, 91) as the supreme value of knowledge, and Sidney’s discourse, in the rhetorical style of an oral delivery, repeatedly addresses itself to a practical audience.

Sidney’s knowledge of his “unelected vocation” (Defence, p. 73), poetry, is not the knowledge of the rhetoricians and grammarians, but the skill through practice of the born poet (Defence, p. 111), and because he wants to demonstrate the absolutely real value of imaginative works he could as soon write an unpoeitic discourse as he could deny the possibility of poetry’s ability to feed man’s whole being. The mode of A Defence of Poetry, in this sense, is existential; that is, it is a testimony to poetic self-realization, and Sidney authenticates its lively force in his frank self-dramatization as poet-critic, the first in the extraordinary tradition of English poet-critics. Appropriately, since this demonstration is to assert and emphasize poetry’s ontological and practical natures, the presentation of “some more available proofs” (Defence, p. 74) would include, in addition to rhetorically conventional ones, those kinds of examples, or fictionalizations, that the poet-critic could utilize to best recommend the claims of his profession. For Sidney, poetry is the educator of education, and it should come as no surprise that his treatise is an artistically executed one. Sidney “...beginneth not with obscure
definitions, which must blur the margin with interpretations, and load the memory with doubtfulness; but he cometh to you with words set in delightful proportion...” (Defence, p. 92), and this is precisely what the Defence does, by its organization of history, poetical knowledge and fictions, through its highly dramatic focus and form.

The artistic, dramatic and fiction-like aspects of the Defence have been recognized and acknowledged in different ways by many critics, and although one recent critical commentary approximates my interpretation, it stops with the recognition of the centrality of fictions and fictionalizations in the Defence, rejecting the view of the Defence inherently exemplifying the theory of imagination that it advocates.9 Two main reasons why this interpretation of self-exemplification in the Defence goes unacknowledged are an insufficient appreciation for the pervasive drama in the Defence, particularly the interaction between Sidney and the audience which he regularly addresses, and an incomplete account of the role assigned to the Renaissance conception of fiction, especially, as it applies to fictional expression in the Defence, fiction’s intrinsic profit for the audience as manifested in its indicators of dependency upon the living world into which it finally enters.10 This interpretation, however, is much more complex than any straightforward employment of poetry as denominated by Sidney, and the Defence’s aesthetic value is of a much different order than a simply logical application of his view of poetry, which is essentially mimetic, but also surreal and intuitive. For Sidney, there is a relationship with which he is very concerned in the Defence, between knowing only, knowing and doing, and what constitutes true learning. Knowing only would not actually be satisfactory learning. The Defence, then, epitomizes his own philosophy of putting into action his poetical knowledge and his poetry by means of accomplished artistry. On the other hand, this represents a distinction between Sidney’s metaphysics and aesthetics, and since Sidney’s philosophy embraces a noble, heroic, active, aristocratic view of man, he is hardly guilty of the “vulgar didacticism” of which he has been accused.11 Apart from the “right virtuous” use that he recommends, his aesthetic is virtually an autonomous one. He characterizes what poetry was for the Greeks and the Romans, for instance, “in a full wrong divinity” (Defence, p. 80), and he stresses repeatedly throughout his discourse a difference between how poets may use poetry and “...the material point of poesy” itself (Defence, p. 117; also, pp. 79, 87, 89, 97, 104, 108). A corollary to this foremost mission to which Sidney personally assigns poetry is his candid admittance of self-interest and the defending of his profession as poet, and in addition, the didactic aspects of the Defence also can be
seen partially as a typical Renaissance strategy of enhancing the value of fictions by countering the charge of frivolity.\textsuperscript{12}

After the very brief \textit{exordium} about his experiences with Pugliano, which is recounted in a direct, first-person, almost lyrical voice, Sidney immediately confronts the reputation of poetry as “the laughing-stock of children” by turning to his audience:

And first, truly, to all them that, professing learning, inveigh against poetry may justly be objected that they go very near to ungratefulness, to seek to deface that which, in the noblest nations and languages that are known, hath been the first light-giver to ignorance, and first nurse, whose milk by little and little enabled them to feed afterwards of tougher knowledges. And will they now play the hedgehog that, being received into the den, drave out his host? Or rather the vipers, that with their birth kill their parents? (\textit{Defence}, p. 74)

This audience is comprised of various groups. There are the potential learners, the enemies of poetry in particular, and, in a broader historical sense, humankind in general, for in such terms as “den,” “host,” “vipers,” and “kill” in the context of the two metaphorical aphorisms, the images and tones resound powerfully in a Hebraic and Biblical scope.

This segment of poetry’s detractors is essentially ignorant and cannot even recognize a good thing such as the works of “right poets”:

For these indeed do merely make to imitate, and imitate both to delight and teach; and delight, to move men to take that goodness in hand, which without delight they would fly as from a stranger; and teach, to make them know that goodness whereunto they are moved—which being the noblest scope to which ever any learning was directed, yet want there not idle tongues to bark at them. (\textit{Defence}, p. 81)

Just as conflicts between social classes are strongest where the differences are slightest, so, too, do these “hedgehogs,” “vipers,” and “dogs” attack the unaffected life:

Is it then the Pastoral poem which is disliked? (For perchance where the hedge is lowest they will soonest leap over.) (\textit{Defence}, p. 94)

To appreciate the positive values of the arts and poetry is beyond this group of scoffers who are sick and tired of learning—and living:
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But truly I imagine it falleth out with these poet-whippers, as with some good women, who often are sick, but in faith they cannot tell where; so the name of poetry is odious to them, but neither his cause nor effects, neither the sum that contains him, nor the particularities descending from him, give any fast handle to their carping dispraise. (*Defence*, p. 98)

They are a formidable opposition to poets, against whom "they cry out with open mouth as if they had overshot Robin Hood, that Plato banished them out of his commonwealth" (*Defence*, p. 102), showing "their mistaking of Plato (under whose lion's skin they would make an ass-like braying against poesy)" (*Defence*, p. 108), but this opposition is against more than poetry, and it perpetrates such prejudices against all learning and human decency that this antagonism begins to appear as human ignorance rather than mere critical senselessness:

First, truly I note not only in these *misó mousoi* [transliteration mine], poet-haters, but in all that kind of people who seek a praise by dispraising others, that they do prodigally spend a great many wandering words in quips and scoffs, carping and taunting at each thing which, by stirring the spleen, may stay the brain from a through-becolding the worthiness of the subject. (*Defence*, p. 99)

This is not merely an entertaining game among critics, nor, as T. S. Eliot asserts, are Sidney's "*misó mousoi* against whom he defends poetry...men of straw."13 Eliot, characterizing Sidney as secure in his assumptions about poetry, is hardly aware of the real sixteenth-century battles between historical and literary forms of representation. Sidney's observations are applied to human nature in general when a larger historical background of pillage and destruction is sketched:

Marry, this argument, though it be levelled against poetry, yet is it indeed a chainshot against all learning, or bookishness as they commonly term it. Of such mind were certain Goths, of whom it is written that, having in the spoil of a famous city taken a fair library, one hangman (belike fit to execute the fruits of their wits) who had murdered a great number of bodies, would have set fire in it: no, said another very gravely, take heed what you do, for while they are busy about these toys, we shall with more leisure conquer their countries. This indeed is the ordinary doctrine of ignorance, and many words sometimes I have heard spent in it. (*Defence*, p. 105)
Images of books and libraries in flames easily come to mind. Sidney’s classical oration is clearly, on this level, a sustained discussion about the human condition. This is the “first world” of the Defence. It is that field of the historical about which the discourse is explicitly concerned and to which, in one direction, its commentary is massively aimed.

This temporal setting includes “the most barbarous and simple” (Defence, p. 76), and Sidney’s anthropological survey of uncivilized peoples near the beginning of his narratio is one view of the image of man. The universal image of human perfectability, positively affirmed in the Defence with an optimism characteristic of the Renaissance, finds its complement in these impressions of animalistic degeneration, for “our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it” (Defence, p. 79). These divergent human images reflect a Biblical version of history and mankind and generally correspond to the late medieval and Renaissance attitude towards human depravity and the will of God. This bifurcated concept of history is a combination of the Augustinian interpretation of human events and destiny as a fulfillment of the divine plan of the Judeo-Christian deity and a Boethian explanation for man’s experience of the randomness of existence. Sidney places a supreme value in, and throughout the Defence is highly sophisticated with, his religious intelligence, as in one of his discussions of “the holy David”:

...for what else is the awaking his musical instruments...but a heavenly poesy, wherein almost he showeth himself a passionate lover of that unspeakable and everlasting beauty to be seen by the eyes of the mind, only cleared by faith? But truly now having named him, I fear me I seem to profane that holy name, applying it to poetry, which is among us thrown down to so ridiculous an estimation. But they that with quiet judgements will look a little deeper into it, shall find the end and working of it such as, being rightly applied, deserveth not to be scourged out of the Church of God. (Defence, p. 77)

These “quiet judgements” of looking “a little deeper” to “find the end and working of it” refer, in one way, to the difference between the nature of religious, or revealed truth, which is epistemically prime, though hermeneutic, and that kind of historically verifiable truth which came to acquire such a dominant position in the epistemologies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In another way, they refer to poetry’s useful value in relation to the appearance of revealed truth, and these ideas are not incompatible with St. Augustine’s:
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For even the stories of the poets and the masters of literature are better than these deceitful traps. Verses, poems, and "Medea flying through the air" are undoubtedly of more use to one man than the Five Elements, variously tricked out to correspond with the Five Dens of Darkness—all of which have no existence at all and are death to the believer. For I can turn verses and poems into true nourishment, and if I declaimed "Medea flying," I was not asserting a fact, nor, if I heard someone else declaiming the lines, did I believe them to be true.14 (Confessions, III, 6)

In such a cosmology, counterfactual forms like the ones that Sidney promotes are potentially closer to truth than other forms of knowledge that abstract data from nature according to qualified, validly constructed methods. In terms of the Boethian vision of human destiny, where fortune deals good and bad luck, provoking man to utilize a sensibility for paradox,

The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool. (As You Like It, V, II)

Sidney makes reference to Boethius (Defence, pp. 93, 94), and also to Erasmus (Defence, p. 100), and in his comical and paradoxical portrayals of the representatives of knowledge, the moral philosopher, historian, astronomer (who, "looking to the stars, might fall in a ditch") (Defence, p. 82), "...his cousin the geometer" (Defence, p. 102), the other practitioners of the "serving sciences" (Defence, pp. 82, 84), and also, in the keen assertion "...that even our Saviour Christ vouchsafed to use the flowers..." (Defence, p. 99) of poetry, Sidney's witty and ironic intellectualizations derive less from any single work like Nicholas of Cusa's De Docta Ignorantia than they do from the sixteenth century's abiding consciousness of human folly. This theme is explicit in the important etymological passage on the historical and linguistic transmittance of the Greek derivative of "to make" as "poet":

...I know not whether by luck or wisdom, we Englishmen have met with the Greeks in calling him a maker. (Defence, p. 77)

"Luck or wisdom" invokes the dual, Augustinian and Boethian components of events, and also suggests the connection between the "first world" of history and the "second world" of human knowledge. Sidney, with Wotton and Pugliano at the court of the Emperor, almost could have been persuaded to have wished himself a horse, but being "a
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piece of a logician” (Defence, p. 73), he went ahead and framed his cavalier narrative in the form of a classical oration.

The classical form of the discourse is the basic structure of artifice in the Defence. The knowledge and allusions—classical, mythological, religious, literary, medieval, contemporary Renaissance—are rich and extensive, as scholarly source-studies have demonstrated, yet the style and tone in Sidney’s discourse are playful, witty and entertaining, reflecting Sidney’s attitudes towards knowledge and his objectives in the Defence. These tones are quickly introduced in the narratio, first, during the description of poets as the original deliverers of knowledge:

So, as Amphion was said to move stones with his poetry to build Thebes, and Orpheus to be listened to by beasts—indeed stony and beastly people—(Defence, p. 74)

Then Plato’s writings are characterized:

...for all standeth upon dialogues, wherein he feigneth many honest burgesses of Athens to speak of such matters, that, if they had been set on the rack, they would never have confessed them... (Defence, p. 75)

Immediately the historiographers are described:

...(although their lips sound of things done, and verity be written in their foreheads)....either stale or usurped of poetry their passionate describing of passions, the many particularities of battles, which no man could affirm; or, if that be denied me, long orations put in the mouths of great kings and captains, which it is certain they never pronounced. (Defence, p. 75)

Soon follows understatement:

But since the authors of most of our sciences were the Romans, and before them the Greeks, let us a little stand upon their authorities, but even so far as to see what names they have given unto this now scorned skill. (Defence, p. 76)

This is not “the philosopher, setting down with thorny arguments the bare rule” (Defence, p. 85), but is a much more lyrical, intelligent persona:

But truly now having named him, I fear me I seem to profane that holy name, applying it to poetry, which is
among us thrown down to so ridiculous an estimation. 
(Defence, p. 77)

It is a dramatic voice, the advocate arguing in the court of truth for his defendant:

...and if in neither of these anatomies he be condemnable, I hope we shall obtain a more favourable sentence....
(Defence, p. 82)

but:

...because we have ears as well as tongues, and that the lightest reasons that may be will seem to weigh greatly, if nothing be put in the counterbalance, let us hear, and, as well as we can, ponder what objections be made....(Defence, p. 99)

At other times it is the voice of an actor playing with other actors:

...the moral philosophers, whom, me thinketh, I see coming towards me with a sullen gravity.... (Defence, p. 83)

There is the deeply moving scene:

Alas, Love, I would thou couldst as well defend thyself as thou canst offend others. I would those on whom thou dost attend could either put thee away, or yield good reason why they keep thee. (Defence, pp. 103-104)

Frequently, it is a parody of the critic:

This much (I hope) will be given me, that the Greeks with some probability of reason gave him the name above all names of learning. (Defence, p. 79)

He says more or less than he knows:

...whereof Aesop's tales give good proof: whose pretty allegories, stealing under the formal tales of beasts.... (Defence, p. 87)

The great authorities especially confound him:
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Thus far Aristotle: which reason of his (as all his) is most full of reason.... (Defence, p. 88)

and:

...far-fet maxims of philosophy, which (especially if they were Platonic).... (Defence, p. 93)

He has his quibbles:

But if (fie of such a but).... (Defence, p. 121)

and:

...I think (and think I think rightly).... (Defence, p. 99)

He is a bit of the bombastic buffoon:

But what? Methinks I deserve to be pounded for straying from poetry to oratory. (Defence, p. 119)

He speaks in the brassy tones of false modesty:

...I conjure you all that have had the evil luck to read this ink-wasting toy of mine, even in the name of the nine Muses.... (Defence, pp. 120-121)

Other times the voice is hardly a parody of "pedenteria" (Defence, p. 73). It is more akin to Sidney's own literary voice, brilliant with sprezzatura, giving the appearance and effect of ease and spontaneity while conveying important points in the arguments and designs:

...glad will they be to hear the tales of Hercules, Achilles, Cyrus, Aeneas; and, hearing them, must needs hear the right description of wisdom, valour, and justice; which, if they had been barely, that is to say philosophically, set out, they would swear they be brought to school again. (Defence, p. 92)

His description of the satirist is terse and incisive:

...who sportingly never leaveth till he make a man laugh at folly, and at length ashamed, to laugh at himself, which he cannot avoid without avoiding the folly.... (Defence, p. 95)
There is a discussion of “rebel Caesar” (Defence, p. 90) and his theories about the lessons of history, images of noses and ears amputated, children preferring “their physic at their ears than at their mouth” (Defence, p. 92), “…the hard-hearted evil men…content to be delighted…as if they took a medicine of cherries” (Defence, p. 93), “Alexander and Darius, when they strave who should be cock of this world’s dunghill” (Defence, p. 95), a clown thrust in “by head and shoulders” (Defence, p. 114), “Sphinx” (Defence, p. 105), the “Tower of Babylon’s curse” (Defence, p. 119), and many more instances of humor and wit, of which the above examples are but a small group.

The dramatic, highly self-conscious artifice is everywhere apparent in the treatise. For Sidney, all human knowledge is “art delivered to mankind” (Defence, p. 78), and those that profess those knowledges are “actors and players” (Defence, p. 78). Sidney has taken the Aristotelean theory of imitation and given it an artistic treatment to the extent that he has transformed a rhetorical discourse into a well-defined “heterocosm” which he has furnished with his own aesthetic and intellectual conceptions and expressions. The implications of subjectivity and relativity in the Aristotelean explanation of branches of knowledge as specific imitations of aspects of nature have become a rationale for eccentricities in literary doctrine. In the “second world” of knowledge, where consciousness is conditioned, the artistic impulse is to match wit and will alongside limitations. A large part of Sidney’s discourse covers the fictions in other supposedly truthful knowledges, especially history and moral philosophy, and in the dramatic heterocosm of the “second world” of his discourse proper he acts the curator in a mansion of curios and artifacts, making comparisons among originals, imitations and fakes, asking his audience to consider alternatives and make choices. All this is done in the self-consciously ironic and frankly undermining tones of the often humorous arguments.

These qualifications and developments of Sidney’s own branch of knowledge establish an aesthetic boundary around the “second world.” This “second world,” which Sidney turns into a showcase for his own purposes, connects with the “first world” of history in the dramatic language of Sidney as narrator and finds its place with respect to man’s limited understanding of events and existence. Sidney establishes a relationship between an audience existing in the somewhat incomprehensible real world of history and his ambitious fiction from the representational world of poetic knowledge. He has aesthetically heightened his subjective treatment of his topic in order to project even more intensified images.

These images are identifiable by their energia. Sidney uses the concept energia once in the Defence, wittily supplying an instance of it before the term appears:
...so coldly they apply fiery speeches, as men that had rather read lovers’ writings—and so caught up certain swelling phrases which hang together like a man that once told my father that the wind was at northwest and by south, because he would be sure to name winds enough—than that in truth they feel those passions, which easily (as I think) may be betrayed by that same forcibleness or energia (as the Greeks call it) of the writer. (Defence, p. 117)

Sidney had translated at least two books of Aristotle’s Rhetoric where energia is the definition for images of activity, metaphors of action, exclamation, direct address, direction of speech to inanimate objects, dialogue; its strongest effects are visual, but it appeals to all of the senses. Sidney was also indebted to Scaliger’s concepts. Energia primarily gives visible form to emotions, and as a dramatic and narrative technique it was very important for Sidney’s purposes. Meter, rhyme and the moving power of music were also parts of Sidney’s concept of energia.16

These dramatizations of strong feelings and images of persuasive forcibleness are omnipresent in the Defence and represent a main, if untrumpeted, component of its poetics. Some of Sidney’s grander, more complex designs and their implications for his aesthetics would be revealed, I believe, by determining the patterns of energia and imagery in the Defence, but of immediate significance in relation to the heterocosm of the “second world” of discourse are those bolder, more elaborate and consciously mounted vignettes of energia, or idealizations, in the Defence that comprise its “green,” or “golden” (Defence, p. 78) “world.”

One of the greatest of these imaginative vignettes is finally projected into the heterocosmic “second world” of discourse after careful preparations. First:

Let us but hear old Anchises speaking in the midst of Troy’s flames.... (Defence, p. 86)

Then:

Who readeth Aeneas carrying old Anchises on his back, that wisheth not it were his fortune to perform so excellent an act? (Defence, p. 92)

The fuller vignette is then projected:
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Only let Aeneas be worn in the tablet of your memory, how he governeth himself in the ruin of his country; in the preserving his old father, and carrying away his religious ceremonies; in obeying God's commandment to leave Dido, though not only all passionate kindness, but even the human consideration of virtuous gratefulness, would have craved other of him; how in storms, how in sports, how in war, how in peace, how a fugitive, how victorious, how besieged, how besieging, how to strangers, how to allies, how to enemies, how to his own; lastly, how in his inward self, and how in his outward government—and I think, in a mind not prejudiced with a prejudicating humour, he will be found in excellency fruitful.... (Defence, p. 98)

The vignette of Anchises and Aeneas is but one prominent fictionalization in the Defence. Its special place in the argument, and its significance and contribution to Sidney's expressions, in this case, about the Heroical, are other aspects of the Defence's complex order and structure, and can be only generally illustrated here. The Aeneas vignette is in a "second world" context of historical and poetical contrasts that balance Sidney's praise of Chevy Chase and the Hungarian ballads with his accusations of triviality in the actions of military figures like Philip of Macedon, Alexander and Darius, and in the subjects of the poet Pindar. Great men are expected to perform great acts, and great men must celebrate worthy subjects in order to be memorable, and it is the matter of memorability that follows Sidney's conclusions to the final and foremost of the genres, the heroical. In projecting his "green world" image of the hero Aeneas, Sidney has strikingly compared it with inferior versions, "second world" failures, or inadequate representations, of eloquence without valor and heroes without heroic deeds. The technique of contrast is a device directed to the realistic capacities of the literal-minded of the "first world," the "hedgehogs," "vipers" and "dogs" attacking the Pastoral; the "backbiters" and hypochondriacs critical of art, learning and living. The "golden" image of Aeneas is not only contrasted with the other "second world" subjects, but this higher order of fiction is distinguished from the merely representational and linguistic orders. As an idealization of a hero, it is an intuitional embodiment of human perfection that is not imitative of the "first world," but is rather a parody, a surreal portrayal of sublime action analogous to "first world" processes as they might appear in the "second world." The effect is more heightened, controlled and intelligent in its differences and similarities to real experience than if it were a poetical example introduced into a conventionally more factual treatise. These kinds of relationships throughout the Defence indicate that deeper level of highly differentiated sensibilities that is the
undercurrent to Sidney’s poetics in the *Defence*, which is one of its unexplored aesthetic (in contrast with its metaphysical and strictly literary) dimensions.

We have already observed “...the holy David’s...awaking his musical instruments...telling of the beasts’ joyfulness and hills leaping...” (*Defence*, p. 77). The fictionalizing is compounded when we come upon this scene:

The other is of Nathan the prophet, who, when the holy David had so far forsaken God as to confirm adultery with murder, when he was to do the tenderest office of a friend in laying his own shame before his eyes, sent by God to call again so chosen a servant, how doth he it but by telling of a man whose beloved lamb was ungratefully taken from his bosom: the application most divinely true, but the discourse itself feigned; which made David (I speak of the second and instrumental cause) as in a glass see his own filthiness.... (*Defence*, pp. 93-94)

This passage is dense with telescoping fictions within structures of artifice, “the disclosure itself feigned” in several directions, again intensified by visual framings and effects “as in a glass.”

Sidney’s development of the image of the poet follows a similar pattern. There is the introduction of some of the first of his train:

...the philosophers of Greece durst not a long time appear to the world but under the mask of poets. (*Defence*, p. 75)

Soon, the poet is gloriously characterized:

Only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature, as the Heroes, Demigods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies, and such like: so as he goeth hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit. Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done; neither with so pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too much loved earth more lovely. Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden. (*Defence*, p. 78)

The “right poets” (*Defence*, p. 80) are described:
For these...but range, only reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be and should be. (*Defence*, p. 81)

This “learned discretion” is the rationale for the “anti-mystical” and “severely practical” emphases that A. C. Hamilton describes in Sidney’s view of poetry. Yet Sidney’s discretion derives from genuine valor. Though “reined,” this poet’s great strength is displayed:

...for he yieldeth to the powers of the mind an image of that whereof the philosopher bestoweth but a wordish description, which doth neither strike, pierce, nor possess the sight of the soul so much as that other doth. (*Defence*, p. 85)

At last he is received into the dramatic setting of the *Defence*’s heterocosm:

...but he cometh to you with words set in delightful proportion, either accompanied with, or prepared for, the well enchanting skill of music; and with a tale forsooth he cometh unto you, with a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner. (*Defence*, p. 92)

He is a hero among heroes. Other imaginative characters and scenes that are introduced and developed in comparable patterns are philosophers, painters, lawyers and advocates, horses and soldiers, beasts, Xenophon’s Cyrus, Ulysses, children, physicians, Jesus Christ, the Alexander of legend, and the “mongrel tragi-comedy.”

These counterfactual forms within the deliberate artifice of Sidney’s “second world” of discourse can be seen as configurations of a “green world,” since they represent a further dimension of recessed space within the heterocosm. These are examples of “an imaginative ground-plot of a profitable invention” (*Defence*, p. 103), just as Puglianò’s conceit of the horse stirred Sidney to take up his defense of “poor poetry,” because they are dramatized symbols organized with respect to the historical world and its contiguous relation to the world of artifice. Their place in Sidney’s dramatic oration assumes a surreal validity that reflects back on the hypothetical qualities of mind and psychological projects, ultimately referring back to the activity of life.

In Sidney’s metaphysics, these “profitable inventions” will be “right virtuous” (*Defence*, p. 73) idealizations of classical and Biblical heroes, and in his aesthetic executions the contingencies of the
historical foreground of the audience will be unified with the recessional and sublime images from his "golden" world of mythology, classical literature and Scripture. Nevertheless, the architectural structuring of the historical, artificial and "green," or "golden," settings creates a specific aesthetic with its inherent psychodynamics and sensibilities.

The heroical virtues are Sidney's objectives, but his aesthetic achievement is a theatre of human thought and emotion, a vitalized mode of being:

For as in outward things, to a man that had never seen an elephant or a rhinoceros, who should tell him most exquisitely all their shapes, colour, bigness, and particular marks, or of a gorgeous palace, an architect, with declaring the full beauties, might well make the hearer able to repeat, as it were by rote, all he had heard, yet should never satisfy his inward conceit with being witness to itself of a true lively knowledge.... (Defence, p. 85)

This "true lively knowledge" is not a representation of matters but is "figured forth" (Defence, p. 86) from insights into human experience, for "the poet...doth not learn a conceit out of a matter, but maketh matter for a conceit" (Defence, p. 99), "making things...such as never were in nature...by delivering them forth in such excellency as he hath imagined them" (Defence, pp. 78-79).

Sidney's emphasis upon the artist and his "fore-conceit" (Defence, p. 79) adds a mannerist slant to his arguments, and many passages of prose embellished by sprezzatura, play, wit and other techniques deliberately draw attention to a prevalent and cultivated artistic self-consciousness in the Defence. The maniera is adeptly executed, and Sidney mentions his favorable estimates of Pietro Bembo (Defence, pp. 110, 121) and Marc-Antoine Muret (Defence, p. 110).19 The Defence is predominantly a Renaissance, and not a Mannerist work, however, because of its ascendant configurations and inspirations. In addition to the classical form of the oration, which stands as elemental structure outside of the architectonics of the "three worlds," the resultant pattern and design are in keeping with High Renaissance theories that encompassed the aesthetic techniques of visual space.20 With the exploitation of space as a new material in artistic design came the development of two-dimensional heterocosms in painting that required the viewer to properly locate himself in relation to the framed image in such a way that the painting evoked an experience of the real scene. The recessional technique produced a surreal, intuitive perception in the viewer. The hallmark of the Renaissance poetic imagination, however, comes less from the idea of conscious fiction than it does from the
inclination to differentiate fields of experience. The importance of the relationship between “second world” and “green world,” or fiction within fiction, resides not so much in the complexity of fictional technique itself as it does in the genius of the Renaissance imagination to construct fictions containing inner fictions which are capable of mirroring the outer fictions in such a way that the fictional world itself becomes more clearly distinguishable from the real world. The objective of these arrangements, as Sidney states, is “…clearly to see through them” (Defence, p. 86).

The literary implications to be explicated out of the “house of many mansions” that is the specific patterning in the Defence are yet to be done. The Defence has been treated in terms of its definitions of poetry, for its poetics, and for its historical significance, but its aesthetic import in terms of its higher order of artistry occurring simultaneously with critical contexts has not been fully articulated. The critical insights among “worlds,” actors, voices, arguments, images, legends, myths, histories, biographies, portraits and tales are extraordinarily complex. Both of the dramatic heterocoms of Astrophel and Stella and the Arcadia possess similarly rich intricacies and implications.

The upshot of the “three worlds” is for the pleasure and profit of the courtier or person of action to move away, back into individual concerns, but with fresh thoughts for new experiences. Man makes himself; reality is changing; the future is open. The “three worlds” allow for “review” and “recreation.” Especially this latter term, I believe, goes far in suggesting Sidney’s ethos of fictions, and the Renaissance’s, too, for, as Edmund Spenser wrote to Sir Walter Raleigh, it is “the use of these dayes,” to have delightfulness.22

NOTES

46 THRE WOLDS IN SIDDY’S DEFENCE


3Bate, p. 82.


5Berger, p. 48.

6Sir Philip Sidney, A Defence of Poetry in Miscellaneous Prose, Duncan-Jones and Van Dorsten, pp. 78-79. Other page notations in the text from A Defence of Poetry will refer to this edition.

7Kenneth Myrick, Sir Philip Sidney as a Literary Craftsman (Lincoln, Neb., 1965), pp. 46-83; Duncan-Jones and Van Dorsten, p. 64.

8Bate, 77.


10Berger, p. 75; Davis, pp. 43-44; Nelson, pp. 59-64.

11Jan Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary (Garden City, 1964), p. 194.

12Nelson, pp. 49-50.


15“Heterocosm,” a term M. H. Abrams uses in his consideration of fictional worlds, indicates “a second nature,” and it
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16For an excellent discussion of the concept of energia see Neil L. Rudenstine, Sidney's Poetic Development (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), ch. X.

17Sir Philip Sidney: A Study of His Life and Works (Cambridge, 1977), p. 120.

18Berger, pp. 73-74; Davis, pp. 281-282.


21Berger, p. 48.

THE USE OF SCRIPTURE IN OTHELLO

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Othello has been generally regarded as the least universal and symbolic of Shakespeare’s major tragedies. Most critics would agree with A. C. Bradley’s view that the play is more a story of private life than the other tragedies, a domestic tragedy of jealousy, which limits its greatness. G. Wilson Knight describes Othello as a play that is “vividly particular” rather than universal, one in which the characters appear human and concrete. The tragedy is sometimes seen as a tragedy with an improbable plot, and based on some lucky (or unlucky) timing. All of which reduces the stature and scope of the play and keeps it from having wider moral implications.

This situation, however, has not hindered some scholars from finding a variety of elaborate theological meanings in the play. One critic likens Othello’s initial bliss to that of Adam in Eden. “But there was a serpent in his Eden,” which caused Othello, like Adam, to lose his paradise and become the prey of his passions. Another prefers to liken Othello to Judas who betrayed Christ with a kiss and then killed himself. So also Othello says, “I kiss’d thee ere I kill’d thee. No way but this. Killing myself, to die upon a kiss” (V.ii.358-59). But in the handkerchief incident, this critic thinks that Othello becomes parallel to Christ who in the Veronica legend accepted Veronica’s napkin while being led away to be crucified.

In contrast to the opinion that Othello is less symbolic than Shakespeare’s other tragedies, a third scholar thinks that “nowhere in Shakespeare does the presence of some kind of Biblical analogy suggest itself more readily to the receptive reader than it does in Othello.” He holds that Othello reflects the office of God, that Cassio is Shakespeare’s figure for Adam, and that Roderigo parallels the serpent suborned by Satan, Iago. Another view is that the relationship between Othello and Desdemona is an allegory of Henry VIII and Queen Katherine, while Iago is comparable to Wolsey.

Outstanding among those who disagree with these authorities is Roland Frye. According to Frye, the major flaw of those who insist that Shakespeare’s plays are primarily theological and Christian is a lack of evidence. We are repeatedly faced with “theological assertion without theological evidence” about the characters, actions, and speeches in Shakespeare’s plays, Frye says. Rarely do we find evidence from the sixteenth century to indicate that Shakespeare’s contemporaries
understood the plays in that manner. Frye believes that these interpretations are largely subjective and theologically naive.\(^7\)

The principal basis for any religious interpretation of Shakespeare’s plays must be the many biblical references and analogies in the plays themselves. Should it occur that Shakespeare’s borrowings from Scripture support a consistent religious interpretation of the plays, then we are justified in concluding that Shakespeare had a religious meaning in mind when he penned the plays. Those who support a religious interpretation of the plays firmly contend that their interpretations are based on Scripture. They stress that they are careful to “investigate the pertinence of Christian lore” in the plays, the “way in which biblical paradigms echo in a play’s structure.”\(^8\) We are told that “a Scriptural reference in Shakespeare often seems to take control of that part of the play in which it appears, and sometimes even takes control of the entire play.” Even in plays where the biblical references are neither numerous nor striking, “there is nothing casual or accidental about them. Working as reinforcement for the network of metaphors in the play, they help to establish and define the values that are presented there.”\(^9\) If there is one thing on which these critics agree, it is that the biblical references and analogies in Shakespeare’s plays are central to their interpretations of his plays.\(^10\)

We would do well to re-examine the biblical references in *Othello* to see what conclusions we can validly draw from them, and whether Shakespeare’s use of Scripture warrants a religious interpretation of the play. As it happens, *Othello* contains a surprising number of biblical references. In his study of Shakespeare’s use of the Bible, Richmond Noble lists twenty-three references for the play in his main text (plus four others which he cites as possible references), with the observation that “a large proportion of the Biblical allusions proceed from the mouth of Iago.”\(^11\) There are, however, upwards of fifty biblical references as well as borrowed biblical analogies and expressions in the play, most of which seem to be conscious adaptations of Scripture on the part of Shakespeare. The number of religious terms and images is also large.

I will first list the references in the order in which they occur in the play, with an occasional comment on some of them, as well as a few observations on which Bible Shakespeare appears to have in mind. Quotations from Scripture preceded by “Compare . . . ” indicate those items which I think are probably conscious references to Scripture, but about which we should not be dogmatic. The reader can choose to accept or reject as many of these references as he wishes. But even after the more uncertain items are removed to each one’s satisfaction a sufficient number of biblical references and expressions remains to
indicate whether Shakespeare conveys a religious message in the play, whether Othello should be seen as a Christian tragedy. Quotations are from The Riverside Shakespeare and the Geneva Bible of 1560, unless indicated otherwise.12 The Geneva Bible is used since that is the Bible that Shakespeare echoes most often.

I.i.65: “I am not what I am.”
   Compare Ex. 3.14: “I am that I am.”

I.i.70-71: “And though he in a fertile climate dwell,
   Plague him with flies.”
   The fourth plague on Egypt was the plague of flies.
   Ex. 8.21-31. See also Gen. 47.6.

I.i.108-9: “You are one of those that will not serve God, if the devil bid you.”
   A reversal of the Devil’s proposal that Jesus worship him instead of God, and of Jesus’ answer: “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serue.” Matt. 4.10.

I.i.154: “Though I do hate him as I do hell-pains.”
   Ps. 18.4: “The paynes of hel came about me: the snares of death ouertooke me.”
   Ps. 116.3: “The snares of death compassed me rounde about: and the paines of hel gate holde vpon me.”

I.ii.9-10: “That with the little godliness I have
   I did full hard forbear him.”
   Compare Col. 3.13: “Forbearing one another, and forgiuing one another.”
   Compare Eph. 4.2, Tyndale, Matthew’s, Coverdale, Great, Bishops’: “Forbearynge one another.”

I.ii.59: “Keep up your bright swords.”
   Compare Matt. 26.52: “Put vp thy sworde into his place.”
   Compare John 18.11: “Put vp thy sworde into its sheath.”
   The setting closely parallels the Gospel accounts. A band with torches and armed with swords comes by night to arrest Othello. The circumstances of Jesus’ arrest are much the same. Matt. 26.47.
   In Cinthio’s tale, there is no elopement and no attempt is made to arrest Othello. Desdemona marries Othello with her parents’ knowledge but against their wishes because she and Othello (“the Moor”) deeply loved each other. Shakespeare
adds the arrest scene, which increases the likelihood that in doing so, he patterned Othello’s arrest on Christ’s.

I.iii.81: “Rude am I in my speech.”
2 Cor. 11.6: “Thogh I be rude in speaking.”

I.iii.94-95: “A maiden, never bold;
Of spirit so still and quiet.”
1 Peter 3.4-5, of women, who should have “a meke and quiet spirit.”

I.iii.147-50: “But still the house affairs would draw her thence,
Which ever as she could with haste dispatch,
She’d come again, and with a greedy ear
Devour up my discourse.”
Luke 10:39-40: “Marie, which also sate at Iesus fete, and heard his preaching. But Martha was combred about muche seruing.”
Here, again, as at I.ii.59, the parallelism is to be found in the setting rather than in the actual words. The fact that in this instance also, Shakespeare adds this scene to what he found in Cinthio, increases the likelihood that he modelled this addition on the well-known account of Jesus at the home of Mary and Martha.

I.iii.177: “Destruction on my head if . . . .”
A common biblical expression.
Compare 1 Kings 2.33: “Their blood shal therefore returne vpon the head of Ioab, and on the head of his sede.”
Compare Ezek. 9.10: “Wil recompence their wayes vpon their heads.”
See also Joshua 2.19; Judges 9.57; 2 Sam. 1.16; 1 Kings 2.37; Ps. 7.17 (7.16, Geneva); etc.

I.iii.347-49: “The food that to him now is as luscious as locusts, shall be to him shortly as acerb as the coloquintida.”
Matt. 3.4: “His meat was also locustes and wilde honie.”
Rev. 10.9-10: “It was in my mouth as swete as honie: but when I had eaten it, my bellie was bitter.”

II.i.64-65: “And in th’ essential vesture of creation
Does tire the ingener.”
Ps. 102.25-27: “The heauens are the woorke of thy handes.
They shal perishe, but thou shalt endure: they al shall waxe
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olde as dooth a garment. And as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shalbe changed.”

II.iii.71-72: “A soldier’s a man;
O, man’s life’s but a span.”
Ps. 39.6 (39.5, Geneva): “Beholde, thou hast made my dayes as it were a spanne long.”

II.iii.102-104: “Well, God’s above all; and there be souls must be sav’d, and there be souls must not be sav’d.”
Rom. 9.18: “Therefore he hathe mercie on whome he wil, and whome he wil, he hardeneth.”
Rom. 9.22-23: “What and if God . . . suffer with long pacience the vessels of wrath, prepared to destruction . . . that he might declare the riches of his glorie vpon the vessels of mercie, which he hathe prepared vtnto glorie?”

II.iii.106-107: “For mine own part . . . I hope to be sav’d.”
Rom. 8.24: “For we are saued by hope.”

II.iii.111-12: “God forgive us our sins!”
Luke 11.4: “And forgie vs our sinnes.”
Matt. 6.12: “And forgie vs our dettes.”
Prayer Book: “And forgie vs our trespasses.”
The form of the Lord’s Prayer that Shakespeare heard most often was that set forth in the Prayer Book, recited daily in the English Church. But the Act of Uniformity of 1559 prohibited disrespectful use of the Prayer Book in any interlude, play, song, or rhyme. Thus when drunken Cassio quotes the Lord’s Prayer, Shakespeare is careful not to use the Prayer Book version lest he run afool of the law.

II.iii.296-97: “It hath pleas’d the devil drunkenness to give place to the devil wrath.”
Eph. 4.27: “Nether giue place to the deuil.”
The Geneva Bible was the first version to read “giue place to the deuil.” Earlier version had “giue place vnto the backebyter.”

II.iii.309-10: “Good wine is a good familiar creature, if it be well us’d.”
Ecclus. 31.27-28: “Wine soberly dronken, is profitable for the life of man . . . Wine mesurably dronken, and in time, bringeth gladnes.”
II.i.iii.342-44: “And then for her
To win the Moor, were’t to renounce his baptism,
All seals and symbols of redeemed sin . . . .”
Eph. 4.30: “The holie Spirit of God by whome ye are sealed
unto the day of redemption.”
Eph. 1.13-14: “Ye were sealed with the holie Spirit of
promes, . . . vntil the redemption.”

II.i.iii.351-53: “When devils will the blackest sins put on,
They do suggest at first with heavenly shows,
As I do now.”
With clear overtones to Satan as an angel of light, which
Shakespeare refers to several times in his plays.
2 Cor. 11.14: “For Satan him self is transformed into an
Angel of light.”

II.i.iii.360: “So will I turn her virtue into pitch.”
Compare Ecclus. 13.1: “He that toucheth pitch, shalbe defiled
with it.”

III.i.iii.117: “My lord, you know I love you.”
Compare John 21.15-17: “Yea Lord, thou knowest that I loue
thee.”

III.i.iii.155-59: “Good name in man and woman, . . .
Is the immediate jewel of their souls.
Who steals my purse steals trash; . . .
But he that filches from me my good name . . . .”
Prov. 22.1: “A good name is to be chosen aboue great
riches.”
Ecclus. 41.12: “Haue regarde to thy name: for that shal
continue with thee aboue a thousand treasures of golde.”
Eccl. 7.3 (7.1, AV): “A good name is better then a good
oyntment.”

III.i.iii.203-204: “Their best conscience
Is not to leave’t undone, but to keep’t unknown.”
Matt. 23.23, Bishops’: “These ought ye to haue donne, and
not to leaue the other vndonene.” (Also Tyndale, Matthew’s,
Great).
Prayer Book, Morning Prayer: “We haue left vndonone those
things which wee ought to haue done, and wee haue done those
things which wee ought not to haue done.”
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Morning Prayer, recited daily, would be Shakespeare's most immediate source.

III.iii.381-83: "Oth... Thou shouldst be honest.
Iago. I should be wise—for honesty's a fool
And loses that it works for."
Compare Luke 16.8: "And the Lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely. Wherefore the children of this world are... wiser than the children of light."
The Unjust Steward was shrewd though dishonest.

III.iv.146-48: "For let our finger ache, and it endues
Our other healthful members even to a sense
Of pain."
1 Cor. 12.25-26: "In the body... if one member suffer, all suffer with it."

III.iv.197: "I pray you bring me on the way a little."
Compare Gen. 18.16: "Abraham went with them to bring them on the way."

IV.i.8: "The devil their virtue tempts, and they tempt heaven."
Compare the Devil's second temptation of Jesus and Jesus' answer at Matt. 4.7: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."
See also Luke 4.12; Deut. 6.16; and I.i.108-109, above.

IV.i.270: "He's that he is."
Compare Ex. 3.14: "I am that I am."
See also I.i.65, above.

IV.ii.15-16: "If any wretch have put this in your head,
Let heaven requite it with the serpent's curse!"
A reference to God's curse on the serpent in Eden at Gen. 3.14:
"The Lord God said to the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou are cursed above all cattle."

IV.ii.25-26: "Let me see your eyes;
Look in my face."
Based on the idea that the guilt of an adulterous woman can be detected by the look on her face, and especially by looking into her eyes.
Compare Ecclus. 26.9: "The whor dome of a woman may be known in the pride of her eyes, and eyeliddes."
IV.ii.42: "Alas the heavy day!"
Compare Joel 1.15: "Alas: for the day."
Compare Jer. 30.7: "Alas, for this day."

IV.ii.47-53: "Had it pleas’d heaven
To try me with affliction, had they rain’d
All kind of sores and shames on my bare head,
Steep’d me in poverty to the very lips,
Given to captivity me and my utmost hopes,
I should have found in some place of my soul
A drop of patience."
A reference to Job, who was reduced to poverty and shame, afflicted with disease, and yet maintained patience.
Job 2.7-10: "Smote Job with sore boyles, from the sole of his fote vnto his crowne."
James 5.11: "Ye haue heared of the pacience of Job."

IV.ii.57-62: "But there, . . .
Where either I must live or bear no life;
The fountain from the which my current runs
Or else dries up: to be discarded thence!
Or keep it as a cestern for foul toads
To knot and gender in!"
Prov. 5.15-18: "Drinke the water of thy cisterne, and of the riuers out of the middes of thine owne well. Let thy fountaines flowe forthe, and the riuers of waters in the stretes. But let them be thine, euen thine onely, and not the strangers with thee. Let thy fountaine be blessed, and rejoyce with the wife of thy youth."
Shakespeare seems to have the Geneva Bible in mind in this reference. The Bishops’ has neither “cisterne” nor “fountaine” (“fountaines”).

IV.ii.69: "Would thou hadst never been born!"
Matt. 26.24: "It had bene good for that man, if he had never bene borne."
See also Mark 14.21.

IV.ii.82-85: "No, as I am a Christian.
If to preserve this vessel for my lord
From any other foul unlawful touch
Be not to be a strumpet, I am none."
1 Thess. 4.3-4: “That ye shulde absteine from fornication, That euerie one of you shulde know, how to possesse his vessel in holines and honour.”
1 Sam. 21.5: “Certeinly women haue bene separate from vs . . . and the vessels of the yong men were holy, . . . how muche more then shal euery one be sanctified this day in the vessel?”

IV.ii.90-92: “You, mistress, That have the office opposite to Saint Peter, And keeps the gate of hell!”
Matt. 16.18-19: “Thou are Peter, and vpon this rocke I wil buylde my Church: and the gates of helshal not overcome it. And I wil giue vnto thee the keyes of the kingdome of heaven.”

IV.ii.152-53: “If e’er my will did trespass ’gainst his love, Either in discourse of thought or actual deed.”
A paraphrase of the General Confession in the Communion Service: “Wee knowledge and bewaile our manifold sinnes and wickednes, which we from time to time most gr eiusly haue committed, by thought, word, and deed, against thy diuine Maiestie.”

IV.iii.64, 68-70: “Des. Wouldst thou do such a deed for all the world? Emil. The world’s a huge thing; it is a great price For a small vice.”
With overtones to Satan offering Jesus “all the kingdomes of the worlde, and the glorie of them,” if Jesus would but fall down and worship him. Matt. 4.8-9.
Compare also Matt. 16.26: “What shal it profite a man thogh he shulde winne the whole worlde, if he lose his own soule?”

V.ii.21-22: “This sorrow’s heavenly, It strikes where it doth love.”
Compare Heb. 12.6: “For whome the Lord loueth, he chasteneth.”

V.ii.26-27: “If you bethink yourself of any crime Unreconcil’d as yet to heaven and grace.”
Compare 2 Cor. 5.20: “Be reconciled to God.”
V.ii.32: "I would not kill thy soul."
   Compare Matt. 10.28: "Feare ye not them which kil the bodie, but are not able to kil the soule."

V.ii.46: "Peace, and be still!"
   Mark 4.39: "Peace, and be stil."

V.ii.59-61: "Never lov’d Cassio
   But with such general warranty of heaven
   As I might love."
   A passing reference to the common Christian admonition to
   "loue one another." See 1 John 3.11; 1 Thess. 4.9; Rom. 13.8; etc.

V.ii.99-101: "Methinks it should be now a huge eclipse
   Of sun and moon, and that th’ affrighted globe
   Did yawn at alteration."
   Typical of the signs that signify the deaths of great persons.
   At Christ’s death, the Gospels record an eclipse, an earthquake,
   the opening of graves, and the dead coming out of their graves.
   Matt. 27.45, 51-53; Mark 15.33; Luke 23.44-45.

V.ii.132: "She turn’d to folly, and she was a whore."
   Deut. 22.21: "For she hathe wroght follie in Israel, by playing the whore."

V.ii.134: "She was false as water."
   Compare Gen. 49.4, said to Reuben for defiling his father’s bed:
   "Thou wast light as water."
   Tyndale, Matthew’s, Great, Bishops’: “Vnstable as water.”

V.ii.196: "’Tis proper I obey him; but now now."
   Matrimony Service: "Wilt thou haue this man to thy wedded husband, . . . Wilt thou obey him, and serue him?"
   Eph. 5.22: "Wiues, submit your selues vnto your housbands."
   1 Peter 3.5-6: "Holie women . . . were subject to their housbands. As Sarra obeied Abraham."

V.ii.347. Folio: “Like the base Iudean.”
   A reference to Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Christ. Matt. 26.14-16. Judas was the only apostle who was from the tribe of Judah. The other eleven were all Galileans.
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V.ii.347-48: “Threw a pearl away
Richer than all his tribe.”
A reference to the “perle of great price” of Matt. 13.46. Since both Judas and Jesus belonged to the same genealogical tribe, Judas threw away the most precious jewel of his tribe by betraying Jesus.

V.ii.355-56: “I took by th’ throat the circumcised dog,
And smote him—thus.”
Compare 1 Sam. 17.35: “I went out after him and smote him,
. . . . I caught him by the beard, and smote him, and slewe him.”

V.ii.358-59: “I kiss’d thee ere I kill’d thee. No way but this,
Killing myself, to die upon a kiss.”
Again, parallel to Judas, who betrayed Jesus with a kiss and afterwards killed himself. Matt. 26.48-49; 27.4-5.

To the above list can be added the following passages in Othello, that were probably also suggested to Shakespeare by the biblical texts cited for them:

| II.i.187-89:        | Ps. 107.23-26 |
| II.i.299:          | Ex. 21.23-25 |
| III.iii.172-73:    | 1 Tim. 6.6-8  |
| IV.i.234:          | Luke 17.29; Rev. 14.10; 20.10; 21.8 |
| IV.ii.63:          | Gen. 3.24; Ex. 25.18-22 |
| IV.ii.103-104:     | Num. 5.11-31  |
| V.ii.129:          | Rev. 21.8     |
| V.ii.220:          | Ezek. 1.4; Job 37.9 |

Since Shakespeare’s use of Scripture in Othello is so extensive and varied, it should not be too difficult to ascertain whether his aims were theological. Surely Shakespeare was capable of conveying a coherent and consistent religious message if he chose to do so. On the other hand, if the foregoing array of references do not set forth a reasonably clear or consistent theological scheme, then we must conclude that Shakespeare’s references are subservient to his dramatic ends and are used by him as the need arises in developing the action of the play.

An analysis of the references make it clear that Shakespeare had no theological message to convey. All efforts to find a consistent religious pattern or to convert the play into a Christian allegory on the basis of the references are both futile and unconvincing. For the patterns that appear to emerge from some of the references are
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completely contradicted by other references which present a totally different pattern.

Four of Shakespeare’s references seem to liken Othello to Christ:

I.ii.59, the arrest scene, where both the circumstances of the arrest and Othello’s words on being apprehended are parallel to Christ’s;

I.iii.147-50, Othello at Desdemona’s home, parallel to Jesus at the home of Mary and Martha. In Shakespeare’s context, Desdemona plays the role of both Mary and Martha, being distracted by household duties and at the same time eagerly devouring Othello’s words as opportunity affords;

IV.ii.69, Othello’s use of Jesus’ words, “It had bene good for that man, if he had neuer bene borne.” Jesus spoke these words about his betrayer, Judas. Othello, however, says them to Desdemona;

V.ii.46, where Christ’s words in calming the stormy Sea of Galilee, “Peace, and be still,” are put in Othello’s mouth.

Elsewhere, however, Shakespeare seems to consciously compare Othello to both Job and the Apostle Paul:

At IV.ii.47-53, Othello is likened to Job. Othello says he would prefer to have heaven afflict him in the manner that Job was afflicted, rather than be made a cuckold;

Othello’s words to the Duke and the council, “Rude am I in my speech” (I.iii.81), are those of the Apostle Paul to the church at Corinth.

But before we conclude that these references which liken Othello to three outstanding men of faith have any theological significance, we must also come to terms with the fact that in another reference Othello accuses Desdemona (who as we shall see, is also compared to Christ and given ideal Christian qualities) of being a whore, then murders her, and finally commits suicide. Moreover, while it can be argued that Othello is four times likened to Christ, he is twice compared to Judas:
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V.ii.347-48, where Othello speaks of himself as the base Judean, who betrayed Christ, the richest member of his tribe;

V.ii.358-59, already commented on, where Othello plays out the part of Judas, who likewise betrayed Christ with a kiss and then killed himself.

In these instances, Desdemona would be the Christ figure, betrayed and killed by a Judas. But when Othello says to her, "Would thou hadst never been born," Desdemona is being compared to Judas, to whom the Gospels apply these words. At V.ii.99-101, however, Desdemona's death is compared to Christ's, at whose death an eclipse and an earthquake also occurred. Desdemona is given ideal Christian qualities at I.iii.94-95; IV.ii.82-85; IV.ii.152-53; IV.iii.64; and V.ii.59-61, all quoted in the list of references.

Discrepancies of this nature cannot be easily ignored or explained away without manipulating and distorting the evidence. If Shakespeare wrote to convey a religious message, then he must be judged as a very inept and inconsistent theologian. And not to be overlooked is the fact that the majority of Shakespeare's fifty-plus references play no part in any theological scheme.

The most consistent use of Scripture in the play involves Iago. Except for one reference, he is consistently portrayed as either the Devil parading as an angel of light (II.iii.351-53), or else as an evildoer filled with malice toward others (I.i.154; I.ii.9-10; II.iii.342-44; II.iii.360). That portrayal coincides with the part that Iago plays in the drama and in using these biblical references Shakespeare aptly develops Cinthio's narrative in which Iago (the ensign) is also presented as a devil incarnate.14 If Shakespeare's intentions were theological, we should expect a reasonably similar consistency in the references pertaining to Othello and Desdemona. But those references are theologically irreconcilable and are used by Shakespeare as they best lend themselves to the dialogue and action of the play. The controlling factor is not the reference, for the references are subordinated to the plot borrowed from Cinthio, and to the context in which they appear. Moreover, as S. L. Bethell has shown in his study of the diabolic imagery in the play, only eighteen diabolic images (rather than references) are applied to Iago, but twenty-six to Othello,15 although the biblical references four times liken Othello to Christ.

The evidence seems conclusive, therefore, that based on the biblical references in the play, attempts to impose a religious interpretation on Othello have no sound basis. Those who argue otherwise seem to be dominated by their private religious leanings and their arguments are
marred by over-ingenuity and a great deal of special pleading. There is no evidence that anyone in Shakespeare’s day interpreted Othello as a Christian tragedy. Shakespeare’s company performed the play in Oxford in 1610, six years after it first appeared, and a learned Oxonian who saw the play wrote that the audience was moved to tears by Desdemona’s death. “As she lay on her bed, her face itself implored the pity of the audience.”16 The actors movingly conveyed the play’s basic theme, the tragedy of a loving wife murdered by her jealous husband. No hint that anyone saw Desdemona as a Christ figure or a divinity, or that the play was interpreted in symbolic or allegorical terms. For no matter how adroitly these interpretations may be argued, they stray far afield by attempting to load the play with meanings it does not have, and go beyond what Shakespeare intended or the audience must have understood.

NOTES


5J. A. Bryant, Jr., Hippolyta’s View: Some Christian Aspects of Shakespeare’s Plays (Lexington, 1961), pp. 139-146.


8Roy Battenhouse, pp. ix-x.

9J. A. Bryant, Jr., pp. 17, 69.

10Paul Siegel, pp. 88-98.

Quotations from the Psalms, however, are from the Psalter, the version of the Psalms recited daily in the morning and evening services of the Anglican Church, and which Shakespeare was best acquainted with. I have used the Psalter that was published in the Second Folio edition of the Bishops' Bible of 1572. References to the Prayer Book are to an edition of 1590.

The First Folio text of Othello is considered the superior text by most editors, but in this line, the Riverside editors preferred the First Quarto, which has “Like the base Indian.” See my note “Like the Base Judean,” SQ, 31 (1980), 93-95, for evidence that “Judean” is the correct reading.

The exception occurs at III.iii.117 where Iago utter the well-known words that Peter spoke to Jesus at the Sea of Galilee, a passage that makes it difficult to argue for theological intent even in the case of Iago.


DEATH AND REBIRTH: CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN AND THE GOTHIC ENCLOSURE IN ARTHUR MERVYN

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H. P. Lovecraft has remarked that the early American novelist Charles Brockden Brown differed from Ann Radcliffe in her classic Gothic novels by “discarding the external Gothic paraphernalia and properties and choosing modern American scenes for his mysteries.” However, Brown did not discard the enclosure device which had marked Gothic fiction from the beginning. He used it, like his predecessors in the Gothic tradition, Horace Walpole, Radcliffe, “Monk” Lewis, and others, to effect terror and fear in his characters and heighten suspense in the reader. But where Walpole and Radcliffe used enclosures—dungeons, vaults, underground passageways, secret compartments—principally as horror devices, affecting external circumstances, Brown introduced a new element in his novels, using enclosures as instrumental factors that directly influence the internal growth and development of his characters. His enclosures would often separate a character from his natural environment, isolate him physically, and intensify his mental experience, sometimes causing a personality crisis that would lead to a change in behavior. Thus, in this aspect of the Gothic tradition, Brown serves as a transitional figure, bringing the enclosure device to America and influencing Poe and later writers of American literature.

What Brown’s use of the enclosure device suggests, especially where the characters are enclosed in vaults or chambers below the ground, is the classical, epic pattern of the hero’s withdrawal and return, where the hero retreats from the known world into a confined area usually filled with danger and prepares to undergo a test of his strength and endurance. If he is successful, his return to the world is often met with a hero’s welcome, as he becomes the embodiment of the values held in his society, for example, the necessity for Odysseus to leave his crew, descend into Hades, and be surrounded with the spirits of the dead before he can return home to Ithaca, rid his household of the suitors, and be reunited with his family.

To be sure, nothing as elaborate as this happens to the very American characters of Brown, but there does appear to be a parallel between the experience of the traditional epic hero and that of some of the significant characters in his stories. That is to say, the enclosure often becomes the focal point for the epic hero’s withdrawal from the world and his preparation to return to it. It provides him with a specific
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area of operation, a unique framework within which his experience may lead to his growing awareness and maturity, a test of his manhood. Symbolically, of course, it suggests a descent into his deeper self, a confrontation with his inner being, which often leads to self-knowledge and rebirth of some sort; in effect, he finds new levels of identity and selfhood.

While the characters of Brown are not of epic stature, to an extent they experience something of the epic pattern of "separation-initiation-return"2 while in various enclosures. Their levels of awareness upon emerging may, at least in some cases, not be unlike those of their classical models. Such is the case, I believe, with the character of Arthur Mervyn, where Brown focuses our attention on Arthur's reactions to his predicaments. As Robert Hume has emphasized and I concur, "Brown's concentration on his protagonist's responses seems the defining characteristic of his method."3 By dramatizing Arthur's reactions to each enclosure he experiences, Brown intensifies our concern with his psychological development.

Part I of Arthur Mervyn (1799) begins when Arthur, nearing the age of physical maturity, arrives in Philadelphia, having spent his early, formative years immersed in the pastoral life. Seemingly, the rural environment has had its lasting effect on his open and frank nature, for his mind is the American prototype of the Lockean tabula rasa.4 However, he has recently been dispossessed of his inheritance, and he has left home to make a better life for himself in the world. Before arriving in the city, he is promptly swindled out of what little money he has and, upon arriving, is duped by a practical joker and forced to spend an embarrassing period of time confined in the closet of a bedroom in the home of a family whom he does not know. He finally escapes, but in the ordeal forgets his shoes in the closet. Obviously, these themes are not new to English and American literature—the healthy, rural life as opposed to the mystery and deviousness of the city, and the problems besetting the uninitiated protagonist as he moves from natural innocence to worldly knowledge.

What is significant here is Brown's use of the enclosure device to dramatize Arthur's acquiring of experience and the resulting movement toward genuine maturity. That is, Brown depicts the crucial moments in his young hero's adventures using a series of small physical confinements, within the larger one of the city, that contrast with the openness and freedom of country life. As Arthur moves toward full maturity, he gains understanding and learns to accept the manners and morals of men in his society. Having been imbued with the pristine quality of country life, Mervyn must experience the pain and panic of a dark, confined, urban area before he can reach maturity, and each
enclosure Brown uses marks another stage in his learning and development.

Symbolically, the enclosure suggests the fear and horror Arthur must encounter within himself, for each successive enclosure he experiences serves as a test of sorts. He emerges from each more aware of himself and vowing to follow a more rational course of action that will reflect his newly acquired knowledge. Not an insignificant part of this process is the fact that, within each enclosure, Arthur usually forgets or loses some of his personal effects, an indication that something of the old self is left behind as his new self emerges. I believe Brown is suggesting through these enclosures Arthur’s loss of innocence, naïveté, and country boorishness.

In addition to the embarrassing confinement in the closet, Arthur experiences three other enclosures in Part I that have varying consequences for him: the burial of the murdered Watson in the underground passage and its effect on his imagination, his unconsciousness in the same room as the first enclosure and near confinement in the coffin, and his narrow escape from death in the attic of Welbeck’s house; each marks a new level of awareness for Arthur. In addition, he experiences a curious “baptism”—a rebirth of sorts—while submerged in the Schuylkill River, which I’ll have more to say about shortly.

The second confinement occurs when Arthur accompanies his recently acquired mentor, Welbeck, into a passage beneath Welbeck’s house to bury the body of Captain Watson, whom Welbeck has killed in a duel. Brown depicts the scene in a Gothic manner:

The vaults beneath were lofty and spacious. We passed from one to the other till we reached a small and remote cell.

The narrow cell in which we stood, its rudely fashioned walls and arches, destitute of communication with the external air, and its palpable dark scarcely penetrated by the rays of a solitary candle, added to the silence which was deep and universal, produced an impression on my fancy which no time will obliterate.

Perhaps my imagination was distempered by terror. The incident which I am going to relate may appear to have existed only in my fancy. Be that as it may, I experienced all the effects which the fullest belief is adapted to produce. Glancing vaguely at the countenance of Watson, my attention was arrested by a convulsive motion in the eyelid. This motion increased, till, at length the eyes
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opened, and a glance, languid but wild, was thrown around. Instantly, they closed, and the tremulous appearance vanished.5

This passage, particularly the early sentences, anticipates Poe’s “The Cask of Amontillado” (1846), where Montresor leads Fortunato through a series of vaults until they reach a small, remote crypt in which he then walls up Fortunato, Montresor relates:

We passed through a range of low arches, descended, passed on, and descending again, arrived at a deep crypt, in which the foulness of the air caused our flambeaux rather to glow than flame.

At the most remote end of the crypt there appeared another less spacious....

It was in vain that Fortunato, uplifting his dull torch, endeavored to pry into the depth of the recess. Its termination the feeble light did not enable us to see.6

Professor Mabbott has carefully noted the many possible sources for Poe’s “Cask,” and this scene in Arthur Mervyn may well be yet another. Poe has changed the mission of his characters considerably, however, dramatizing the ironic, obsessed mind of Montresor, but there are striking similarities in atmosphere and description. In addition, the purpose of the underground journey in each case is fulfilled; that is, a body is buried.

Clearly, Brown’s purpose in the scene from Arthur Mervyn is to emphasize the effects of the Gothic atmosphere on young Arthur’s consciousness. “The narrow cell” with “its rudely fashioned walls and arches,” the “palpable dark,” and the “deep and universal” silence produce an effect on his “fancy” which causes an hallucination when he thinks he sees Watson’s eyelids move and open. There is no reason to believe that Watson is still alive by this time. Apparently Arthur does not believe it either, for he has no compunction about burying Watson, nor is he troubled by it later. He seems to accept the fact that the incident existed only in his “fancy” and that his “imagination was distempered by terror.” In short, Arthur, like Emily in The Mysteries of Udolpho, ultimately accepts what his senses and reason indicate and is not misled by his imagination, and Brown, like Radcliffe and other Gothic writers, after building suspense through mysterious, seemingly preternatural events, finally offers more or less rational explanations.

This second enclosure scene in Mervyn’s initiating experience, unlike the first, increases the “spooky thrill” by adding the element of
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death and its impact on the imagination of the young man. Where the first enclosure is physically uncomfortable, it is not filled with terror nor is death a likely possibility. In the second enclosure, the events are much more serious, and Arthur’s response to them more complex. Another part of his self is revealed to him, a part he had previously been unaware of—the distempering of his imagination by terror.

The baptismal scene referred to earlier occurs when Arthur inadvertently plunges into the Schuykill River. The rowboat he and Welbeck have been riding in is swept away in the current, and sensing the danger of his situation, Arthur quickly discards his “loose gown” and resolves “to commit” himself to the river to swim for his life. When he finally reaches shore and is lying on the bank trying “to repair his wasted strength” (p. 110), he decides to leave the city and return to the simple, safer life of the country. Although this scene does not involve an enclosure, at least not the kind I have been discussing, the psychological change in Mervyn is part of an organic process. His immersion in water serves the same purpose as the enclosures he has experienced; that is, it indicates another stage in his movement toward maturity and selfhood.

Another possible inference from this river scene underlines the difficulty of his journey and how it is often fraught with hidden snares. While he is swimming to shore, he tells us “I landed in a spot inconmoded with mud and reeds. I sunk knee-deep into the former, and was exhausted by the fatigue of extricating myself.” The “knee-deep” mud below the surface of the water, like the death of Watson which Arthur witnesses in Welbeck’s cellar, symbolizes the ugly realities hidden beneath the surface of life, which he has been ignorant of until now. Arthur reflects: “The transactions of the last three days, resembled the monstrous creations of delirium. They were painted with vivid hues on my memory; but so rapid and incongruous were these transitions, that I almost denied belief to their reality. They exercised a bewildering and stupifying influence on my mind, from which the meditations of an hour were scarcely sufficient to relieve me. Gradually I recovered the power of arranging my ideas, and forming conclusions” (pp. 110-11). These events have seriously disturbed Arthur’s psyche and have sent his mind into an hallucinative state bordering on the irrational.

Brown has arranged these experiences in such a way as to test Arthur with a trial he must endure, to disturb his consciousness and upset his naïveté, in effect, to shock him into new awareness. He describes Arthur’s first movements after these thoughts with the following: “I resumed my feet. I knew not where to direct my steps. I was dripping with wet, and shivering with the cold. I was destitute of habitation and friend. I had neither money, nor any valuable thing in
my possession. I moved forward, mechanically and at random” (p. 111). Arthur’s movements resemble those of a person regaining consciousness after deep sleep, and the simplicity of thought expressed in short, staccato sentences reinforces such an interpretation.

The subsequent decisions Mervyn makes further reflect his growing sense of responsibility and a wiser view of the world. He reflects: “The country was my sole asylum. Here, in exchange for my labour, I could at least purchase food, safety, and repose. But if my choice pointed to the country, there was no reason for a moment’s delay. It would be prudent to regain the fields, and be far from this detested city before the rising of the sun” (p. 112). In short, as a young adult, Arthur is beginning to show more responsibility.

The events Mervyn experiences in these scenes are not unlike the trials in the *rites de passage* a young man must undergo to achieve adulthood in certain primitive societies. Charles Moorman writes:

... in most of these initiatory rites the youth is first of all thrust apart for a time...and his severance accomplished by drastic and severe acts...make clear the width of the gulf he is crossing. Then presented to him in isolation are ritual actions that introduce to him the duties and secrets of his new life. Most important, he learns these matters in isolation, often in darkness, completely cut off from his family and from any reminders of his former life. At length he emerges from this extended retirement a new man, ready to take his place as a fully indoctrinated citizen...and usually ready to establish a new place of residence in the village.

Obviously, the major symbols of such rites symbolize a death to the static world of childhood and a rebirth into a dynamic adult world.7

Joseph Campbell points out that, when “the time has ripened for the return to the normal world, the initiate will be as good as reborn.”8

When Arthur leaves the rowboat, is immersed in the water, swims to shore, and subsequently heads for the country, beginning a new life, Brown symbolically suggests such a rebirth, and it is one that will eventually lead to Arthur's integration into society and his full acceptance of the values of a responsible citizen in that society.

The third enclosure is virtually a re-enactment of the first, but this time with more terrifying effects. Ironically enough, the entire scene takes place in the same room in which Arthur is locked during his first night in the city. However, unlike the first when Arthur was a rather naive, country innocent cruelly taken advantage of, the experience is
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extremely serious, and the mistake that nearly entombs him in a coffin is horrifying. In his search for the missing Wallace, the young friend of the family in the country with whom Arthur has been staying, he has sought the room willingly and is confined to it indefinitely by a blow on the head. Mervyn narrowly escapes eternal confinement in the coffin by his opportune awakening, which is foreshadowed by his dream of being thrown into the abyss: “I conceived myself lying on the brink of a pit whose bottom the eye could not reach. My hands and legs were fettered, so as to disable me from resisting two grim and gigantic figures, who stooped to lift me from the earth. Their purpose methought was to cast me into the abyss. My terrors were unspeakable, and I struggled with such force, that my bonds snapt and I found myself at liberty. At this moment my senses returned and I opened my eyes” (pp. 140-41).

Ironically, Arthur awakens to a very different life. In rendering Arthur’s second experience of confinement in the same house, Brown does not present him as the mere innocent he clearly was in the first. Now his destiny is intricately bound up with that of Wallace, and as he searches for Wallace through the deserted streets and alleys of pestilent-ridden Philadelphia, in and out of empty rooms and houses, picking up a clue here, finding a partial answer there, he is, in fact, searching for his own identity.

Arthur’s experience in the city, with a large number of its inhabitants suffering from yellow fever and the rest living in fear of contracting it, is not unlike a Dantesque descent into Hell where one must experience one’s own dark night of the soul before reaching selfhood and Paradise, but Brown’s version of the journey and the knowledge Mervyn receives from it are presented entirely in terms of the relationship between self and society. The Paradise Arthur arrives at is one exclusively created by society. There are significant differences, therefore, between the quest of Brown’s young initiate and the quests of earlier seekers after true self and spiritual knowledge, such as Bunyan’s Christian, and later seekers, like Melville’s Ishmael. If the presentations of these two great authors concern universal and timeless questions, including patterns of epistemology, ontology, and theology, Brown’s dramatization of Mervyn focuses mainly on the ethics and values of eighteenth-century society, particularly as seen in the United States.

Mervyn’s open and innocent nature thus attests to Brown’s optimism and belief in the goodness of human nature. As Marilyn Pease accurately notes, “The persistent triumph of Arthur’s dogged innocence against the machinations of men and fate is in keeping with the optimistic moral philosophy of the eighteenth century which posited the perfectability of man.”
Similarly, James Justus equates Mervyn’s Americanism with that of Ben Franklin: “Mervyn stands at the threshold of America’s new century....his entry into Philadelphia is like Franklin’s.” “He combines,” Justus points out, “the identity of an ‘ignorant youth seeking experience’ and that of ‘a self-sufficient individualist’ whose values are operable in spite of his experience.”11 He is, also, as Patrick Brancaccio has emphasized, “a young man who is moved by the ambitions and anxieties fostered by the American myth of success.”12 Arthur is, in short, a new American hero, robust, cocksure, ingenuous, and one who embodies the values and beliefs of the new, young, mercantilistic, post-Revolutionary, American society.

Arthur’s final enclosure is back in Welbeck’s house. He has contracted yellow fever and wishes to die alone, instead of in a public place. However, he is frustrated in his intent by officials ruthlessly searching for the diseased, and he is forced to hide in Welbeck’s attic to escape detection. In his haste he allows the attic door to close and, consequently, faces a new danger, “my retreat proved to be worse than any for which it was possible to change it. The air was musty, stagnant, and scorchingly hot. My breathing became difficult, and I saw that to remain here ten minutes, would unavoidably produce suffocation” (p. 203). He finally finds a nail in the wood that allows him to raise the door, but before he descends from this “retreat” that has provided safety from the intruders but ironically has almost caused his suffocation, he scrutinizes the recess and discerns something that will set him “afloat on a sea of new wonders and subject...[his] fortitude to a new test...from which consequences may hereafter flow, deciding on my peace and my life” (pp. 204-205). Arthur, thus, experiences a remarkable revelation before he quits his final enclosure of Part I, and soon afterward he decides to leave Welbeck’s home for a safer abode. However, he faints on the road from exhaustion and is found by Dr. Stevens, who takes him to his home and eventually restores him to health.

These four enclosures in Part I and the river baptism, taken together, correspond to the traditional rites of passage and thus mark progressive stages in Arthur’s movement toward maturity. In addition, these experiences act in various ways as symbols for the diseased city of Philadelphia, forcing Mervyn’s outer self (that which encounters society there) inward and causing his essential good nature to be more wary and discerning in his dealings with men.

What we witness, then, through these enclosures is not a crise de conscience which Arthur must endure to arrive at some spiritual truth, but rather a more secular growing awareness of himself in relation to the ways of the world and the manners of men. By the end of Part I, Arthur in a sense is ready to assume a new life, one for which Brown
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has been preparing him and one in which he will be able to deal effectively, rationally, and benevolently with that world in Part II. Ironically, his reward for striving toward and finally assimilating these values of the eighteenth century is symbolized at the end of Part II by his proposed marriage to the worldly Mrs. Fielding. "He has attached himself to the older, more experienced Mrs. Fielding," Warner Berthoff comments, "for the simple reason that, like Welbeck, she can give him something for practically nothing." Arthur is "a chameleon of convenient virtue, able...to assume the form and role that others wish him to assume."\(^{13}\) He renders an account of himself at the end of Part II, a narrative that is apparently intended to remove doubts about his character and his future. Nevertheless, it leaves the reader, as Patrick Brancaccio points out, "with a host of new questions." Brown has presented Arthur "not as a young man haunted by Gothic terror but as an American on the make in a competitive, moralistic business culture."\(^{14}\) To be sure, ambiguities in Mervyn's character remain, allowing critics to interpret him and the book in a variety of ways. However, one thing is certain: Brown has marked the progressive stages in Arthur's movement from innocence to worldly knowledge with a well-executed series of enclosures that provide an artistic unity and coherence the novel would not otherwise have.

NOTES


4 Cf. David Lee Clark, *Charles Brockden Brown: Pioneer Voice of America* (Durham, 1952), p. 43. Concerning the influences of Brown in his youth, Clark points out that Brown "...showed an unusual familiarity with the main currents of eighteenth-century thought from Locke to Hume, from Descartes to Rousseau." Commenting on *Alcuin*, one of Brown's earliest published stories (1798), Clark states that Alcuin, "...with Locke...rejects the notion of innate ideas, holding that man was born in ignorance, and habit has given permanence to error" (p. 119). Further on, Clark comments that "with Locke, Alcuin holds that we are born ignorant, that ideas are received only through the senses, that our knowledge broadens with our experience" (p. 213).
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8Campbell, p. 10.

9*Arthur Mervyn* has been viewed by many critics as an initiation story. See Berthoff, “Introduction,” p. xv, who calls it “the story of the young man’s initiation into life.”

R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago, 1955), calls Mervyn “a guileless young man who comes from his country farm into the city of Philadelphia, and there discovers the prolific reality of evil” (pp. 92-93). Brown depicts Philadelphia during the plague as “the land of the dead...a land of spiritual crisis, a hell in which moral consciousness is either overwhelmed or transformed into the toughness of conscience.” Arthur, Lewis emphasizes, “moving blindly toward that world, that city, coming fresh from the country...is the foolish, young innocent: the first of our Adams” (p. 97).


10Ibid., p. 78.


13Berthoff, p. xvii.

PONDERING O'ER THE SKELETON: DECAY AS CONTROLLING METAPHOR IN DON JUAN

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I

Byron was always fascinated with the idea of decay, as we know from his letters, his journals, and to an even greater extent, his poetry. That the theme of decay is important to many of Byron's works has long been appreciated; but its fundamental and profound importance to the greatest of his works, Don Juan, is yet to be fully understood.

Little attention, for instance, has been paid to the fourth canto of Childe Harold in relation to Don Juan. More attention has been paid, instead, to the influence of Beppo; and it is perhaps because of the obvious stylistic relationship between these two poems that the significance of Childe Harold IV has been overlooked. With the first version of Childe Harold IV newly completed in 1817, and Beppo more or less hastily sandwiched in between this version and its later drafts, it is debatable which of the two works can be said, with greater accuracy, directly to precede Don Juan. In truth, Childe Harold IV is just as crucial to the development of Don Juan as is Beppo. The influence, however, is thematic rather than stylistic.

The theme of decay appears again and again in Childe Harold, but it is in Canto IV, written when Byron was twenty-nine years old, that decay as metaphor becomes increasingly complex and highly integral to the work—so integral, in fact, that it lies at the center of most critical interpretations, and has led at least two critics to comment upon the tradition of "ruin-poems" from which it descends.1 This canto, in short, is about decay: decay of body, of spirit, of love and beauty, of art, glory, fame, and power. All of these themes figure prominently in Don Juan, and all of them suggest, in one way or another, the process of decay that seems to me a central metaphor in Byron's greatest work.

It is a metaphor that is present in Don Juan on many levels: as an explicit theme, it appears repeatedly in narrative asides; as a structural device, it defines the poem's linear, time-bound progression; as a moral context, it informs and heightens character and plot; as a function of style and tone, it reflects the continual passing from the "high" mode to the "low." Within an overall context and atmosphere, finally, that might best be described as gradual degeneration, or a general "falling-off," it reflects dissipation on physical, spiritual, moral, emotional, social—and even formal—levels. It is, finally, a metaphor that can
reveal much to us, if we will let it, about the mind and the heart of its creator, about Byron himself.

II

The most explicit, extended passages on decay in Don Juan are often those in which the narrator takes a merciless, unflinching look into the grave, and invites us to do the same:

Death laughs—Go ponder o’er the skeleton
      With which men image out the unknown thing
That hides the past world, like to a set sun
      Which still elsewhere may rouse a brighter spring,—
Death laughs at all you weep for:—look upon
      This hourly dread of all, whose threatened sting
Turns life to terror, even though in its sheath!
Mark! how its lipless mouth grins without breath!²

What are the hopes of man? old Egypt’s King
      Cheops erected the first pyramid
And largest, thinking it was just the thing
      To keep his memory whole, and mummy hid;
But somebody or other rummaging,
      Burglariously broke his coffin’s lid;
Let not a monument give you or me hopes,
Since not a pinch of dust remains of Cheops.

(II: 1.219.1-8)  

I pass each day where Dante’s bones are laid:
      A little cupola, more neat than solemn,
Protects his dust, but reverence here is paid
      To the bard’s tomb, and not the warrior’s column:
The time must come, when both alike decay’d,
      The chieftain’s trophy, and the poet’s volume,
Will sink where lie the songs and wars of earth,
Before Pelides’ death, or Homer’s birth.

(II: 4.104.1-8)

As in Childe Harold, however, the narrator does not limit his fascination with decay to that following death, but is similarly taken with the idea of decay before death. And we find soon in the poem why this should be so:

But now at thirty years my hair is gray—
      (I wonder what it will be like at forty?
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I thought of a peruke the other day.)

My heart is not much greener; and, in short, I
Have squander’d my whole summer while ’twas May.

No more—no more—Oh! never more, my heart,
Canst thou be my sole world, my universe!
Once all in all, but now a thing apart,
Thou canst not be my blessing or my curse:
The illusion’s gone forever.

(II: 1.213.1-215.5)

So we find that the imminent passing of the narrator’s own youth (as the poet’s) explains the overriding obsession in the poem with both physical and emotional decay. Because of this obsession, “material” and “spiritual” decay are fundamentally related; and the dissolution of the human being on all levels becomes central to the poet’s vision of the universe.

This particular theme, furthermore, is reflected not merely in narrative asides; its mentality infuses the poem even on the levels of plot and characterization. The narrator’s preoccupation with his own physical decay is reflected, for instance, in a preoccupation with the characters’ ages, which are usually described in quite specific terms, and the implications thereof commented upon at some length. Though Julia is what one might ordinarily regard as a rather young twenty-three, we are made quite conscious of her age as being something less than young. This much is implied, at least in part, by the comparison we are invited to make of her with Juan: at sixteen his approach to their love affair is less worldly, more idealistic. On the other hand, we are also well aware of the contrast in ages between Julia and Alfonso, much being made of the difference between twenty-three and fifty. Similar contrasts occur later in the poem with the juxtaposition of Haidée and her father, and of the Empress Catherine and Juan.

Akin to this technique of contrasting characters’ ages is the “doubling” of characters—that is, the pairing of one major character with a minor character who is just a few years older. The minor character in such instances seems to suggest the younger character within a few years’ time. Typical of this device is Haidée, paired with the beautiful, but less beautiful and more down-to-earth, Zoe. Another example is the pairing of Juan with Johnson, who is the narrator’s age and the poet’s when he began Don Juan—thirty. Johnson’s greater experience and more cynical attitude towards both love and war are a clear contrast to Juan’s. At times, the suggestion of physical and spiritual decay becomes quite explicit:
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"You take things coolly, sir," said Juan. "Why,"
Replied the other, "What can a man do?
There still are many rainbows in your sky,
But mine have vanished. All, when life is new,
Commence with feelings warm and prospects high;
But time stips our illusions of their hue,
And one by one in turn, some grand mistake
Casts off its bright skin yearly like the snake.

"'Tis true, it gets another bright and fresh,
Or fresher, brighter; but the year gone through,
This skin must go the way too of all flesh. . . ."

(II: 5.21.1-22.3)

Emotional decay, then, is an important extension of the idea of physical decay—but it is still just one part of a larger, more cosmic vision. Even more pronounced than the idea of emotional decay is the suggestion of a moral decay within the poem. This particular dimension of the theme can be traced through the poem's linear structure—particularly the structure of the first ten cantos. From the moment of Juan's symbolic death and rebirth in the first half of Canto II (the shipwreck passage), he gradually works his way back towards a civilization similar to the one he left behind in Canto I. Thus he finds his way from the "sunny clime" of Spain, to the paradisal Greek island of Haidée, through the pagan society of Turkey, and finally to the Christian civilization of Russia. And as he travels from "paradise" towards this icy wasteland, he is also making his way towards the darkest of evils within man and within the universe—towards slavery, decadent sexuality, abuse of power, merciless warfare, and death. Thus we see a moral progression (or regression, if you will) that directly corresponds to geography, and to time—to both the civilizing and the aging processes.

The presence of Haidée, Gulbeyaz, and Catherine in Cantos II through X makes concrete not only the poem's progression from youth to age, but its corresponding progression from innocence to moral corruption. This moral progression can be traced through two fundamental aspects of their characterization: love and power. With increasing age, we find a decrease in the capacity for love (that is, for idealized, selfless love), and a corresponding increase in power (and thus in cruelty and inhumanity). Haidée, for instance, has at least nominal power in her position as princess, heiress, and first lady of the land. But the true nature of her subjugated, and ultimately powerless, position is all too evident when her father returns to their island. On the other hand, her capacity for love—and love of the most ideal kind—
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is clearly of profound proportions. Gulbeyaz represents the second step in an evolution of both qualities. That she has power is indisputable: "To hear and to obey' had been from birth/The law of all around her..." (II: 5.112.1-2). Her power is not complete, however: she, too, is subject to a Sultan's whims. Her love, furthermore, though seemingly of a most sincere and passionate nature, is inferior to Haidée's. That she chooses Don Juan from a line of slaves for the express purpose of loving is, needless to say, indication of a cynicism beyond the innocent Haidée's capabilities. Both these tendencies culminate, finally, in Catherine. Her love is little more than open and undisguised lust; her power, too, appears to be absolute in nature ("Glory to God and to the Empress!" exclaims Suwarrow. "Powers Eternal!! such names mingled!" adds the narrator—III: 8.133.7-8). Furthermore, the bloody descriptions of the warfare for which she is responsible are the most explicit indication of her gross misuse of this power.

Immortality and physical decay, then, are clearly related in the linear structure of the poem; and the worst of evil is thus often compared to the passing of time:

The bayonet pierces and the sabre cleaves,
   And human lives are lavished every where,
As the year closing whirls the scarlet leaves
   When the stript forest bows to the bleak air,
And groans; and thus the peopled City grieves,
   Shorn of its best and loveliest, and left bare;
But still it falls with vast and awful splinters,
   As Oaks blown down with all their thousand winters.

(III: 8.88.1-8)

The passage, then, that is most often accused of "tastelessness" within the poem is simply in keeping with this metaphor, and with the world that Byron has created:

Some odd mistakes too happened in the dark,
   Which showed a want of lanthorns, or of taste...
But six old damsels, each of seventy years,
   Were all deflowered by different Grenadiers...

Some voices of the buxom middle-aged
   Were also heard to wonder in the din
(Widows of forty were these birds long caged)
   "Wherefore the ravishing did not begin!"

(III: 8.130.1-132.4)
The worst of evils—warfare, murder, rape—and the spectre of old age, or physical decay, all combine to reinforce Byron's (predominantly) dark vision of the human condition.

So we can see that the concept of decay is important not only to the idea of emotion, but to the idea of morality; and not only thematically important, but structurally important, as well. Furthermore, this progressive linear structure is reflected and reinforced continually throughout the poem in the presence of more minute versions of the same technique. Stanzas 122 to 126 of Canto I, for instance, contain such a condensed progression. In what amounts to an extended description of the concept of "sweet," the passage begins with highly romantic images of nature that anticipate many such passages in the Haidée episode:

... 'Tis sweet to hear
At midnight on the blue and moonlit deep
The song and oar of Adria's gondolier,
By distance mellow'd, o'er the waters sweep;
'Tis sweet to see the evening star appear;
'Tis sweet to listen as the nightwinds creep
From leaf to leaf. . . .

(II: 1.122.1-7)

In stanza 124, however, the language begins to shift from the romantic to reflect, instead, a heady, bacchanalian lust that anticipates, for instance, the Dudu episode in Canto VI:

Sweet is the vintage, when the showering grapes
In Bacchanal profusion reel to earth
Purple and gushing. . . .

(II: 1.124.1-3)

The passage then goes on (with the exception of one line, which describes the love of a father for his first-born) to mention both war-lust and greed for money in the same breath:

Sweet to the miser are his glittering heaps . . .
Sweet is revenge—especially to women,
Pillage to soldiers, prize-money to seamen.

(II: 1.124.5-8)
The theme of material greed is continued as the language now changes to reflect the caustic humor characteristic of the England cantos, and of those passages in the poem which come closest to satire:

Sweet is a legacy, and passing sweet
The unexpected death of some old lady
Or gentleman of seventy years complete,
Who've made "us youth" wait too—too long already
For an estate, or cash, or country-seat . . .

(II: 1.125.1-8)

The gradual shift in thematic emphasis, then, is accompanied by a corresponding shift in tone from pathos, or seriousness, to satire. Progressive series such as this one are found in even more condensed form elsewhere; and, if not precisely reflective of the poem's order of progression, they at least approximately suggest it:

Love's the first net which spreads its deadly mesh;
   Ambition, Avarice, Vengeance, Glory, glue
The glittering lime-twigs of our latter days,
   Where still we flutter on for pence or praise.

(II: 5.22.5-8)

Few mortals know what end they would be at,
   But whether glory, power, or love, or treasure,
The path is through perplexing ways, and when
The goal is gain'd, we die . . .

(II: 1.133.5-8)

This technique is quite similar to the "diminuendo" series that M. K. Joseph finds (p. 214)—a technique that he too sees as "microstructure" reflecting "macrostructure" (p. 212). He speaks about what Donald Davie has called, in his Purity of Diction in English Verse, "a deliberate courting of impurities in diction" (qtd. in Joseph, p. 220)—a series that reflects a falling-off, or a "break[ing of] decorum by drawing on the prosaic," thus leading to "anti-climax and deflation" (p. 214). Furthermore, he follows his description of this "controlled 'impurity'" (p. 223) with discussion of the "catastrophism" (p. 224) (as opposed to evolution) that some geologists of Byron's time supported, and that Byron himself, so Joseph argues, seems partial to within Don Juan. He does not make the connection explicit, but the affinities between Joseph's idea of "microstructure" (diminuendo series) and "macrostructure" (catastrophism and its related themes) are evident:
both reflect the dissipation, degeneration, or general “falling-off” that is characteristic of the poem on many levels. What is particularly interesting, however, is that in Joseph’s discussion of the “diminuendo” series he relates the technique, however briefly, to tone, suggesting that the “deflative” move is also a move from the “serious” to the “cosmic” (p. 214). This brings to mind Ridenour’s (and others’) discussion of “high and low” diction—and one is sorely tempted to see even the multiple shades of the narrator’s tone as a progression from seriousness to irony, pathos to satire, or a kind of “decay” within itself. Even more significantly, however, Byron himself suggests this idea in Don Juan when he directly relates “deflation” of style to the passing of time, and to his own physical decay:

Now my sere fancy “falls into the yellow
   Leaf,” and imagination droops her pinion,
   And the sad truth which hovers o’er my desk
   Turns what was once romantic to burlesque.

(II: 4.3.5-8)

From theme, to structure, to style—on moral, social, and literal levels—the concept of decay infuses the poem, and goes a long way towards helping us understand both narrator and author.

III

One important qualification must be made here to my reading of this poem. Although the importance of the concept of decay seems to me undeniable, Byron may well have been aware (at least instinctively) of the inherent complexities of such an idea, and of the dangers of oversimplification. Indeed, many critics—no matter which themes they have stressed in their own interpretations—must eventually do some kind of double-bind, and remark upon the same thing: Byron’s insistence on having things both ways—even a hundred different ways—at once. This artistic peculiarity gives rise to such critical examinations as the following: “The poem will allow us to formulate not an idea about itself but only ideas about what it is saying at any particular moment”; “The traditional associations of epic and satire are constantly being played against each other in the course of defining the sense in which a satire may be epic”; “And, after all, love and dreams of paradise regained are no different from ‘Fame, Ambition, Avarice.’”4 Rather than seeing this tendency as nothing more substantial than uncontrolled self-contradiction, I believe, on the contrary, that Byron was simply being true to his own philosophy about any “system”
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whatevver, and therefore avoided imposing such a closed system upon
the world of his poem.

The clearest indication of this possibility is the remarkable
"balance" of Don Juan. The first, most blatant, example of this balance
can be found in the peculiar nature and structure of Canto II. If the first
half of Canto II is to be included in the linear structure of the poem, in
its gradual "falling-off" process, then it is indeed placed in a peculiar
position. The extreme pessimism and darkness of this section—the
shipwreck passage—is not reached again in the poem—not even, in my
opinion, in the war scenes of Cantos VII and VIII. Here, in this second
canto, Juan encounters the darkest of the dark: cannibalism, insanity,
unparalleled physical suffering, and death. This entire section is in fact
a long, tortured, and hopeless scene of decay as the shipwrecked men
waste away in body, mind, and spirit. They are reduced, in the end, to
animals; and all ideals, all common bonds of humanity, are rendered
absolutely meaningless.

This passage, clearly, should come after the Haidée episode if it is
to be in keeping with the dominant structure of the poem. But we are
reminded in its particular placement that decay is something more than
a process—that Juan, in short, must die before he can be reborn to
paradise. Death must come first in the progression because it is
inherent in everything that contains Life; and this much is clear in the
second half of the canto, which is infused with vestiges of its first half.

After the dark vision of sin and death in the shipwreck passage, echoes
of this vision throughout the rest of the poem, especially in the Haidée
episode, are particularly effective. Love may be at its most beautiful in
Canto III, but it is also a source of sin and suffering. The narrator even
goes so far as to call it the "god of evil" (205.7), and likens it to Death
itself (st. 197). Haidée also embodies elements of evil and death. Her
eyes, we learn almost immediately, are "black as death" (117.2), and she
stands over Juan, as he sleeps, "still as death" (143.7). Finally, we are
reminded that the warmth with which she restores life to Don Juan is
kindled by the broken remnants of wrecked ships:

They made a fire, but such a fire as they
Upon the moment could coalesce with such
Materials as were cast up round the bay,
Some broken planks, and ears, that to the touch
Were nearly tinder, since so long they lay
A mast was almost crumbled to a shruite . . .

(132.1-6)
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With this passage, the image of decay surfaces once again; and thus we see that the life of the canto's second half is quite literally dependent on the decay of its first half.

The first half of this canto, then, serves to "open" what I see as a system of morality that would otherwise, in many ways, remain closed. In Cantos II through X the increasing decay of morals is unmistakably associated with the growth of civilization—with monarchy, imperialism, and war in particular. Such inferior stanzas as the Daniel Boone passage in Canto VIII (sts. 61-67) are indication of the banality that such an oversimplification—or closed system—must inevitably lead to. The first half of Canto II, however, anticipates that problem. While the rest of the poem clearly suggests that civilization equals evil, the message of the first half of Canto II is just as clear that evil lies, not within society, but within the heart of man. It is a scene, after all, cut off from all vestiges of civilization: it is the bottom line—man left to himself in a moral void, struggling for nothing but survival. A fitting beginning to the poem's long trek towards civilization, it is the opposite of civilization—of Catherine's world—and thus balances the all-too-simple presentation of evil that her world might sometimes seem to suggest.

But perhaps the most poignant and condensed example of this kind of balance lies in what Ridenour sees as the poem's controlling theme: that of the Fall. Byron's many paradisal allusions in the poem contain, in essence, two contradictory ideas: that of man in his ideal state and that of man falling away from his ideal state. Paradise, then, is an allusion to both timeless perfection, as well as to the beginning of both spiritual and physical decay for man—that "slip" which "tumbled all mankind into the grave" (III: 9.19.3-4). That such a paradox is indeed central to the work, and conscious on Byron's part, is evident in passages such as the following in which he describes the "paradisal" homeland of Haidée's mother:

Her mother was a Moorish maid, from Fez,
Where all is Eden, or a wilderness.

There the large olive rains its amber store
   In marble fonts; there grain, and flower, and fruit,
Gush from the earth until the land runs o'er;
   But there too many a poison-tree has root,
And midnight listens to the lion's roar,
   And long, long deserts scorch the camel's foot,
Or heaving whelm the helpless caravan,
And as the soil is, so the heart of man.

      (II: 4.54.7-55.8)
Innocence is corruption, beauty is evil, life is death: such ideas are everywhere in the poem, both implicit and explicit ("For me, I sometimes think that Life is Death," says the narrator—III: 9.16.7, my emphasis). About these passages one could accurately say what Ridenour says about certain other passages in his discussion of the Fall:

The statements, taken in themselves, are clearly contradictory. But again this is not indecision or confusion. Not only do both points of view have their validity, but Byron supplies us with a consistent metaphor in terms of which the fact may be contemplated. That basis is again the Christian myth of the Fall. (28-29)

Within a structure, then, that clearly reflects a linear and time-bound progression, Byron does indeed manage to have it both ways—and successfully.

IV

There could be no more fitting conclusion to a poem with the structural and stylistic characteristics of Don Juan than for the hero to find himself, eventually, in the poet’s native England. England is indeed the very height of “civilized decadence” within the poem—the true culmination of all that has gone before. Lust for power is replaced by lust for money in the final six cantos—for the “wealth of worlds” (III: 10.83.4), which is associated with decay, or old age, more than once:

Youth fades, and leaves our days no longer sunny;
We tire of Mistresses and Parasites;
But oh, Ambrosial Cash! Ah! who would lose thee?
When we no more can use, or even abuse thee!

(III: 13.100.5-8)

Consequently, as pathos, drama, and horror wane, satire emerges as the most fitting approach to the decadence characteristic of England.

As tone changes, then, and the linear structure of the poem as we have seen it dissolves, other elements of the poem must naturally and inevitably change, including the nature and treatment of the poem’s controlling metaphor. The stark, condensed, and vivid images of decay that appear so often in the first ten cantos become less frequent. At the same time, those passages which do treat specifically of decay, though fewer and more subtle, are generally longer, and take on new and
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powerful urgency. The *ubi sunt* passage in Canto XI (sts. 76-85) is a fine example. The theme of decay, though muted here, is undeniably present; and in these ten stanzas universality, pathos, and a genuine grieving for humankind all blend perfectly and eloquently with satire:5

"Where is the World?" cries Young, "at eighty"—"Where
The World in which a man was born?" Alas!
Where is the world of eight years past? 'T was there—
I look for it—'t is gone, a globe of glass!
Cracked, shivered, vanished, scarcely gazed on, ere
A silent change dissolves the glittering mass.
Statesmen, Chiefs, Orators, Queens, Patriots, Kings,
And Dandies—all are gone on the Wind's wings.

Where is Napoleon the Grand? God knows!
Where little Castlereagh? The devil can tell!
Where Grattan, Curran, Sheridan—all those
Who bound the Bar or Senate in their spell?
Where is the unhappy Queen, with all her woes?
And where the Daughter, whom the Isles loved well?
Where are those martyred saints the Five per Cents?
And where—oh, where the devil are the Rents?

(III: 11.76.1-77.8)

Another example of an extended passage of decay lies in Canto XIII. Here, no less than seven stanzas are devoted to describing the ruin and decay of the old Abbey:

A glorious remnant of the Gothic pile,
(While yet the church was Rome's) stood half apart
In a grand Arch, which once screened many an aisle.
These last had disappear'd—a loss to Art:
The first yet frowned superbly o'er the soil,
And kindled feelings in the roughest heart,
Which mourn'd the power of time's or tempest's march,
In gazing on that venerable Arch . . . .

A mighty window, hollow in the centre,
Shorn of its glass of thousand colourings,
Through which the deepen'd glories once could enter,
Streaming from off the sun like seraph's wings,
Now yawns all desolate: now loud, now fainter,
The gale sweeps through its fretwork, and oft sings
Lise Rodgers

The owl his anthem, where the silenced quire
Lie with their hallelujahs quench’d like fire.

(III: 13.59.1-62.8)

This is in fact a brilliant reappearance of the theme of decay, and its corresponding romantic elements, in a setting now predominantly given over to satire. Throughout Don Juan, it is true, romance and satire alternate, intermingle, complement one another, to add up to what is finally a powerful medley of art and social commentary. Tragedy is tempered with irony, and satire with pathos—we are “scorched and drenched” at once. But the story of the Black Friar is perhaps the greatest medium for this technique within the English cantos. It is a story at once romantic and burlesque—a parody of contemporary Gothic works, and thus one that provides an atmosphere easily inclusive of both the romance of an Aurora Raby, and the wit and worldliness of a Fitzfulke. With this introduction, then, of Gothic elements into British society at its most burlesque, Byron is truly in his element: an element that seems quite clearly linked in some fundamental way to the concept of decay and all that it means to the poet—be it satire, romance, decadence, evil, mortality of man, or immortality of theme.

V

The natural question arises, then, about Byron’s intent: did he or did he not fully and consciously plan all of this? My own sympathies, on the contrary, tend to lie with those critics who believe that Don Juan was a fundamentally fortuitous work—that the growth of the poem was, for the most part, both organic and more or less haphazard. But the presence of decay as a powerful image, a central metaphor, a significant theme, is nevertheless clearly conscious in many places; and I believe that the strength of Byron’s fascination with the idea—particularly at this time of his life (from thirty, to his death at thirty-six)—was enough to make it unconsciously reflected throughout the entire work. Many critics of Don Juan have suggested (McGann, indeed, calls the idea a “commonplace”) that the unifying principle of the poem is nothing other than the character of Byron as narrator, and I am in agreement with this view. In the end, the vision of human existence as decay is nothing less than an attitude, a state of mind, that informs virtually every line of Don Juan, and—because of its depth and pervasiveness—has the potential to reveal a great deal about the poet’s own consciousness besides.

The implications of this theme, indeed, are such that they can call forth strikingly similar reactions to the poem by some of the poem’s
shrewdest interpreters—reactions that are reflected in an even more strikingly similar vocabulary. Rutherford senses a “deflation” of romantic sentiment; Joseph sees not only “deflation” but “anti-climax” and even “catastrophism”; Ridenour gives great emphasis to the Fall as well as to the concepts of “time and disillusion”; McGann talks about the “lowering” of love and ideals, and about the literary and social “decline,” “degeneration,” and “corruption” which *Don Juan* seems “intended . . . to correct.”

McGann’s comments are particularly interesting in that he later relates this “gain and loss, rise and fall” pattern to contemporary political and social events, as well as to Byron’s own life.  

Byron’s letters and journal entries, indeed, merely serve to confirm all of our instincts on the matter. This is a man who is so specifically obsessed with the idea of decay that he cannot fail to visit every ruin or graveyard within his reach, nor keep himself from literally carrying pieces of such sites away with him. In November of his twenty-eighth year, on his way to Venice, he writes the following description of Juliet’s legendary tomb in Verona:

> It is a plain, open, and partly decayed sarcophagus, with withered leaves in it, in a wild and desolate conventual garden, once a cemetery, now ruined to the very graves. The situation struck me as very appropriate to the legend, being blighted as their love. I have brought away a few pieces of the granite.

*(BLJ V, 126)*

Six months earlier, on the same journey, he had written of a similar, even more macabre, experience:

> We went over the site of Aventicum . . . a column or two down—several scattered shafts—& one solitary pillar in the midst of a field—the last of its family . . . . From Morat I brought away the leg and wing of a Burgundian.

*(BLJ V, 78)*

Four years later—and hard at work on *Don Juan*—he continues to display a preoccupation with the subject of physical decomposition that borders on maniacal intensity:

> . . . I have seen a thousand graves opened—and always perceived that whatever was gone—the *teeth and hair* remained of those who had died with them.— —Is not this
Lise Rodgers

odd?—they go the very first things in youth—and yet last the longest in the dust—if people will but die to preserve them?—It is a queer life—and a queer death—that of mortals.

(BLJ VIII, 228)

It was Venice—the city of decay—that seemed to provide the most fertile grounds for Byron's imagination. He writes to Thomas Moore in his twenty-eighth year:

It is my intention to remain at Venice during the winter, probably, as it has always been (next to the East) the greenest island of my imagination. It has not disappointed me; though its evident decay would, perhaps, have that effect upon others. But I have been familiar with ruins too long to dislike desolation.

(BLJ V; 129)

And it is within Venice that he begins work on the greatest artistic achievement of his life, Don Juan. He was thirty at the time.

To Byron, the metaphor of decay was a metaphor so complex as to encompass all the greater concerns of his life: the waning of his own physical, emotional, and sexual powers; the disintegration of his family life; the corruption of his society; the degradation of his literature; the sadly ephemeral nature of his world. And yet, at the same time, decay had a fascinating, morbid beauty about it that would find expression in the romance and history of a Norman abbey or a Venice; in the excitement of a short-lived, adulterous affair; in the deeply troubling paradox of beauty and evil within man. Byron sensed the heart of the universe within the metaphor, and then rightly tapped it to produce some of his most profound, and most beautiful, art in Don Juan.

NOTES


All subsequent references appear in the text with volume, canto, stanza, and line numbers.
DECAY AS METAPHOR IN DON JUAN


5 I am indebted to Jerome McGann for bringing to my attention not only the beauty, but the critical importance, of these stanzas.


7 See in particular, “Don Juan” in Context, Ch. 1.

8 “Don Juan” in Context, pp. 66, 174n.


THE VAST SUSPENSE: PATTERNS OF ANTI-CLOSURE IN TENNYSON

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Written in late summer 1888—apparently soon after his recovery from a severe illness—Tennyson’s “Far-Far-Away” addresses perennial concerns of much of his poetry. The “passion of the past,” the hope of renewal in the dim light of dawn, a terrestrial landscape that fades to a celestial one, even the characteristic forward-backward movement of the verse—all are here in a poem that evokes those central mysteries of existence which seem always to have inspired his best poetry:

A whisper from his dawn of life? a breath
From some fair dawn beyond the doors of death
Far-far-away?

Far, far, how far? from o’er the gates of Birth,
The faint horizons, all the bounds of earth,
Far-far-away?¹

That evocation of the future as “some fair dawn beyond the doors of death” is a characteristic of the poetry, early and—given the evidence of this lyric—quite late. William Fredeman, calling this characteristic of the verse, Tennyson’s “penultimate moment,” has noted its prominence in the dramatic monologues and lyrics, and Christopher Ricks, moving somewhat beyond Fredeman, has observed the penultimate note throughout the canon. In fact, what Ricks has called Tennyson’s “art of the penultimate,” his ability to set up “a tension between [the poem’s] existing moment and its unmentioned outcome”² is as evident here, in 1888, as in poems as early as “Armageddon” (1824?) and “Mariana” (1830). Not only is the penultimate moment expressed in such relatively brief narrative poems as “Armageddon”—where, for example, the poem’s ostensible subject is avoided and the poem ends “on the vast/ Suspense of some grand issue” (R 74, 33-4)—but it may be found in the final stanzas of works as lengthy as the Idylls of the King and In Memoriam. The endings of these poems, in other words, really are not endings in themselves because they so often look forward to a future ending rather than enacting or depicting one.

While perhaps acknowledging Tennyson’s penultimate moment as an “art,” Barbara Herrnstein Smith might prefer to call this poet’s curiously unclosed endings “weak” or even “false.” In what remains to
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this day the only full-length study of poetic closure, Smith contends that adequate, successful closure in a poem “gratifies” by releasing whatever tensions have been stimulated by the poem itself. Putting the case another way, she argues that “an experience is gratifying to the extent that those expectations that are aroused are also fulfilled.” As appropriate as this argument is within the boundaries of Smith’s Poetic Closure, it is inadequate in discussions of the anti-closure tendency of much nineteenth-century verse—Browning’s and Tennyson’s in particular. Tennyson rarely “gratifies” at all in Smith’s sense of the word but writes instead—consistently, over a span of more than sixty years—a kind of poetry which does not close on itself, does not yield what Smith calls a “sense of stable conclusiveness, finality, or ‘clinch’” but, rather, stimulates without gratifying and anticipates without delivering. Even so—and Smith herself accepts the point—“weak” closure often causes the conclusion of the poem to bear an unusually heavy influence on a reader’s interpretation of the whole. In this essay I shall argue, in readings of five representative poems which resist Smith’s traditional sense of closure, that Tennyson’s use of anti-closure has crucial consequences on interpretation. Further, I will suggest that Tennyson’s anti-closure conforms to a relatively consistent pattern within the canon as the unclosed poems share not only characteristics of style but also demonstrate Tennyson’s sense of a non-ending in art as well as in life.

“Mariana” first appeared in Poems, Chiefly Lyrical (1830), and represents an early example of Tennysonian anti-closure in narrative verse. While other poems in that volume resist enacting the endings they seem to promise—“The Kraken,” for example, and “A spirit haunts the year’s last hours”—“Mariana” alone stops short of a conclusion not only well known but far happier than the one the poem appears to embrace. The Kraken’s end is obscured by its use of the future tense, the “spirit” of the year’s last hours is felt more than seen; so the precise identities and ultimate destinies of the sea creature and the spirit are unrevealed. But “Mariana” has an ending, not in the poem itself but in the comedy which provides that epigraph on the moated grange, Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure. Why Tennyson should allude within an unresolved poem to comic resolution in Shakespeare is only one question raised by the anti-closure pattern taken by “Mariana.”

From beginning to end, “Mariana” surprises us and reverses our expectations. The allusion in the epigraph to a play in which Mariana is married to Angelo, is obviously undercut by the poem; less obviously, the apparent “quotation” from Shakespeare actually does not appear in his play. The perfectly regular iambic tetrameter lines are broken at the ninth line of each stanza, and they are further attenuated
by the feminine rhymes of the refrain and by its numbing repetitions. The expected progression from “day” to “night” never occurs as we move from one refrain to the next; the progression from “night” to “day” occurs only once (stanzas 2 and 3) and may very well be forgotten as “life” and “night” become nearly synonymous, appearing five times in the poem’s seven refrains. So our expectation of natural progression to a close is impeded at every turn. Time is suspended as the poem seems to rotate in space on its monotonous refrains; and those internal repetitions within the refrains (she said, she said; aweary, aweary) give only the illusion of motion through rhythm and repetition because Mariana herself is going nowhere. It is true that despite the many repetitions, the refrains are not identical, and in what appears to be the speaker’s most significant cry, Mariana moves from wish to plea. The change occurs in the final line: not, “I would that I were dead!” but for this one and last time, “Oh God, that I were dead!” The change in tone is so slight as to be virtually insignificant, and even that apparent introduction of the spondee in the final line may be more wished for by the reader than sanctioned by an iambic trimeter line that never changes in seven stanzas.

At the end of the poem Mariana looks out across the moated grange, the glooming flats, the rounding gray to, presumably, a man who does not come and a God who does not answer. The poem obviously does not attain resolution, but it does provide a sign of resolution in its epigraph. So we return to the interpretive problem raised by this version of anti-closure: why allude in an unclosed poem to the ultimately “closed” relationship of Mariana and Angelo, a relationship resolved in marriage? Ricks finds the allusion “profoundly equivocal,” optimistic and pessimistic simultaneously. “Mariana” is optimistic as it points to the happy resolution in Shakespeare, pessimistic in its reminder that Measure for Measure “is patently not the real vulnerable world, whereas the world of ‘Mariana’ may be.” This ironic discrepancy set up by the juxtaposition of Shakespearean and Tennysonian Marianas is especially pointed in James Kincaid’s reading of the poem. Calling the poem “a cosmic statement of irony,” Kincaid sees no point in looking to Measure for Measure for a resolution withheld in the poem; in “Mariana” the “whole point [is] that Mariana’s love is senselessly denied, that her fruition is cut off without reason.” These ironic readings exert a powerful attraction, but they overlook the pattern frequently taken by Tennysonian anti-closure. I am anticipating some readings of later poems, but I believe that even here in the early “Mariana” the poem does not give us a close because the close so hopelessly desired is death. Even here, a silent God will not answer a plea from one who wants only to die.
Before moving to a discussion of the anti-closural patterns in the dramatic monologues, I wish to consider two more narrative poems from the early years. Both “The Lady of Shalott” and “The Lotos-Eaters” appeared in Poems (1833) and both reappeared, considerably revised in Poems (1842). In his revisions Tennyson paid particular attention to the endings of both poems, and comparison of the final stanzas of the 1833 “Shalott” and “Lotos-Eaters” with their 1842 versions illustrates Tennyson’s continuing interest in the unclosed ending. The second “Shalott,” for example, is clearly more unclosed than the first, and the second “Lotos-Eaters,” while less allusive and open-ended than “Shalott,” shows especially in its final lines how a sophisticated sense of anti-closure betrays the hollowness of the mariners’ Choric Song.

“The Lady of Shalott” embraces antithetical subjects: island and city; “four gray walls, and four gray towers,” and “the lighted palace;” and, finally, the “fairy Lady of Shalott” and “bold Sir Lancelot.” The antitheses point to the lady’s terrible choice but for our purposes they would seem to point to a strong sense of closure, rather than anti-closure. For despite the woman’s containment by walls, island, and river, she braves the curse to look down to Camelot and then actually moves Shalott to Camelot. The choice is fatal to the lady, but in bringing death to the poem’s close it would seem that the poem precludes an unclosed reading. And not only do all those Camelot-Shalott rhymes—seventeen pairs of them by the final stanza—point to a strong sense of closure as Shalott meets Camelot and the lady meets her death, but even the lady’s single speech is contained by an unvarying and regular metrical line. Her last word may be unaccented, but it is answered by the final stress of the iambic tetrameter line:

Out flew the web and floated wide;  
The mirror cracked from side to side;  
‘The curse is come upon me,’ cried  
The Lady of Shalott.  
(R 359, 114-17)

Dwight Culler observes that Lancelot intrudes into the lady’s refrain “as he had into her world”9 and indeed he does in both versions of the poem; but, in the important revision of 1842, she does actually meet the bold Sir Lancelot. Tennyson himself commented on his revised version and paid special attention to his reduction in 1842 of hissing sibilants—he claimed he had succeeded in kicking “the geese out of the boat.”10 More important than the absence of geese is the presence of that final stanza, for not only does it replace an 1832
conceding stanza on the “wellfed wits at Camelot,” but it introduces Lancelot’s one and only comment on the lady:

Who is this? and what is here?  
And in the lighted palace near  
Died the sound of royal cheer;  
And they crossed themselves for fear,  
All the knights at Camelot:  
But Lancelot mused a little space;  
He said, “She has a lovely face;  
God in his mercy lend her grace,  
The Lady of Shalott.”

(R 361, 163-71)

Lancelot’s comment would seem equivocal. James Kissane, for example, sees “smug insensitivity” in Lancelot’s words, but Edgar Shannon reminds us that the second line, “God in his mercy lend her grace” would recall, at least to Anglican ears, the burial service in The Book of Common Prayer “with its supplications for both mercy and grace.” Shannon’s reading complements Ricks’s, but Ricks, once again, points to the unclosed reading invited by the 1842 revision: “...in those lines we sense—off the end of the poem again—another destructive love which awaits its catastrophe.” Such a reading is wholly appropriate, for Tennyson is already alluding through Lancelot to other poems within the canon—both written and unwritten. In Lancelot’s words “lovely face” Tennyson echoes a line from the 1830 poem “Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere”; the compliment first given Guinevere that is now given the Lady of Shalott helps us see the relevance of Ricks’s comment on a “destructive love” awaiting its catastrophe. But the poem also looks forward to the treatment of the Shalott-Lancelot story in “Lancelot and Elaine” in 1859 of the Idylls. The point of the unclosed ending is not a cruel irony: the lady has not died only to be commemorated with a flippant aside. For the Lady of Shalott dies within a context far larger than that perceived by the isolated artist—the context includes a poem written twelve years earlier and one to be written seventeen years later. The artistic context is not only larger than the self but it permits re-creation: the Lady of Shalott becomes Elaine, the Lily Maid of Astolat. The ultimate paradox of the poem is that the lady’s death brings life to Tennyson’s artistic Camelot.

As is the case with “The Lady of Shalott,” the most significant revisions in the 1842 version of “The Lotus-Eaters” occur at the end of the poem. Twenty-three lines composed in 1842 replace the earlier conclusion, but their effect on an unclosed reading of the poem is not
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nearly so strong as the second Lady of Shalott on the first. As consistent as his interest in anti-closure seems to be, it is also true that "The Lady of Shalott" and "The Lotos-Eaters" exist in different contexts and would appear to attract Tennyson in different ways. The fact that the lady is an isolated artist whose fate seems enigmatic would seem part of an almost personal myth of the artist—a myth resolved positively, at least in my reading of the poem, by the 1842 version. But "The Lotos-Eaters" has a classical context and an ending, unmentioned as usual in the poem, in the Odyssey. Odysseus, that is, provides a cryptic end of the story: "These men, therefore, I brought back perforce to the ships, weeping." Tennyson will have none of this and leaves his mariners in both versions of the poem vowing neither to "return" (1832) nor to "wander" (1842) "more." The 1842 version is, as we shall see, as unclosed as the first version in denying Odysseus his swift resolution, but by oddly recalling words from another important and unclosed poem of 1842 the poem subtly exposes the fatal delusion of the mariners' song.

"The Lotos-Eaters" provides us with a structure we have not seen in previous unclosed poems. The regular stanzas of "Mariana" and "The Lady of Shalott" give way to the five Spenserians of the opening frame and to the long and metrically varied Choric Song of the mariners. So formal a metrical environment would seem to preclude anti-closure, but it is part of the poem's elaborate irony that things are not what they seem, and the Spenserian stanza itself is used as a formal contrivance designed to mask a hollow argument for selfish irresponsibility. As early as the first stanza the whole poem actually pivots away from Odysseus' command—"Courage!"—and settles into elaborate, stylized description:

In the afternoon they came unto a land
In which it seemed always afternoon.
All round the coast the languid air did swoon,
Breathing like one that hath a weary dream.
Full-faced above the valley stood the moon;
And like a downward smoke, the slender stream
Along the cliff to fall and pause and fall did seem.
(R 430, 309)

That final Alexandrine illustrates a part of the poem's method. The archaic verb form "did seem" fulfills the obligation of the final line to expand its length by a foot but it also focuses on semblance as a problem to confront. To put the point another way, the line provides an illusion of what the mariners take to be reality and gives us, simultaneously, an illusion of finality. For what would seem more
formal, more “closed” than the Spenserian stanza? Not Tennyson’s version, for his Spenserians are deliberately padded with their archaic verbs as they give the illusion of formality, order, and finality—an illusion eventually broken by the intrusion of the Choric Song.

The Spenserians give way to the Choric Song which literally carries the poem away from the opening formal cadences. In one way, the poem’s essentially unclosed nature is almost graphically illustrated by the way in which it remains “unframed”—Spenserians introduce a Choric Song that never returns to the opening Spenserians for a traditional sense of closure. In another way, we know from the allusion to the Odyssey that the Choric Song does not give us the final word on the mariners. But even more interesting than the formal break of Spenserians to free verse and the Homeric allusion—both of which point to the unclosed nature of the poem—is the revised 1842 version with its ability to allude to another poem within the canon first published in 1830.

The most obvious difference between the two endings is the announcement by the mariners in 1842 that they will “Live and lie reclined/ On the hills like Gods together, careless of mankind.” This hubristic oath was not a part even of the tone of the 1832 version, and its inclusion in 1842 would seem to indicate Tennyson’s more confident rejection of the desire to escape a world from which “All things are taken from us, and become/ Portions and parcels of the dreadful past.” The argument may be irresponsible, but in Tennyson’s second version he wishes us to see that it is confused—fatally so. The original version ends as follows:

Surely, surely slumber is more sweet than toil, the shore
Than labour in the ocean, and rowing with the oar.
Oh! islanders of Ithaca, we will return no more.
(R 436, [38-40])

But in 1842, these lines conclude the poem:

Surely, surely slumber is more sweet than toil, the shore
Than labour in the deep mid-ocean, wind and wave and oar;
Oh rest ye, brother mariners, we will not wander more.
(R 437, 171-73)

The important difference between the conclusions, as I see it, is the insertion of “rest” in the last line of the 1842 poem. The word recalls, uneasily, the rest of the dead, and in fact the word appears almost antithetical to death in the Choric Song itself at l. 96:
All things have rest, and ripen toward the grave  
In silence; ripen, fall and cease:  
Give us long rest or death, dark death, or dreamful ease.  
(R 433, 96-98)

And “rest” has been associated with death in the 1832 elegy on Edward Spedding, “To J. S.” Significantly, the word appears near the close of the poem: “Sleep full of rest from head to feet; Lie still, dry dust, secure of change” (R 466, 75-6). The allusively unclosed ending of “The Lotos-Eaters” reminds us again not only that there is “confusion worse than death” but that what the mariners most yearn for is death. We have not heard so eloquent a plea for death since Mariana’s mournful refrains—and this plea, like hers, will go unanswered.

If patterns of anti-closure occur with some frequency in the narrative poems, their roles and their effect on interpretation are even more prominent in the dramatic monologues. In his essay on the nine major dramatic monologues Tennyson wrote between 1833 and 1885, William Fredeman notes their common treatment of the penultimate: the speakers share the twilight of old age and face a future undisclosed within the poems themselves. He notes as well that in contrast to Browning’s speakers who, “even when they are victims of their own delusions” can move backward and forward, Tennyson’s speakers “are cornered; they can only, as Ulysses puts it so well,... ‘pause’ and ‘make an end’.”

The pause which makes up the seventy blank verse lines of “Ulysses” is an especially provocative example of Tennyson’s anti-closure, for once again a poem anticipates a conclusion withheld. In this case the conclusion is in Dante’s Inferno where only a few lines after Ulysses’ speech to his mariners, his ship, his crew, and Ulysses himself sink beneath the waves. Despite Tennyson’s gloss in the Memoir that the poem “gives the feeling about the need of going forward and braving the struggle of life perhaps more simply than anything in ‘In Memoriam’,” we should be troubled by a poem which clearly does not move forward—and even more troubled when we realize that the voyage, off the edge of the poem, is a final one. It may be especially helpful, then, to take another look at “Ulysses” within the context of Tennyson’s unclosed poems.

The peculiar silence in “Ulysses” is a characteristic of other unclosed poems we have examined and is present even in “The Lotos-Eaters” where the mariners sing in one voice to an unnamed, unseen audience. But of more significance than the peculiarly isolating silence is the heavy weight of the past in his monologue. In this subject, too, the poem shares similarities with other unclosed poems. But Ulysses’ burden of the past is far heavier than anything we have seen so far
because he, unlike all the others, is an old man. He knows the length of years traveled between past experiences and the present moment and is almost brutally honest in acknowledging how short is the distance between his present self and his future death:

for my purpose holds
   To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
   Of all the western stars, until I die.
(R 565, 59-61)

However close the final voyage may be, however much the use of the conditional mood attenuates the speaker’s use of the future tense, Ulysses does not simply yearn for death. His problem is that in one sensibility he contains both past and present and knows, as Tennyson knew himself, the paradoxically close but distant relation of past to present.

That much should be clear from some of the most famous lines in the poem, the ones celebrated by Matthew Arnold as taking up by themselves “nearly as much time as a whole book of the Iliad”:17

   I am a part of all that I have met;
   Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough
   Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades
   For ever and for ever when I move.
(R 563, 18-21)

Ulysses’ past is summed up in his present but the lines on the future (the “untravelled world”) are richly suggestive. While it may certainly be true that in these lines we see the heroic or even existential Ulysses ready to assert himself or define himself through yet another great adventure, it is significant that the man does nothing of the kind and remains, as Goldwin Smith noted as early as 1855,18 standing on the shore. Within the context of the unclosed poems we may be able to understand what appears to be a contradiction in lines on movement spoken by a speaker in suspension. Ulysses seeks not simply a new adventure but a place where the margin—a boundary, something that contains—fades for ever and for ever. Also, within a few lines, Ulysses speaks once more of moving outside boundaries,

   To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
   Beyond the utmost bounds of human thought.
(R 564, 31-2)

The lines anticipate movement beyond not only this present time and space but movement beyond death. It may be, says Ulysses, the gulfs
will wash us down: “It may be that we shall touch the Happy Isles/
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew” (R 565, 62-3). Achilles
was on those ringing plains in windy Troy so many years ago and it is
hard to imagine in a poem which alludes at the end to the great warrior,
that Ulysses fails to associate his past with the dead Achilles; it is hard
to imagine, too, that Tennyson fails to associate Achilles with
Hallam—especially when we learn that l. 66 quotes directly from a
poem written in 1829 by Hallam himself.19 To bring past, present,
and even future together—and to see the great Achilles, whom we
knew—is to escape indeed the bounds of human thought. It is certainly
this experience which Ulysses so poignantly hopes for. Years before
Tennyson’s “Ancient Sage” will counsel that in certain moments “the
late and early [are] but one” (R 1355, 222), Ulysses seeks to pass
beyond—in the words of yet another late poem, “Far-Far-Away”—“the
bounds of earth.” So deep, finally, is this yearning for a passage
beyond this world, that the weight of the poem comes to rest not on
what appears to be the strong sense of closure announced in four
infinitives—“To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield,”20—but on a
single word that admits of movement and experience to come: yield.

“Tithon”—later revised as “Tithonus”—was written almost
simultaneously with “Ulysses” in 1833 and in this dramatic monologue
Tennyson turns once more to the unclosed ending. Not only is the
ending withheld, but other elements we associate with Tennyson’s anti-
closural patterns recur. Tithonus is at least as solitary a figure as
Ulysses; for not only is it far from clear that Aurora hears his plea,
“take back thy gift,” but Tithonus actually refers to his home at the
dge of the world as “the ever-silent spaces of the East” (R 114, 9).21
The burden of the past is heavy upon him, too, though it is possible
that no one in the unclosed poem carries so heavy a burden; for
Tithonus, alone among the monologuists, faces that past directly—day
after day—in the beauty and eternal youth of Aurora:

thy strong Hours indignant worked their wills,
And beat me down and marred and wasted me,
And though they could not end me, left me maimed
To dwell in presence of immortal youth,
Immortal age beside immortal youth,
And all I was, in ashes.

(R 1115, 18-23)

The repetitions in these lines imitate the burden of immortality by
repeating the word “immortal” three times within six words and by
rhyming “youth” with itself. These lines also point to a cruel
disparity: immortal youth and immortal age. We saw earlier in “The
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Lady of Shalott” how the oppositions of Shalott and Camelot and, finally, Lancelot impeded movement and suppressed clear resolution, so we should not be surprised to see opposites play a role in this unclosed poem. “Tithonus,” however, resembles “Mariana” even more than “The Lady of Shalott” in its direct plea for death and in its stasis. The poem’s stasis is most pronounced in its opening:

The woods decay, the woods decay and fall,
The vapours weep their burthen to the ground,
Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,
And after many a summer dies the swan.

(R 1114, 1-4)

In the first version of the poem l. 4 read, “And after many summers dies the rose” (R 566, 4), and it is interesting to consider that in replacing the rose with the swan Tennyson alludes not only to his poem “The Dying Swan,” written in 1830, but also to the imagery surrounding the dying Lady of Shalott (R 360, 136-53). The poem’s opening cadences prepare us for its end as we find Tithonus yearning to “lie beneath” the ground:

Release me, and restore me to the ground;
Thou seest all things, thou wilt see my grave:
Thou wilt renew thy beauty morn by morn;
I earth in earth forget these empty courts,
And thee returning on thy silver wheels.

(R 1118, 72-6)

Even in its conclusion, the poem has not moved beyond its opening as the imagery of the grave recalls l. 3. And in resting on the concluding word “wheels” the poem suggests that the movement of Aurora and the dawn will come round again. Tomorrow will be much the same as today, and Tithonus will remain powerless to affect change. Mariana, confronted with a similar situation, yearns for death as resolution. So, too, Tithonus. But once more we see in an unclosed poem that yearns for death that such pleas go unanswered.

It should be clear that the unclosed ending is a characteristic of Tennyson’s lengthy and productive career. I have referred to the characteristic in several poems and have concentrated on readings of five important unclosed poems in order to illustrate what I have called “patterns of anti-closure.” Others may very well find the unclosed ending in many additional poems. Ricks, for example, mentions at least twenty-seven poems—if my count is accurate—as illustrating Tennyson’s art of the penultimate.
ANTI-CLOSURE IN TENNYSON

As I noted earlier, Barbara Herrnstein Smith has argued that successful closure gratifies the reader by releasing whatever tensions have been stimulated by the poem itself. But it is certainly possible, perhaps even necessary, to say now that Tennyson’s unclosed poems gratify in ways Smith has not recognized. Like Keats’s urn, which may “tease us out of thought,” Tennyson’s unclosed poems intend to gratify our sense of wonder, our delight in questing for, rather than arriving at, an emphatic, unambiguous meaning. They illustrate Carlyle’s pronouncement, given in “Characteristics,” published one year after Tennyson’s Poems, Chiefly Lyrical, that incompleteness, rather than its opposite, is a truer manifestation of reality: “Perfection of Practice, like completeness of Opinion, is always approaching, never arrived: Truth, in the words of Schiller, immer wird, nie ist; never is, always is a-being.”22 The poems illustrate what Lawrence Starzyk has called “the metaphysics of becoming”—but with a distinctly Victorian slant. Starzyk holds that early Victorian poetics are Romantic in their metaphysical origins but “anti-Romantic in [their] essentially moral orientation.”23 The pattern of Tennyson’s anti-closure supports Starzyk and simultaneously shows Tennyson’s implicit endorsement of Schiller and Carlyle: those who would remove themselves from the society of their fellows, as the mariners, or those who yearn for death or, even, pray to God for death, are consistently denied the “end” they so desire.

It may be appropriate, in this penultimate section of the essay, to pause before the end and consider what the patterns of anti-closure in Tennyson suggest. I would suggest, first, that those poems in Tennyson which seem to exist in a state of suspended animation share some elements of style beyond their obviously unclosed endings. Nearly all the unclosed poems depend for part of their effect on repetition. “Mariana”’s refrains emphasize her weariness with almost narcotic effect, and “The Lady of Shalott”’s regular repetition of Camelot and Shalott emphasizes the two poles on which her life and death depend. More subtly colored within the poem but of no less importance to our understanding of character than the repetitions in the preceding poems, the repetitions of key words in “Ulysses” (“old”) and in “Tithonus” (“immortal age”) show that even in the dramatic monologues repetition makes up part of the pattern of anti-closure.

The importance of repetition to anti-closure is its ability to impede forward movement. The refrains in “Mariana” act as a dead weight and make each day for her much the same as the day before. No progress that way—and lack of progress, lack of change is clearly one of the points of the poem. Movement in “Ulysses” is retarded mainly by a more subtle kind of repetition than “Mariana”’s almost identical refrains. W. David Shaw, for example, comments sensitively on
Ulysses as a man “possessed by the magic of repose, [as] the slow, long-vowel movement produces a round-and-round hypnotic rhythm that enchants and beguiles him”.

The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
Moans round with many voices.

(R 565, 54-6)

Of course the use of three colons within two lines and two caesuras within a single line amount almost to a retrograde movement at the end of the poem. Repetition, then, impedes movement and contributes to our sense that the endings of so many of the poems are off the horizons of the poems themselves.

The resolutions which these central figures hope to pursue or realize illustrate further similarities in the unclosed poems—but also some important differences. In his observation that the dramatic monologues focus consistently on speakers near the point of death, Fredeman notes that “the propinquity of death” was a subject which attracted and fascinated Tennyson throughout his career, and although Fredeman writes mainly of that fascination’s effect on the monologues, I think he would agree that other types of poems within the canon illustrate an almost deathless fascination with death itself. It is important to recognize, however, that the unclosed poems do not embrace death as a resolution for whatever problems the poems depict—in fact, they do just the opposite. “Mariana” provides the most obvious example of a life that sees “no hope of change,” of a woman tempted to commit suicide, of an abandoned lover who prays to God, in remarkable blasphemy, for death. The close so desired is death, but in resisting that close and in fact pointing through the Shakespearean allusion to another kind of ending altogether, the poem emphatically withholds death as a resolution. The case is nearly the same in “Tithonus” whose speaker pleads to an uncomprehending or at least silent Aurora for death as a release from the pain of immortal age. Again, the resolution of death so longed for is suppressed from the poem. The mariners in “The Lotus-Eaters” are clearly haunted by their parents’ deaths but they do not, consciously, wish themselves to become “handfuls of white dust, shut in an urn of brass.” Nevertheless, the rest they desire in the final lines comes uncomfortably close to the eternal rest of death; but that ending, too, is withheld from the poem. It would seem, then, that the pattern anti-closure takes in some poems is deliberately set against those who wish to die or those who confuse, as the mariners do, a “long rest” with a “dark death.”
Although “The Lady of Shalott” ends in death and “Ulysses” comes uneasily close to death, both poems illustrate anti-closural patterns far different from the preceding set. The Lady of Shalott dies into a world far greater than isolated Shalott, and that world—Camelot and Lancelot—proclaims her importance as a figure who can move Lancelot himself and as a figure who will be recreated in art. Her death, in other words, is not an end at all since there are other “ends” off the edge of the poem which in fact give life. My argument, I realize, is primarily an esthetic one, but the importance of the poem in its two versions, in its allusions to the early poem “Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere,” and in its anticipation of “Lancelot and Elaine” in the Idylls should be clear: to Tennyson the Lady has not died at all—unlike Mariana and Tithonus, she never sought death anyway—and she has been recreated in the poetic imagination. Death, at least esthetically, has been vanquished.

“Ulysses” sets itself apart from “Tithonus” and the other poems so in love with easeful death, but, as suggested earlier, it seems to belie Tennyson’s claim that “it gives the feeling about the need of going forward.” Some would argue that if the poem points to forward movement at all, it is a movement into certain death. But in his hope to move beyond the “bound of human thought,” Ulysses actually resembles the unnamed speaker of the early “Armageddon,” a poem in which time, space and being are “swallowed up and lost/ Within a victory of boundless thought” (R 72, 44-5). Nevertheless, Ulysses is much older than the young speaker of “Armageddon,” and Tennyson himself was far more conscious of the recent loss of Hallam when, in 1833, the dramatic monologue placed its speaker on a dark shore gazing at a dim sea. “Ulysses” therefore resembles “Armageddon” in its wish to annihilate time and space, but it differs from the earlier poem in its wish to embrace the dead Hallam. The lack of closure in “Ulysses,” then is wholly appropriate. The poem raises the possibility, firmly endorsed in “Vastness” that “the dead are not dead but alive,” and anticipates that “we shall touch the Happy Isles,/ And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.” Achilles—and Hallam—have not reached an end, so the poem, perforce, cannot end.

The pattern of “Ulysses,” which looks backward and forward and, in its anticipation of the future, hopes to transcend time and space is imitated by In Memoriam. Even so, in the climactic trance section Tennyson creates a transcendent experience only wished for in the early “Ulysses” when the loss of Hallam was heavy upon him. The words of the trance section are well known, but they need to be read here within the context of the unclosed verse. We read in Section 95 that Tennyson’s friends, one by one, withdrew from the outdoor scene and left him “alone,” and that all is “silent.” But as he begins to read the letters of the dead Hallam, the dead man himself seems to speak:
So word by word, and line by line,
   The dead man touched me from the past,
   And all at once it seemed at last
   The living soul was flashed on mine,
   And mine in this was wound, and whirled
   About empyreal heights of thought,
   And came on that which is, and caught
   The deep pulsations of the world,

Æonian music measuring out
   The steps of Time—the shocks of Chance—
   The blows of Death.

(R 946-47, 33-43)

What happens next is, if anything, at least as remarkable as the transcendent experience; for just as the poet doubts what he has felt, the natural world responds in ways which cancel doubt itself. Dwight Culler beautifully describes the concluding lines of Section 95 as “nature’s response to [Tennyson’s] effort, Hallam’s way of saying he has been heard”:26

And sucked from out the distant gloom
   A breeze began to tremble o’er
   The large leaves of the sycamore,
   And fluctuate all the still perfume,

And gathering freshlier overhead,
   Rocked the full-foliaged elms, and swung
   The heavy-folded rose, and flung
   The lilies to and fro, and said

‘The dawn, the dawn,’ and died away;
   And East and West, without a breath,
   Mixt their dim lights, like life and death,
   To broaden into boundless day.

(R 947, 53-64)

“Boundless.” To transcend time, space, and being was a goal of the poetry from Tennyson’s earliest years. The goal never entirely vanished, and the effort to imitate a transcendent journey into a world beyond human thought never entirely lost its fascination. The unclosed poems imitate, again and again, Tennyson’s belief in a world and a life without end.
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NOTES

1The Poems of Tennyson, ed. Christopher Ricks (London, 1969), p. 1405. Citations from the poetry in the body of this essay are taken from the Ricks (i.e., R) edition.

2See William E. Fredeman, “‘A Sign Betwixt the Meadow and the Cloud’: The Ironic Apotheosis of Tennyson’s ‘St Simeon Stylites’,” UTQ, 38 (1968), 72, and Christopher Ricks, Tennyson (New York, 1972), p. 49.


4For an example—though the focus is on Browning’s endings—see Herbert F. Tucker, Jr., Browning’s Beginnings: The Art of Disclosure (Minneapolis, 1980).

5Smith, p. 212.

6For a discussion on perfect repetition as an anti-closural force, see Smith, p. 57.

7Ricks, p. 50.


13Ricks, p. 81.

14Shannon, pp. 222-223, sees in the conclusion “that the Lady fulfills the victory of love over death, just as in religious symbolism God’s love through Christ’s Passion redeems the world.”


19 See R 565, note on ll. 66-69.

20 W. David Shaw in *Tennyson’s Style* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1976), p. 93, stresses how “the regular meter, reinforced by monosyllabic diction, produces a secure sense of ending.”

21 I quote from “Tithonus” rather than the earlier “Tithon” because I believe that revisions in the 1860 version do not significantly affect an unclosed reading.


24 Shaw, p. 87.


26 Culler, p. 183.
EDGAR ALLAN POE’S “THE BLACK CAT” ON FILM

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“For the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad indeed would I be to expect it, in a case where my very senses reject their own evidence.” With those lines, Poe’s narrator begins his tale of madness and murder. “The Black Cat,” published in the United States Saturday Post, 19 August 1843, has not only been one of Poe’s most enduring works but also one of the most filmed.

Reasons for the popularity of “The Black Cat” are many: some obvious, some obscure, and some eminently arguable. The story is popular among filmmakers, despite its interior nature, because it is a riveting tale of a precipitous descent into nightmare and filled with dreamlike archetypical signposts—like black cats. The mad teller of the tale is much like a tortured sleeper, eerily impotent in the face of obstacles which, like all such nightmarish roadblocks, frustrate and confine him like a fly trapped in amber.

Poe fascinated moviemakers from the very beginning of the motion picture era. In 1909, a hundred years after Poe’s birth in 1809, the then-relatively-unknown D. W. Griffith directed a 450-foot silent “bio-pic” for the Mutoscope and Biograph company called simply Edgar Allan Poe. Herbert Yost played Poe and Linda Arvidson (Mrs. Griffith) played Virginia Clemm.¹

The 6 February 1909 edition of Moving Picture World notes that the film begins with Poe opening a window to get air for his dying wife, Virginia, whereupon a raven flies in and perches on a bust of Pallas. Poe dashes off his poem “The Raven” and sells it for $10. Buying food and medicine, he rushes home only to find his wife dead. After a title appears saying “My God, she is dead,” Yost falls across the cot in despair. The film is noteworthy as Griffith’s first attempt to pay homage to Poe, and for Billy Bitzer’s moody photography.

In 1912 The Eclair/American Standard Co. filmed the two-reel The Raven at their studios in Fort Lee, New Jersey. The 30-minute film starred Guy Oliver, an actor who closely resembled Poe. “Poe” falls asleep and dreams of scenes from his short stories—many of which had not yet been written at the time he was composing “The Raven.” But this ploy made audiences aware that he had written “The Black Cat” and “The Gold-Bug,” among others.

In 1914, D. W. Griffith filmed one of the truest-to-Poe adaptations of “The Black Cat” and other Poe works. One writer believed that “the
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really unique" feature of *The Avenging Conscience* was "that it is based on a number of Poe's poems and stories" forming a "Poe mosaic, and it projects Poe on the screen in a way that had not been done before and has not since."²


An opening title card by Griffith states that the film was "Suggested by Edgar Allan Poe's story of 'The Telltale [sic] Heart' and by certain of his poems of the affections," adding that his intent was a "humble effort to express, in motion picture form, Poe's conception of the psychology of conscience, the great safeguard of human righteousness."³ Referring to Griffith's preachy preface to the film, another writer characterized "William Wilson" and "The Black Cat" not as the murder mysteries they technically are, but as "conscience stories."⁴

As the story begins, the nephew/protagonist (Henry B. Walthall) has been raised by his wealthy uncle (Spottiswoode Aiken) to be a great writer and a scholar. The nephew is in love with a village girl (Blanche Sweet), but the uncle disapproves of her and calls her a man chaser. With his nephew's best interests at heart, the uncle forbids the two lovers to see each other again.

The nephew, whose sweetheart reminds him of Poe's "Annabel Lee," is heartbroken and angry at his uncle's cruel dictum. Seated in his uncle's library, the nephew is seen reading a volume of Poe's works, and Griffith reproduces the opening paragraph of "The Tell-Tale Heart" on a title card. Then follows a full-screen close-up of Walthall, who continues reading, followed by a cut to the opening lines of "Annabel Lee":

It was many and many a year ago
In a kingdom by the sea
That a maiden lived, whom you may know
By the name of Annabel Lee
And this maiden she lived with no other thought
Than to love, and be loved by me.

As the nephew grows increasingly resentful of his uncle, Griffith intercuts between scenes and texts from Poe to suggest the youth's
unhealthy psychological motivation. After observing insects and a spider devouring each other, the nephew strangles his uncle and walls up his body in the fireplace. An Italian (George Seigmann), a “disreputable foreigner” (as a title card calls him), witnesses the murder and blackmails the youth.

His guilt weighing upon him, the nephew is grilled by a detective (Ralph Lewis) in the uncle’s library. One of the most remarkable evocations of sound in a silent film follows as the youth breaks down: Walthall hears the thumping of his uncle’s heart and Griffith intercuts among the nephew, the detective, the rhythmic beat of the pendulum of the clock, the detective’s foot on the floor, the screeching of an owl outside the window, and the tapping of the detective’s pencil (which a title card likens to “the beating of the dead man’s heart”).

As the nephew collapses in guilt, a title proclaims: “Conscience overburdened by the telltale heart.” Rigid with horror, the nephew experiences an insight into the Poesque “mystic mid-region of Weir” in a sequence that poet Vachel Lindsay says “takes a higher demoniacal plane reminiscent of ‘The Bells.’” Walthall opens a door to confront the “ghoul-visions,” which follow Griffith’s next title card from Poe: “They are neither man nor woman; They are neither brute nor human; They are ghouls . . . .” This mixture of Poe phantasmagoria and Griffith climactic artistry climax the nephew’s nightmare. Overcome by his guilt and the horrific images he’s seen, including his uncle’s accusing ghost emerging from the fireplace, the nephew hangs himself. Seeing his swinging body, the boy’s sweetheart subsequently hurls herself off a cliff. Then we discover that all has been a horrible dream suffered by the nephew. The principals reconcile, and the film ends with the happy honeymooners featured in a whimsical fantasy sequence of the sort Griffith would soon use in The Birth of a Nation and Intolerance.

Griffith’s cinematographer recalled the director’s instructions for the spider sequence in the film: “Get me a spider, weaving her web/ to snare unwary blunderers/ in the night.” As Brown later explained, “I didn’t mind being instructed in verse. I was used to it. Griffith was up to his eyebrows in Edgar Allan Poe, who was the inspiration for The Avenging Conscience, and he couldn’t help speaking in iambic pentameters of a sort, thanks to his love of Shakespeare and his hope of being a poet himself someday” [emphasis mine].

Griffith used this sequence, in which a spider in a web devours a fly and ants in turn devour the spider, for the inspiration behind “the birth of an evil thought” as the nephew observes that nature is “one long system of murder.”

Poet Lindsay said of these shots that “Their horror and decorative iridescence are of the Poe sort. It is the first hint of the Poe
hieroglyphic we have had, except for the black patch over the eye of the
uncle, along with his jaundiced, cadaverous face.”

Completed, *The Avenging Conscience* was full of visual magic—
special effects, double exposures, special filming devices, extreme
character close-ups, symbolism, and expressionistic images. Many of
these devices Griffith was using for the first time. These experiments,
perfected and polished, would appear in the director’s later work.
Griffith reserved the final cut on *The Avenging Conscience* until an
audience’s reactions told him what had to be taken out. After a final
hectic day of shooting, Griffith took seven or eight reels of the film to
Pomona for a sneak preview on 16 July 1914. The first-night audience
in the big Clune’s Auditorium responded overwhelmingly favorably to
the film. Satisfied with what he had wrought, Griffith could
immediately commence production on his next film—*The Birth of a
Nation*.

*The Avenging Conscience* opened at the Strand in New York City
on 2 August 1914. A review in the 7 August 1914 *Variety* noted that
“Artistically, Mr. Griffith has put on a beautiful picture in
‘Conscience.’ It lives up to his reputation, from scenes and situations
to photography.” Certainly, the film’s beautifully-conceived high-
contrast lighting anticipated and, perhaps, influenced the German
Expressionist films of the teens and twenties. Concerned with
psychological motivation and the mental state of the protagonist,
*Conscience* prepared audiences for the better-remembered *The Cabinet of
Dr. Caligari* (1919), which itself would influence film, and horror film
especially, in the years to come—including Ulmer’s 1934 filming of
*The Black Cat*.

In 1919, the German-made *Fünf Unheimliche Geschichten* (*Five
Sinister Stories*) drew upon Poe’s “The Black Cat,” “The System of Dr.
Tarr and Professor Fether,” and Robert Louis Stevenson’s “The Suicide
Club” to produce a silent film, which starred Conrad Veidt as Death,
Reinhold Schuenzel as the Devil, and Anita Berber as a prostitute. As
one writer noted, “The same material was altered and modernized in
1932 by director Richard Oswald for a talkie which was released in the
U.S. [in 1940] as *The Living Dead*.7 Oswald’s *The Living Dead*
begins with the story of “The Black Cat,” but the murderer escapes and
develops into a Mabuse-type supercriminal who turns out to be the
sinister force behind the other stories.8

The year 1934 saw the release of Universal-International’s *The
Black Cat*, a Boris Karloff/Bela Lugosi vehicle, which was an
entertaining mishmash of satanism, sadism, necrophilia, and murder
which, in its own campy way, is true to Poe’s spirit.
Director Edgar G. Ulmer, a master of the “B” film, told an interviewer why his film had little to do with Poe’s tale except for the title: “The Edgar Allan Poe story is not a story you can dramatize.” Ulmer added that the film’s visual sophistication reflected “my Bauhaus period.”

Ulmer’s film career began in Germany, where he worked on Lang’s *Metropolis* (1926) and where he was F. W. Murnau’s production designer before that unique position had a name.

Leaving Germany for Hollywood, Ulmer made silent Westerns for Universal. When Ulmer took a story treatment he’d written to Carl Laemmle, Jr. which would employ Lugosi and Karloff at the same time in the same picture, Laemmle gave him the go-ahead to produce a script. Ulmer and Laemmle had also decided that *The Black Cat* would be filmed in the German Expressionistic style initiated by *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* in 1919. Ulmer chose a young writer named Peter Ruric to write the final script. As “Paul Cain,” incidentally, Ruric wrote mystery stories for the often-lurid *Black Mask* magazine.

The film begins with Vitus Verdegast (Lugosi) and a young couple (David Manners and Jacqueline Wells) aboard a train. A shuttle bus accident causes the two young people, Lugosi, and his major domo Thamal (Harry Cording) to go on by foot. They stumble upon a fortresslike chateau, Marmaros—Lugosi’s original destination.

Inside, they meet the gadget-filled chateau’s owner and designer, an engineer named Hjalmar Poelzig (Karloff). [See Photograph 1] Later we learn that Karloff is a mad genius who built his chateau on the ruins of a fort he betrayed to the enemy in wartime. He keeps the bodies of young women—one of whom is Lugosi’s late wife—preserved in glass crypts. Frightened silly by a black cat, Lugosi throws a knife at it and kills it. [See Photograph 2] He justifies this strange behavior by explaining that black cats are the “living embodiment of evil.”

Now married to Lugosi’s daughter, Karloff is also the head of a sacrificial devil cult; and he plans a dark fate for Miss Wells. [See Photograph 3] She soon becomes the center of a strange sexual tug-of-war, encompassing her, her husband, and Lugosi and Karloff.

Insane with rage after discovering the body of his daughter, Lugosi disrupts the cult’s plan to sacrifice Miss Wells and pursues Karloff into the cult leader’s vast underground labyrinth. Lugosi and his servant Thamal capture Karloff, disrobe him, and stretch him on a rack. “Did you ever see an animal skinned?” Lugosi asks. “That’s what I’m going to do, tear the skin from your body—slowly—bit by bit.” While Karloff screams in pain, Lugosi, laughing madly, flays the skin from his body with a sharp scalpel (seen only in shadow). When Lugosi tries to help Miss Wells escape, Manners misunderstands his intent and shoots him. The mortally-wounded Lugosi limps to a wall switch.
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Facing the dying Karloff, he announces, “Five minutes—and this switch ignites the dynamite. Five minutes and Marmaros, you, and I—this whole rotten cult will be no more . . . .” As the young couple watches from outside, the whole fortress is blown apart in a gigantic explosion.

Shot in nineteen days for just under $100,000, the film is a rare (for the thirties) look at sexual repression and fanaticism. Universal, disturbed by the “unhealthy” emphasis of the film (Lugosi’s character was originally just as sex-obsessed and cruelly manipulative as Karloff’s), allotted $6500 for retakes and new scenes. In the new version, Lugosi’s Verdegast became more a hero and less a leering lunatic.

Although Ulmer must get the bulk of the credit for The Black Cat’s superior visual look, he was aided greatly by the work of cinematographer John Mescal, who was later to be acclaimed in regard to his filming of the 1935 The Bride of Frankenstein. As in all his best work, Ulmer’s use of screen space is disturbing in its suggestiveness. His abstract compositions leave almost as much out as they detail in. As one critic noted, “For Ulmer, a few sticks of wood in primary shapes, dressed with a modicum of essential props, when photographed in shadows that respect no natural light, can create a world cognizant of the legitimacy of nightmare, of encompassing despair unable to muffle the cries of profound spiritual pain.”

Ulmer’s The Black Cat, then, is worthy of comparison to Poe: its examination of madness exuberantly embraced places it among the last great horror epics of the 30s, the last gasp of the evocative if mannered German Expressionism that is so close to the Poesque.

“The Black Cat” was also the basis of Roadshow Attractions’ 1934 release, Maniac (also known as Sex Maniac). This six-reel sex-and-horror film, produced and directed by Dwain Esper, used much of Poe’s plot, as well as mad scientists, nude women, and a rape on camera. It starred Horace Carpenter and Phyllis Diller and played burlesque grind houses for years. The villain is given away by a black cat.

Universal released another version of The Black Cat in 1941 which had nothing to do with either the Poe story or the 1934 version. Directed by Albert S. Rogell, this 70-minute filming starred Basil Rathbone, Hugh Herbert, Gale Sondergaard, Broderick Crawford, and a painfully young Alan Ladd. Bela Lugosi had a small role playing the film’s red herring menace, an old caretaker.

A review noted that “A short story by Edgar Allan Poe caused the picture to be made. Poe may not be so much at fault, however, as those who took his yarn in hand [and] moulded it into a 70-minute bore . . . .” Typical of the film’s dialogue is this witticism: “Everything around here is for the cats, that’s why the place is going to
“THE BLACK CAT” ON FILM

the dogs.”12 The film is played for laughs with Hugh Herbert as a bumbling antiques expert and Crawford as an anxious real estate dealer who’s allergic to cats. At one point, Crawford says of Basil Rathbone—then playing the great detective in a series of programmers—“He thinks he’s Sherlock Holmes.” A black cat, whose presence is explained as foretelling death, accidently sets the murderer on fire at the conclusion.

At least three of “The Black Cat” filmic incarnations have been shorts. With the help of USC students, director/producer William C. Jersey made a 15-minute-long, 16-millimeter version in 1956 which was narrated by William Munchau.13 In 1960, Braverman Films released a 22-minute animated version narrated by Basil Rathbone and directed by Frank Marvel. Using illustrations by John Lemmon and music by Arthur DeCento, this color short is considered by many to be one of the best versions ever made.14 If the USC and Braverman films are so true to Poe, then it is almost certainly because the story seems incapable of maintaining a full-length feature. “The Black Cat” is a single scream of anguish and madness—not a sustained tale. Its focus is limited and its characters few, and the shivers it contains are not the sort that can bear the weight of “plot.” For this reason, the shorter efforts—freed of the necessity to flesh out and expand that singular note of insanity into a longer, unified work—retain Poe’s emphasis and dramatic intensity.

Roger Corman’s 1962 trilogy Tales of Terror also contains a short segment, one fashioned by screenwriter Richard Matheson from “The Black Cat” and “The Cask of Amontillado.” Starring Peter Lorre and Vincent Price, it was the first of Corman’s tongue-in-cheek treatments of Poe. As Montresor, a swollen pixie of a man, Peter Lorre is perfect as the husband cuckolded by his wife (Joyce Jameson) and her lover, Fortunato (Price). [See Photograph 4] Insanely jealous, Lorre entombs his wife and Fortunato alive behind a cellar wall, unaware he’s also brickling up a third party—Pluto, his wife’s black cat. After a psychological-fantasy sequence in which he imagines his dead wife and her lover ripping his head off and playfully tossing it around, Lorre is undone by Pluto’s mewing from behind the cellar wall.

Corman’s filming of “The Black Cat” captures some of the atmosphere, mood, and psychological nuances of Poe’s story—partly because Corman, master of the four-day quickie, took more time and paid more attention to his work on the Poe pictures. As he told two interviewers, “With a three-week schedule on the Poe pictures, I had a little more time to work with the camera. And also, I felt the subject matter lent itself to that.”15
Kenneth Von Gunden

The Poe-inspired films kept coming through the 60s. In 1966, Hemisphere/Falcon International released a 77-minute *The Black Cat* written and directed by Harold Hoffman. More gore than Poe (it featured a hatchet driven into a young woman’s head), this film’s only relationship to the Poe story is that a man believes a black cat, which he accidentally walls up, to be the evil incarnation of his murdered father.16 In 1968 Toho Films released *Kuroneko (Black Cat)*, a horror film by Kaneto Shindo set in twelfth-century Japan. The souls of two women raped and murdered by roving Samurai make a pact with evil spirits which allows them to return as avenging monsters. Luring their unsuspecting prey to their home, the women tear out the warriors’ throats. While not really having much in common with Poe’s story, the film is highly imaginative and atmospherically photographed.17 Yet another version—also called *The Black Cat*—was released in 1984. Filmed in 1980 on British locations and Rome studio interiors and directed by Lucio Fulei, this latest incarnation concerned a series of deaths in a small British village. As it turns out—rather improbably—the black cat of a Mr. Miles (Patrick Magee), an experimenter in the paranormal, is responsible for the killings. Thus, this film, like so many of the others, has little in common literally with Poe’s story.

Thus, Poe’s image-laden prose has found a perfect marriage with film. His tales of psychological horror and madness transfer well to the screen—where dream-like images seduce us and activate our sense of wonder. None of us is truly innocent, and as long as we continue to plot murder most foul in the darkest recesses of our imaginations, Poe’s “The Black Cat” will continue to inspire filmmakers.

NOTES


6Lindsay, p. 125.

"THE BLACK CAT" ON FILM


10McCarthy and Flynn, pp. 148-149.


12Variety, 30 April 1941, p. 16.

13USC Catalog, p. 19.


16Lee, p. 37.

‘A SOUL THAT TOOK IN ALL HUMANITY’—
HAYNE ON SHAKESPEARE

Rayburn S. Moore

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Paul Hamilton Hayne (1830-1886) was the best-known Southern man of letters in the late nineteenth century. With the death of William Gilmore Simms in 1870, Hayne became the leading spokesman for the South on literary matters. As an editor before and after the Civil War, as the author of three collections of poems before the war and of three more afterwards and of numerous contributions in verse and prose to magazines both north and south, and as the friend and correspondent of many prominent writers in both sections, Hayne’s reputation was gradually asserting itself before the war, but after Simms’s death and the publication of *Legends and Lyrics*, Hayne’s first post-war book of poems in 1872, Hayne’s position as the representative Southern poet or laureate was confirmed.¹ As a central figure, then, in Southern culture for a period of thirty-five years—first as a young poet and editor and subsequently as a leading literary spokesman for his region—Hayne’s attitude towards, experience with, and view of Shakespeare should be of interest and importance to any consideration of Shakespeare in the nineteenth-century South.²

From early to late, Shakespeare meant a lot both to Hayne the man and to Hayne the writer. One of his earliest letters describes for a cousin’s delectation a presentation of scenes from Shakespeare’s plays by local performers in Pendleton, South Carolina, in 1848. While visiting in the “up-country village,” Hayne, a young man of eighteen, attended a “Theatrical Entertainment” put on by “the young men” for an audience of “at least 200 persons”:

The 1st act of Richard III & the last act of Julius Caesar were the plays chosen. I arrived at the scene, just as the curtain rose & Richard...with a huge hump on his back stalked on the stage. Elevating one hand & solemnly regarding the audience, he commenced appropriately with “Now is the winter of our discontent” &c—The death of Caesar though was the ludicrous part. Something very much resembling a *hump*, but intended I was told to represent Pompey’s statue (poor Pompey!) was deposited in the centre of the stage. Four of five young men attired in *blue & red*, rushed on Caesar, as he got opposite the Statue & so precipitate was their attack, that not only Caesar himself, but Brutus, Cassius, Casca & Pompey’s
representative, all went rolling down on the floor, kicking like a parcel (excuse my comparison [sic]) of pigs in a gutter—This set the whole audience in a roar, but the Conspirators nothing daunted rose to their feet & dragging Caesar’s recumbent body into a corner, proceeded to act their several parts with a coolness, perfectly admirable. Brutus delivered his speech to the Mob & then came forward Mark Antony, who got through his oration tolerably, until he came to the portion—“Oh! now you weep & I perceive you feel &c”—when some of his auditors became so seriously affected as to drown his words by their vociferous grief—& completely (you know how nearly the ridiculous borders on the sublime) to upset his gravity—He hesitated—hemmed—came to a dead stop & then rushed from the scene amid a perfect roar of applause—a spontaneous tribute I suppose to the genius capable of converting tragedy into the most ludicrous of Comedies.3

Such an account of Shakespeare in the Up Country should not imply a mere bit of condescension on the part of a sophisticated playgoer from the city who may have seen Forrest, Macready, the elder Booth, and others—Hayne may indeed have or have not seen these players perform in Charleston—but it does suggest a certain knowledge and appreciation of the Bard on Hayne’s part at a fairly tender age. Though the Pendleton performers are not up to Falstaff and his friends in trickery and braggadocio, they offer a balance in naïveté and amateurishness, qualities the young writer catches in his account.

From this early experience until the last months of his life when Andrew Adgate Lipscomb, a well-known Methodist minister and former Chancellor of the University of Georgia (1860-74), lectured on Shakespeare in his honor before the Hayne Circle in Augusta, Georgia, in March 1886, Hayne was an avid admirer of “glorious Will,” and his writings abound with references to Shakespeare’s work and life.

Hayne’s letters, in particular, are filled with references and allusions to the plays and sonnets. Many of the better plays are referred to frequently, and over the years Hamlet is mentioned more often than any other play—parts of lines and fragments are sprinkled throughout the correspondence.4 “Flat and unprofitable” appears in a letter of 17 September 1856; the “ills to which flesh is heir” in 23 February 1869; “whips and scorns” (reversed in the text by a slip of the pen) in 3 April 1878; and “more things in heaven and earth” in 7 March 1879.5

Hayne’s interpretation of Hamlet is also worthy of notice, though his view is expressed in his reaction to another critic’s “treatise” on the character and the play. In a letter to A. A. Lipscomb, 14 November
1884, he praises his friend's recent essay on *Hamlet* in the *Methodist Quarterly Review* as a specimen of "creative criticism," and he continues:

You have made some points, in fact, unrecognized & untouched upon (as far as I know), by any previous Shaksperean [sic] critic, the Germans not excepted.

For example, the very key-note of *Hamlet's* nature, & his destiny, is struck, when you remark that his extreme temperamental sensitiveness is wholly dissociated from sensuousness, & nothing could be finer than your illustrations of Hamlet's introspective soul, his indifference to even legitimate forms of sensuous enjoyment; the enormous unconscious *Egoism* of the man, leading him to make his spirit, a scenic edifice, for the display of "a drama of nerves, etc."

I am glad, too, that while you exhibit Hamlet as subjected to "an overmastering hysteria," you show with equal clearness, that he was not insane!

Then Hayne takes his place with Lipscomb in concluding that Hamlet's "very eccentricities (hysteria at the bottom of all)," according to Lipscomb, "saved him from insanity." 6

Though Hayne accepts Shakespeare's "gigantic genius," he frequently is puzzled by the fact that a "Warwickshire Peasant, with few chances of academic learning"—with "small Latin and less Greek," as Ben Jonson expresses it—could have absorbed so much "universal knowledge" and had so few "limitations."

In 1873, for example, Hayne read a play in *Blackwood's* for April entitled "Shakespeare's Funeral" in which Michael Drayton, the poet, and Walter Raleigh, the son of Sir Walter, visit Stratford upon the day in 1616 when Shakespeare's final rites are performed. They are surprised to discover, as Hayne expresses it in a review of the contribution, that "by his household no less than by the sagacious town folks, Shakespeare was respected rather as a prosperous burgher and 'man of substance' than as a writer!" "In the latter capacity," Hayne continues in his essay,

they seem anxious to ignore or be-little him. His daughter [Mrs. Hall], in especial, cannot conceal her contempt of his 'play-writing' abilities, only this contempt merges, as it were, into a dreadful fear lest her father's worldliness and 'profane' gifts should have imperiled his precious soul!

"We never could have dreamed," Hayne acknowledges,
now that Walter Savage Landor is dead, that the writer lived in Great Britain, or for that matter, in broad Europe, capable of producing an 'Imaginary Conversation' as full of 
vraisemblance of dry humour, allied to touches of deepest 
pathos, of a local coloring so perfect, and a knowledge of 
Elizabethan manners, people and customs, which transports 
one as by magic power to the place, and among the 
individuals depicted, with such rare, such consummate skill. 
But a single dialogue of the kind exists in English 
literature which equals this; we mean, of course, Landor's 
'Citation and Examination of Shakespeare' on the charge of 
deer-stealing!

To illustrate his points, Hayne quotes a "few extracts" and concludes:

If the mental appetite of our reader has not been 
stimulated by these extracts, why, then he almost deserves 
to be handed down to posterity under the same ridiculous 
light which the ingenuity of the author of "Shakespeare's 
Funeral" has evoked to surround the muddle-headed and 
pragmatical citizens of Stratford—the Nyms, Bottoms, 
Slys, and Bardolphs who bravely spent the poet's 'dole' 
while as blind as moles to his surpassing fame and genius!

And yet Hayne himself is fascinated by the relationship between 
Shakespeare's genius and his more mundane qualities and interests. He 
freely acknowledges Shakespeare as his "master," but at the same time, 
he admits to Lipscomb on 6 April 1884:

How thoroughly right you are about Shakspeare [sic]. 
Our age does merit applause for its appreciation of him. 
Did he wholly appreciate himself? I doubt it!! Of course, 
he knew how lofty his position was above his 
contemporaries. He could smile at Ben Jonson's lordly 
contempt concerning his possession of 'little [sic] Latin & 
less Greek'; he could look down with immeasurable scorn 
upon such a hound as Green [sic], etc, but did he know the 
real measure of earthly immortality within him?...

I figure Shakspeare to myself a perfectly unpretentious 
man, a prosperous burgher of Stratford, liking to sit in the 
sunshine & converse pleasantly with all passers by. His 
grand capacious soul took in all Humanity. Not the veriest 
beggar or scoundrel was beneath his notice, nay, his 
sympathy.

How he revels in the absurdities of some of his 
characters; & how, now and then, the profoundest pathos is
eliminated (if I may thus express it) from the humor of even fools & blackguards.

Recall, I pray you, scene III, Act II of King Henry V. Pistol, Dame Quickly, Nym, Bardolph, & Boy are present. When Pistol announces the death of Falstaff, in his usual bombastic vein, but with evident deep feeling au fond, what does poor Bardolph say?

With passionate earnestness he exclaims—"Would I were with him, wheresome’er he is, either in Heaven or in Hell!" Now could devotion go further than this?—Then, observe how the half-grotesque, yet genuine pathos of the scene is modified, or contrasted, (so to speak) by what follows a little after.

The imp-like, mischievous little rascal of a Boy asks, "Do you remember ‘a [Falstaff] saw a flea stick upon Bardolph’s nose, & ‘a said it was a black soul burning in hell-fire?’" And Bardolph’s irresistible answer, "Well! the fuel is gone that maintained that fire! That’s all the riches I got in his service!"§

Hayne, of course, was appalled by the theories that someone other than Shakespeare was responsible for his work. In the last months of his life, Hayne read an article in the Augusta Chronicle on the "monstrous heresy...that Bacon was the author of all Shakspeare’s [sic] Plays." On 8 February 1886, the same day he read the article, Hayne wrote Lipscomb: "Of course, the evidence of such men (as Ben Jonson, e.g.) who knew Shakspeare personally, & have left on record their conclusive testimony as to his genius—is very conveniently ignored. By the way," Hayne continued, "I do wish you would knock this theory on the head, (you can do it in five minutes time) when you speak in Augusta!"§ On February 15, he observed: "Somehow, I cannot bear to have glorious Will insulted, as it were, nay deprived almost of his very identity at this late day."

Lipscomb, on his part, was loath to notice the "Bacon Illusions" in his March lectures before the Hayne Circle for two reasons. "Is there any critic, authority, evidence of any sort, beyond guessing," he asked on February 22, "in its favor? I confess I have seen none," he observed in answer to his own question. In the second place, he admitted, "I am pushed for time, or shall be, in keeping the Lectures within an hour each....If my Lectures make any impression, I hope it will be that S. is about the most read and veritable person who lived on this planet within the last three hundred years." Hayne could hardly disagree with this sentiment, and Lipscomb thereupon lectured on March 23-26 upon Macbeth, The Merchant of Venice and Hamlet; was enthusiastically received; and though he did not take up the so-called Baconian theory in
his lectures, he granted an interview to the *Augusta Chronicle* in which he “effectually dispelled the illusion...that Lord Bacon had inspired or created any of the Shakespearian dramas.”

On the other hand, Hayne realized that Shakespeare had some faults. On 1 October 1885, for example, he acknowledged to Dr. Lipscomb that Shakespeare “not only ‘nods’ sometimes...but goes ‘fast asleep’” and concluded with Ben Jonson that Shakespeare should have “blotted more lines.” On the following February 15, he enclosed in another letter to Lipscomb a copy of some recent sonnets, the images and comparisons of which he admits might be “overstrained” because he could not help “following my Master Shakspeare in what has been pronounced a serious fault of his & the whole Elizabethan Age of Poets—I mean a proneness to comparisons metaphorically dressed up.”

After all was said and done, though, Shakespeare was the great poet to Hayne. He understood human nature better than any other writer, and he expressed himself more memorably than any other poet. He may have been a “Warwickehshire peasant,” but he “absorbed universal knowledge by the pores of his skin” and surpassed all English writers, including Milton with his “majestic genius” who, after all, was but “a child compared with Shakspeare,” whose “grand capacious soul” did indeed take “in all Humanity.” To Hayne, as to Ben Jonson, Shakespeare was truly “not of an age, but for all time.”

**NOTES**


2 In this essay, I am concentrating on Hayne’s use of and reference to Shakespeare in his letters, and though I shall on occasion comment on Shakespeare’s importance to Hayne’s published prose and verse, I shall, on the whole, focus on his correspondence.

3 This letter, a jeu d’esprit of 20 September 1848, is addressed to Susan B. Hayne (1829-1895), Hayne’s favorite cousin and an intermittent correspondent throughout his life. The letter itself and all others quoted hereinafter (unless otherwise indicated) are in the Hayne Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University, and are used with the kind permission of Dr. Mattie Russell, Curator *Emeritus*, Manuscript Department. Further reference to this collection is to
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HP, DUL. Some of Hayne’s letters to Susan B. Hayne have been published in “Seven Unpublished Letters of Paul Hamilton Hayne,” ed. William S. Hoole, Georgia Historical Quarterly, 22 (1938), 273-285.

4 A cursory check of Hayne’s letters reveals that the following plays are neither mentioned nor quoted from: Richard II, Measure for Measure, and Coriolanus lead a list composed of Timon of Athens, Pericles, Henry VI, Henry VIII, Cymbeline, The Comedy of Errors, The Merry Wives of Windsor, King John, and Two Noble Kinsmen. After Hamlet, Hayne refers most frequently to Macbeth, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, The Merchant of Venice, Romeo and Juliet, Henry V, The Tempest, Othello, Richard III, and King Lear.

5 All quotations are, respectively, in letters to Richard Henry Stoddard, William Gilmore Simms, and John G. James in A Collection of Hayne Letters, ed. Daniel Morley McKeithan (Austin, 1944), pp. 15, 210, 428, 458. Hereinafter cited as CHL.

6 Lipscomb's essay, “A Psychological Study of Hamlet,” appeared in the M.Q.R., 65 (1884), 665-678. This title, Lipscomb explained to Hayne on 23 October 1884, was a misprint and should have been “A Physiological Study of Hamlet.” Yet, in the essay Lipscomb characterizes Hamlet as a “profound study in mental physiology” who serves the “mental physiologist” as a basis “for a study in intellectual philosophy, and in that branch of it involving psychology” (p. 670). “At the start,” Lipscomb elucidates,

Hamlet’s infirmity of will is well-defined. The growth of this morbid state, running through a succession of stages, is accurately presented. Nothing is omitted that can cast light on the progress of his intellectual besetment. Step by step the history discloses itself beneath the dramatized movements; the soul in its sorrow and strife is laid bare; and the unusual number, fullness, and impassioned fervor of the soliloquies make the self-revelation complete. (p. 670)

Hamlet, moreover, possesses a “literary temperament” which is not “introversive” but “out-going”:

It loves an audience. It covets sympathy. Next to oratory, it has a yearning for recognition and hearty appreciation. The divine instinct of a fine thinker is, that it is ‘more blessed to give than to receive;’ and in obedience thereto, a truly unselfish intellect delights to communicate for the sake of others. But in Hamlet this sort of temperament is not dominating....And hence his intellect, though so fertile in creation and luxuriant in expression, never concerns itself as to any fruit it might bear in
others....This unvarying occupation with self is not of the lower self. What he shall eat and drink, in what way kill time, how dispose of his large opportunities to find relief from oppressive care and solicitude, never engage his attention. Inward, still deeper inward....this searching for a remoter inwardness, year by year the steady expansion of a world contained in the soul and encircled by a horizon ever thinning away and hastening into ampler spaces: Hamlet is this fascinated explorer of life's occultness, seeking himself where the real Hamlet cannot be found....Account for these phenomena under any ordinary law of literary temperament, plus an abstract philosophic power of almost limitless activity? By no means; the temperament is an important question, perhaps more so than any other next to his genius; but the main thing...is to observe how this natural temperament was developed, by what steps it mastered the will and usurped the entire control of mind, the direction it took in its abnormal energy, and the fatality it entailed first upon Hamlet and afterward on his career. (pp. 668-669)

It is in this light that Lipscomb considers Hamlet as a "profound study in mental physiology." This approach was surely among those considerations that led Lipscomb to indicate to Hayne on 18 November 1884, that he could "truthfully claim" the essay "to be original" since he "had not even a suggestion of the line of argument from any outward source whatever."

7Hayne's review of the play is also entitled "Shakespeare's Funeral" and is contained in a clipping in HP, DUL. The source of the clipping is not identified.

8As early as 1872 Hayne had quoted this passage from Henry V and characterized it as "among the most pathetic in Shakespeare's dramas," and he continues to allude to it from time to time until his death in 1886.

9That the Baconian theory was much on Hayne's mind is supported by a letter written to Charles Colcock Jones, Jr., less than a week later—on February 14—in which he inveighs against the same article in the Chronicle. On February 15 Hayne reminded Lipscomb not to "forget to knock that 'Bacon' theory on the head!"

10See the Chronicle for 24 March 1886, p. 8, col. 4 and for 25 March, p. 4, col. 3. For accounts of the lectures themselves, see the Chronicle for 24 March 1886, p. 8, col. 4; 25 March, p. 4, col. 3; 26 March, p. 8, col. 4; and 27 March, p. 1, col. 6.
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12 See Hayne to Lipscomb, 27 [March] 1884, HP, DUL.
“THE CONSTANT QUESTION OF FINANCES”:
The Ordeal of F. Marion Crawford

Neal R. Shipley

The University of Massachusetts at Amherst

“I find... Crawford himself—to whom I have fallen a helpless victim—of the last magnificence.”

Henry James to Mrs. Waldo Story
17 June 1899

“If you could see my life from within me for a week, you would understand what war means...”

F. Marion Crawford to Isabella Stewart Gardner
23 August 1896

To a generation of readers between 1882 and the First World War, F. Marion Crawford epitomized the romantic novelist. In forty-four novels, he consistently presented to his readers a world of idealized characters and romantic plots and settings, a conservative, traditional alternative to the literary innovations of the late nineteenth century. The public responded by making him one of the most successful novelists of his day. Though he never attained the phenomenal sales of one of the “literary fevers” of the 1890s—of Kipling, for instance, or “Ian Maclaren”—he enjoyed several major successes and was, overall, sufficiently popular and respected that he could on occasion be described as America’s greatest novelist.1

Much of the interest in Crawford’s novels stemmed from the public’s perception of Crawford himself. He appeared to have combined successfully the ordinarily incompatible roles of romantic adventurer and gentleman. It was generally believed that much of the romantic content of his novels derived from incidents and experiences in his own life. He was the trusted friend of Mediterranean peasants and sailors, of Turkish boys and mysterious Orientals, and seemed able to move unobtrusively through any setting, no matter how exotic, invariably possessed of whatever language or patois, philosophy or practical skill, was requisite. It was said that he spoke at least twenty languages like a native and possessed such specialized skills as the best method for defending oneself with a dagger. On the other hand, his life was perfectly respectable: there was never the slightest suggestion of the Bohemianism or the captiousness about society or its institutions that made so many other authors suspect to a middle class readership. He
was an exemplary husband and father and was venerated by his servants. Villa Crawford, his home in Sorrento, where he lived in great state, was one of the best-known literary residences in the world. He dressed conservatively, advanced religion, and was an ornament of the best society in Europe and America. Throughout his career he was praised for the blamelessness of his subject matter and treatment. There was no doubt but that in reading Crawford’s novels one was dealing with a gentleman, one who, in his writing, suggested the gifted raconteur discoursing over the port and cigars. To the public, then, Crawford was first and foremost a gentleman, a cosmopolitan aristocrat, whose novels were the by-products of a cultured, leisured, and eminently enviable life.

There was, at the same time, a minority opinion, usually held by authors and critics of a realist point of view, which argued that Crawford’s popular readership missed his real significance. His youth in papal Rome, his background of Roman palaces, Sorrentine villas, and storm-wrecked Apulian castles, his adventures in India and the Near East, his bold seafaring in his own yacht, all proclaimed Crawford a true romantic in an age of conformity and bourgeois drabness. Henry James, for instance, despised Crawford’s novels but was at the same time deeply impressed by their author. Crawford’s life, full of color and adventure, was his real achievement. 2

The reality of Crawford’s life, however, was radically different from that assumed by either admirers or critics. Instead of a life of romance, glamor, and ease, Crawford’s was one of sacrifice, pain, and bitter frustration. This he steadfastly concealed from friends and critics and even, so far as was possible, from his family. He revealed the truth only to his publisher, Frederick Macmillan. Their correspondence, which covers twenty-six years, reveals with painful clarity the desperate race Crawford ran against sickness, financial hardship, and disappointment. 3

Crawford more or less fell into a literary career. The loss of his mother’s fortune in the Panic of 1873 meant that he was obliged to earn his livelihood, a prospect he faced with considerable reluctance. He was considered by friends and relatives, and evidently by himself, to be so richly talented that he needed only to choose how and when to distinguish himself. He briefly edited a newspaper in India, studied languages with vague thoughts of teaching, considered a career in opera, and probably hoped to fashion a career in public life, starting as the protegé of his uncle, Sam Ward, the well-known and popular lobbyist. While waiting for something to turn up, he fell into casual journalism and book reviewing, then gradually, under prodding from his uncle, began to work on a novel based loosely on his experience in India. This novel, published in December 1882 as Mr. Isaacs: A Tale of Modern India, had a completely unexpected popular and critical success.
130 THE ORDEAL OF F. MARION CRAWFORD

Critics praised the novel for freshness, for its intellectual content, and for its chaste and pleasing prose. In the United States, Crawford was compared to Bulwer Lytton and Sir Edwin Arnold, while in France he was grouped with Howells, James, and Cable as the hope of American letters. In England, Mrs. Oliphant raised the intriguing possibility that the advent of Crawford might somehow be meant as compensation for the recent losses of Anthony Trollope and Charles Reade.4 Virtually every critic agreed that the novel bore signs of the future greatness of its author. Crowning everything, it soon became known that Mr. Gladstone had taken time out from Home Rule and the Eastern Question to read Mr. Isaacs and pronounced it “a literary marvel.” Equally gratifying, the novel sold 13,000 copies by June 1883 in the United States alone, where it was the best-seller of 1883, and its publisher, Macmillan and Company, was obliged to reprint it nine times in the first year.

By the time Mr. Isaacs appeared, Crawford had already finished his second novel and was starting on his third. It certainly looked as though Crawford had found a profession at last, but he did not yet see things that way. In February 1883, he informed his mother that authorship “...is not the one thing I have to do before I die...I must lay my hand to a greater implement than the story teller’s pen.”5 Presumably, he still hoped for a career in politics or public service, or perhaps he considered himself primarily a social or philosophical thinker. In the meantime, however, fiction was convenient, respectable, and profitable.6 Novel-writing was something to do until a more satisfactory profession appeared. Until this happened, advances on royalties and the sale of copyrights provided his only income. Crawford’s first extant letter to Frederick Macmillan, dated 5 March 1883, concerns terms for his second novel, Dr. Claudius. Macmillan paid Crawford £500 for the outright sale of the copyright.7

Crawford spent the summer of 1883 in Sorrento, where he bought a felucca and sailed the southern coasts of Italy. Mostly, though, he worked. Installed in the calata between his hotel and the beach, the reformed idler began his fourth novel on 3 June and, cracking along at the rate of 5000 words a day, finished it on 24 July. His sister observed that he lacked “…the tormenting doubt of self-criticism.”8 Despite this remarkable industry and much evidence of success, there were clear signs of personal and professional trouble as early as the autumn of 1883. Despite the large advances on his first books, Crawford had already run out of money and attempted to anticipate his royalties from Macmillan and Company. He apologized for this gaffe to Frederick Macmillan, explaining that he was not an “agricultural capitalist” but was, rather, a “market gardener.”9 Crawford had started his career as an
author broke and a year later, despite the publication of four books, had not caught up. He never did. From the publication of his first novel onward, Crawford lived on the advances of his publisher. These advances were paid, often with considerable reluctance, because of his personal friendship with Frederick Macmillan. In other words, to continue Crawford’s own analogy, he was the literary equivalent of a sharecropper. The effect of this rapid output on Crawford’s promising reputation was soon detected by critics. As early as January 1884 William Morton Payne, influential literary critic of The Dial, observed pointedly that Crawford’s fourth novel was not so bad, considering his rate of production. He urged Crawford to resist temptations to cash in on his early success and instead to work to perfect his craft: if he did this, Payne argued, he could hope to rank among major American authors. Crawford could not have followed this advice even if he had wanted to, because when the pages stopped the money stopped. In early 1884, he began a new novel, his fifth. Shortly thereafter, he travelled to Constantinople to court a young American girl and, in addition to his personal interests there, managed to work on his sixth novel and collect material for his seventh.

Crawford’s marriage, though clearly a love-match, had the additional benefit of providing him with an apparently wealthy and influential father-in-law, General Hiram Berdan. Through the general, Crawford appeared to have found the alternative career he had been seeking. Crawford informed his family that his future plans would be contingent on the general’s. “His affairs are on the gigantic scale that pleases me,” Crawford wrote his mother, and there was talk of the young couple settling in New York or Washington, where Crawford would continue to write while he made the transition to some sort of role in General Berdan’s vast and lucrative enterprises. This plan soon faded, the young couple settled in Italy instead, and Crawford continued to write. Still, there was the comforting thought that the general’s daughter was wealthy—“Bessie has quite a little fortune...” American relatives were assured—though for various reasons the fortune was not available at the time. Nevertheless, it was taken for granted that the general was worth millions from his patents and armament deals.

With his marriage, Crawford entered upon the career of a full-time writer in earnest. Hitherto he had spent only part of each day writing, usually the morning, but after marriage he spent the greater part of every day at his writing desk. He finished his sixth novel in January 1885 and was soon at work on three new novels, including Saracinesca, his most ambitious undertaking to date and the first of a series. By May he described himself as “...desperately busy...I get up at 4 a.m. and work all day.” In this manner he managed to write a novel in
20-24 days, a chapter a day, with breaks only on Sunday. He was now earning large amounts of money. In January 1885, he reviewed his sales in England and the United States and, on the basis of these calculations, demanded the impressive price of £2500 from Macmillan's for one year's copyright on a new novel in both countries. "My recent success," he wrote Frederick Macmillan, "and the continued sales of my books make it impossible for me to make such engagements as I formerly was very glad to make." Macmillan eventually bargained him down to £1250 and the following November paid him the same amount for rights to his next novel. In January 1886 Crawford calculated that he would earn £2500 in eighteen months from Saracinesca alone, and this was soon improved by an arrangement about American rights. He also wrote a short story and magazine articles and his novels were beginning to appear regularly in translation. He began to sketch a libretto based on his novel Zoroaster, at the behest of Gounod, he wrote Macmillan, and there was even talk of an award from the French Academy. Crawford had become a major literary industry.  

1887 was probably the high-point of Crawford's adult life. In the spring Frederick Macmillan voluntarily raised his regular royalty from 10% to 15%. "I trust," Crawford wrote him, "that your doing so proves that my books are selling well. I suppose that a few years more will decide whether the sale will be permanent."

Later the same year Crawford signalized his personal success as well as the recovery of his family's fortunes by the acquisition of two properties. First, he bought the Villa de Renzis in Sant' Agnello, Sorrento, which he had been renting since 1885. As Villa Crawford, this property was soon to become one of the best-known literary residences in the world and a symbol of the success and respectability of the profession of letters. Shortly afterward, in August, Crawford signed a thirty year lease on the Torre San Niccola, in Apulia, on the Gulf of Policastro. These acquisitions neatly represented the dominant aspects of Crawford's personality. In the villa, he was the rich and cultivated man of the world; here he lived in great state, surrounded by servants, opulent furnishings, and the attentions of the rich and stylish. In Castle San Niccola, on the other hand, he was the lonely, brooding artist, living simply and attended only by a simple, faithful retainer. To this point, descriptions of Crawford still echo those of his childhood and youth: he was strikingly handsome, with a buoyant and cheerful personality, and he radiated power, vitality, and enthusiasm.

The tide turned quickly. Ironically, it was probably the acquisition of Villa Crawford, widely interpreted as the capstone of his success, that ended his halcyon days. To raise capital for the purchase of the villa,
Crawford turned to his publisher. Between March and May 1887 Crawford and Frederick Macmillan negotiated the terms of a contract whereby the former received £4000 in return for the British and colonial rights to several of his novels. On 12 May Crawford, in gratitude, wrote Macmillan that “...my best efforts shall always be at the service of your house” and on 26 July, in the midst of a heat wave, wrote “Thanks to you, I am the fortunate possessor of the coolest house in Italy.” On 20 October, however, Crawford was obliged to admit that his most recent book had not had much success as a serial, and a financial statement which arrived shortly afterward from Macmillan’s produced a distinct chill. The sales of two of his earlier books had fallen off sooner than expected and Crawford acknowledged that it would be some time before the firm recovered the advances it had made to him. He longed for the sales of a Lew Wallace and despaired at the success of the Reverend E. P. Roe, whose popularity in the United States was at the time the subject of much comment. More immediately, however, he had spent the whole £4000 given him in midsummer and now needed something which would bring an immediate return. He concentrated on the current novel, Sant’Ilario, and on 5 January 1888 proposed to sell it outright because of his financial needs. “The price—I speak like a shopkeeper!—would be about three thousand pounds.” This was, he admitted, quite a stiff price, but he bolstered his arguments by references to sales of Saracinesca. Macmillan balked at the price and on 4 March Crawford sent him the manuscript for consideration, assuring him that, though his handwriting had grown smaller, the book contained 163,308 words, sufficient to make a “very solid three volume book.” Macmillan finally accepted the terms, but with obvious reluctance. Failing to recognize the danger signs, Crawford soon brought up the subject of the price for his next novel, Greifenstein.

The firm’s offer for Greifenstein, transmitted by George Macmillan this time, was a rude shock: £1100 for an advance on royalties and for colonial rights. The sudden appearance of George Macmillan, a cousin of Frederick Macmillan and also a partner in the firm, is not explained in the correspondence, but it is clear that he was brought in to play the heavy. Crawford had to be brought down to earth and George Macmillan was appointed to accomplish the task. In a pained response on 23 July, Crawford said that such terms would mean a sacrifice for him; the book had been pronounced “thoroughly German” by a competent critic and would undoubtedly sell well. Frederick Macmillan entered the correspondence at this point, but only to offer his help in placing the manuscript as a magazine serial. Crawford insisted that he wanted the same terms as he had received for Sant’Ilario. On 30 August he sent Frederick Macmillan the manuscript for his personal attention,
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but it did not work this time: Macmillan simply offered further advice on writing for serials but held fast to the firm’s original offer. Crawford lowered his price to £2000. Macmillan’s made a final offer of £1500, which Crawford, without ready alternatives, was obliged to accept. However, in his letter of acceptance, he proposed the sale to Macmillan’s of those copyrights still in his hands. This provoked another frank and painful exchange. The firm offered a mere £200 for the remaining copyrights. Crawford was shocked and the firm then backed up its offer by a detailed analysis of his recent sales. “It appears,” Crawford replied, “from the statements that you have advanced so much upon the various royalties, that I am not likely to receive anything more from them, and, what is worse, it is to be feared that you will not recover all you have paid. I live too much out of the world to understand the practical side of such things.” Despite the clear drift of the discussion, Crawford suggested publication of a collected edition of his works. Macmillan’s quietly ignored the idea. Crawford said he would prefer to retain the copyrights at royalty rather than sacrifice them for so little. The following month he telegraphed for the money.19

By 1889, just as he appeared most successful to outsiders, Crawford entered a period of profound crisis. Between November 1884 and late 1887 he had produced six novels, as well as short stories and articles. Crawford had been producing work so fast that his publisher had to schedule publication dates very carefully to avoid glutting the market, and still he had no financial security. Everything—villa, castles, social position, yacht—all depended on the ceaseless production of saleable pages. Thanks to the equivocal generosity of Frederick Macmillan, he could not even fall back on royalties, since these had been anticipated well in advance and then the copyrights sold. By 1889 Crawford had begun to stretch himself physically—and some said intellectually—as far as he could go, and still he was only barely keeping his head above water financially. It took an iron will to face the writing desk each morning and to know that he must work throughout the day, with scarcely any diversion, and then be obliged to shoulder the same burden the following morning. Between 1889 and 1892 a series of crises profoundly altered Crawford’s personality and attitude toward life and work.

For nearly ten years, Crawford continued to hope that General Berdan might one day prove his rescuer. In a letter to Frederick Macmillan in 1888, Crawford alluded to the possibility that he might not have to write for a living much longer. The following year he again said that he might give up writing indefinitely, and in late 1889 to early 1890 actually ceased writing for several months, but asked Macmillan not to announce his retirement just yet. Behind this
behavior was Crawford’s hope of a large settlement for his wife’s family in the case of the Berdan Firearms Manufacturing Company versus the United States. General Berdan had filed suit against the United States government in 1887 for infringement of two patents he had taken out for improvements in breechloading firearms. The case was complex and highly technical and very large sums of money were involved. Inevitably, the case was drawn out far beyond Crawford’s naive hope of a definitive verdict in early 1890. Crawford gaily informed Macmillan in June 1890 that the general stood to gain nearly £200,000 by the suit, the outcome of which Crawford took for granted, but in the meantime he was so desperate for money that he drew repeatedly on Macmillan’s drafts before their due date. Judgment in the Berdan case was finally entered in December 1890, but for only $96,004.36. The decision was immediately cross-appealed to the United States Supreme Court. This was unfortunate. General Berdan dropped dead in Washington in March 1893, whereupon it was revealed that the total assets of the Berdan Firearms Company amounted to $13.40. There was also, of course, the prospect of a settlement in the case against the government, and the effort of maintaining the suit fell on Crawford. The case dragged on until January 1895, when the Supreme Court affirmed the earlier verdict, leaving the Berdan heirs precisely where they had been five years earlier but with greatly increased legal costs. It is not clear now precisely how this settlement was eventually distributed after costs had been paid, but it is clear that Bessie Berdan Crawford never held any significant personal capital. Her “nice little fortune” was a smoke screen put up by her father.20

More serious than the failure of the Berdan expectations was the failure of Crawford’s health. Beginning in 1889, he suffered from fainting fits, stomach cramps, and rapid weight loss—he lost fifty pounds in a brief period in early 1890—despite which he was obliged to work full time. After his brief respite in 1889, Crawford was writing again with his usual industry in early 1890. By May 1890 he had three different manuscripts in preparation. His illness was at first considered a symptom of stress and overwork, but in fact it represented the onset of the disease that plagued Crawford for the rest of his life and caused his premature death. This disease was pulmonary and was usually referred to as asthma by Crawford and others, but Crawford’s wife specifically referred to “bacilli” in a letter to Macmillan, and others refer to lung hemorrhages, so tuberculosis is clearly indicated—though he may have had asthma as well. Judging from photographs and contemporary comments, Crawford aged rapidly in the course of the 1890’s.21

Finally, overshadowing everything else, Crawford and his wife became estranged. We have no evidence about exactly when this
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estrangement began, nor if there was a precipitating incident, but family difficulties may explain his itinerary in 1890. A de facto separation was apparent to anyone who cared to notice by 1892, at which point his platonic relationships with Marchesa Theodoli and with Mrs. Isabella Stewart Gardner resumed.22

In 1892, after about three years of financial worry, ill health, and domestic unhappiness, a radically different Crawford appears. Henceforth he is a bitter, cynical, disillusioned man, obsessed with images of death and futility, weary of life. He felt that he had died in all the ways that mattered, that his continued physical existence was something in the nature of an irrelevant coda to a life that had ended in the early 1890's. When on one occasion Mrs. Gardner reproved him for a slighting reference to an artist's work, he answered that any criticism had been unintentional: "In the realm of the dead the works of men are not much appreciated." In 1898 he wrote to the same correspondent "I feel now as if I were writing after my own death, in a curious, posthumous way...I seem to feel nothing anymore." He was "...a man for whom life holds nothing, and who would readily part with it."23

Financial pressures and domestic unhappiness induced him to accept the offer of a lecture tour in the United States in 1892. With this tour he began a series of fourteen trans-Atlantic trips, the last of which was made in 1907. From this point onward, he existed only to write. During his visit in 1893-1894, he moved into a relative’s house in Washington, D. C., and vowed to complete two full triple-deckers by the end of the year or die in the attempt. It was no idle boast. He was almost continuously at his writing desk daily from 7:30 a.m. till 10:00 p.m. He nibbled on a store of dry provisions which he kept in his room and a servant made coffee when he called for it. "The world is an ink pot," he wrote Mrs. Gardner, "I am the pen and the devil dips me." By November he was writing a chapter a day but was still hard-pressed: one volume was on its way to Boston and the printer within half an hour of its completion. Galley proofs for the first triple-decker had to be corrected as he wrote the second. "An hour's amusement means the loss of an hour, to be made up by writing at night," he told Mrs. Gardner, "It is not gay." Early in the New Year he moved to New York, to his "loft" in the Macmillan building, where he quickly turned out a slight novel set in Bar Harbor and then began another, more substantial novel, his twenty-fifth. Once established in his spartan flat above the Macmillan offices, Crawford did little but write, and everything was arranged to that end. "I live as though I were training for a race and do nothing whatever which could lose me an ounce of energy...I think I should hurt anybody who interrupted me."24

Between 1892 and 1897 he wrote thirteen novels, bringing his total to
twenty-nine in fifteen years; in addition, he wrote a brief critical study of the novel, a “romantic history” of Constantinople, a book on Bar Harbor, thirteen articles and reviews for American magazines, and began research for two large, popular histories. As always, this tremendous effort was caused by Crawford’s insatiable demand for money. It was extremely expensive to be the “Prince of Sorrento,” even if the villa sat empty for long stretches at a time. Bessie Crawford and the children maintained a residence in Rome, firmly avoiding the villa during the winter; during the summer, they divided their time between the villa and various resorts and spas in the north of the peninsula. Crawford himself was in the United States much of the time and when in Europe travelled and sailed extensively. The villa, for all its symbolism and expense, actually sat idle much of the year, and was used at best no more often than the average summer home.

By 1889, Crawford was regularly apologizing to Frederick Macmillan for anticipating his royalties and throughout the following decade he continuously, desperately, badgered his publisher for money. In 1893, for example, he apologized for an attempt to “plunder” the firm by explaining “I have been so hard driven of late that details—even important ones—have become confused in my mind...I am in urgent need of funds.” In a rare burst of passion, Crawford complained of his many responsibilities, concluding “...being less than half a man, I am expected to be three whole ones and an author into the bargain.” Frederick Macmillan was no doubt sympathetic, but he was running a business and had to keep Crawford’s advances within some sort of bounds. He advanced only £800 for The Ralstons in 1894, though he raised the royalty to 20%, and made the same arrangements for Casa Braccio later the same year. The company advanced £1400 for Crawford’s next novel, but then fell back to a mere £900, ignoring Crawford’s suggestion that it raise the latter advance to £1000 “for the sake of a round number.” 1896 was a particularly tight year for Crawford. In the spring of that year he told Frederick Macmillan that he was again “hard up” and by the summer was asking for fresh advances in the form of notes, blaming his difficulties on disappointing sales in America. In August he wrote “My position is urgent and critical in the extreme,” and he appealed to Macmillan to help him. At length, the firm, with obvious reluctance, bailed him out with another advance of £1000, to be paid out in four installments. But the following June he was pleading again for more advances. The firm continued to reduce the amount it was willing to advance, offering only £350 for a projected novel in 1898. Crawford ruefully replied that such a sum was “not a very persuasive argument” for writing anything.25

Constant financial pressure forced Crawford into a second, more elaborate speaking tour of the United States in 1897-1898. His
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The manager, Colonel J. B. Pond, observed that the first thing Crawford did on tour was carefully to arrange his writing materials. He wrote constantly as he toured the country, writing on pads held on his knees in trains and snatching odd minutes under gas lights while waiting for connections. In Colorado he began to cough, perhaps as the result of visiting a smelter, then had two hemorrhages in one night. He recovered sufficiently to continue the tour but became seriously ill in Oregon. Despite doctors' warnings, he persevered in the lecture tour and finished in Minnesota in April 1898. He later made light of his illness and Colonel Pond announced a couple of years later that Crawford had completely recovered. Crawford's cousin, Maud Howe Elliott, was more accurate when she referred to the contract for the tour as Crawford's death warrant. He had just over a decade to live when he finished the tour and he fought illness and weakness constantly. Despite the effort and terrible cost of the tour, within six months of completing it Crawford was again broke. He had to ask Frederick Macmillan for £1000 "as a personal favor." 26

If Crawford had been able to lead a normal life after returning from the United States in 1898, or better yet, the quiet, retired life he craved, he might well have lived a normal life span. But the juggling act he had been performing with increased desperation for fifteen years could not be interrupted or ended; rather, a sense of urgency developed as he realized how frail his health was and how vulnerable his family would be if he failed to provide for their futures. The effect on his own life of his mother's financial reverses must have been constantly before him. Though he discussed finances with Frederick Macmillan, Crawford did not reveal the whole, tangled story even to him and nobody realized the extent to which he had based his life on advances and overdrafts. Consequently, instead of husbanding his strength to the degree compatible with earning an adequate, if reduced, income, Crawford decided to redouble his efforts by writing plays and histories. These were intended to complement, not supplant, his novels: in addition to his histories and plays, Crawford wrote fifteen novels in the last decade of his life. The production of plays and histories, on top of the heavy commitment to writing novels, would have strained the physical resources of a strong man, and quickly depleted the strength of the barely convalescent Crawford. He maintained the effort for five years, until he was no longer physically able to continue, by which time it had become apparent that, despite some successes, the expenditure of mental and physical effort had not paid off in the literal sense. He could probably have earned as much overall if he had concentrated on novels. 27 It looks very much as though Crawford decided to burn up his reserves of energy in a furious effort to achieve financial security for his family and one can imagine the bitterness with which he realized
that his gamble had not paid off. He must have realized that he was killing himself, but he had hoped to kill himself to some advantage to his family. The last decade of Crawford’s life, when he appeared to the world so glamorous, assured, and fortunate, when he came to be known as “Marion the Magnificent” and “The Prince of Sorrento,” was, in fact, a period of desperate struggle. Behind the urbane and elegant façade there was a grimly heroic struggle.

Most novelists dreamed of the financial rewards that could result from the successful dramatization of one of their books. Crawford had considered such a possibility for several years. There had been considerable discussion over the years about the dramatic potential of Zoroaster, and there was a flurry of excitement when Abraham Erlanger, the producer of Ben Hur, talked about staging it, but nothing came of it. Crawford originally wrote Marion Darce as a play for Augustin Daly, but recast it as a novel when Daly refused to stage it. Crawford helped to dramatize his second novel, Dr. Claudius, but the resulting production closed after a week’s run. In 1899, George C. Tyler, fresh from his extremely lucrative production of Hall Caine’s The Christian, and Viola Allen, his star, travelled to Italy to discuss with Crawford the possibility of staging one of his works. They eventually agreed on Crawford’s current novel, In Old Madrid, which Crawford retitled In the Palace of the King, and worked on through the autumn. The play premiered in North Adams, Massachusetts, in September 1900 and when revisions were needed Crawford travelled to the United States and toured with the company. Tyler was reminded of Robert Louis Stevenson’s long struggle against tuberculosis and said many years later “You didn’t realize just how wonderful a person F. Marion Crawford was till you knew how sick he was.”

In the Palace of the King was a success when it finally appeared in New York. Crawford never mentioned profits to anyone and Tyler confined himself to general expressions of euphoria, so there is no way of determining how much the play earned. The success of this play apparently brought Crawford to the attention of Sarah Bernhardt, who asked him in early 1901 for a play. He proposed one on the subject of Francesca da Rimini and, after several months of negotiation, she signed a contract in September 1901. Crawford was swiftly pulled into her vortex. After many uncertainties, the play opened in Paris on 22 April 1902 and was taken to London the following June. By later summer it was clear that the play was a success neither with the public nor with Bernhardt, who came to realize that Crawford’s Francesca was an unsympathetic character. After this relative disappointment Crawford continued to write for the stage, but mostly without success. He worked on a play for Martin-Harvey, but nothing came of it; Viola Allen asked for material but was so fickle that Bessie Crawford...
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proposed throwing her out a window. Other projects were discussed and possibly even completed, but Crawford had only one further play actually produced, at the very end of his life.\(^30\)

In writing his historical works, Crawford had no intention of attempting conventional academic scholarship. He planned, instead, to produce “romantic” histories which relied on local color and imaginative insight. He began *Ave Roma Immortalis* in August 1896 and planned to finish the following spring but soon found that he had seriously underestimated the work involved. It dragged on past the scheduled completion date and he took the manuscript along on the lecture tour of the United States in 1898, where he worked on it between public appearances and bouts of illness. It was finally finished, a year and a half late, in time for holiday sales in late 1898. It was fairly well received, at least in the United States, but Crawford complained to Frederick Macmillan that he had hurt himself financially by attempting so arduous and complex a work. He got better terms from Macmillan for the book which appeared in 1900 as *The Rulers of the South* and moved on to *Salve Venetia*, which appeared in 1905.

Crawford’s greatest hope along the line of serious history, though, was for a biography of Pope Leo XIII. He proposed the topic to Frederick Macmillan in late 1898 and eventually persuaded the very sceptical publisher to accept the idea and to advance him £1000. Crawford agreed to deliver the manuscript either in August 1899 or as soon after the death of the pope, then in his eighty-ninth year, as possible. At first, Crawford moved along swiftly on the project but then, for reasons not clear, let it drop for nearly four years. The pope persisted doggedly in good health, which removed the sense of urgency. The biography came swiftly to the forefront again in the summer of 1903, when the pope became seriously ill. By this point, Crawford had acquired a mysterious collaborator, a man who had access to state documents and purportedly worked daily under the pope’s personal supervision. As reports came in from the secret collaborator, Crawford’s plans became ever more grandiose. He proposed a “monumental” study of the papacy since 1846, which would include startling revelations. The pope died in July and according to the contract the biography should have been ready in time to catch public interest. Instead, the project began to come apart.

Crawford eventually revealed to a troubled Frederick Macmillan that his mysterious colleague was Count Eduardo Soderini, an important Vatican functionary, though not so important as Crawford had suggested. Count Soderini stubbornly withheld all material from Crawford until early 1904, when he suddenly unleashed a torrent. First Crawford received a manuscript containing 130,000 from the count, then another mass of material arrived, pushing the estimated total to
750,000, but then an additional 300,000 words came—and all of this dealt only with the opening years of the pontificate of Pius IX, Leo XIII’s predecessor. Complications quickly ensued and Crawford began drastically to reinterpret his role. He now referred to himself as merely the translator of Soderini’s material. Macmillan’s recognized a deteriorating situation when they saw one and began to apply pressure on Crawford, to whom they had long ago given the advance. Crawford, for his part, had long ago received and spent the £1000 in advance money and needed more, but the firm, which had been extraordinarily lenient, could hardly overlook the money. By 1906 Soderini was challenging all contracts and demanding new terms. Signs of megalomania appeared. Crawford, pressed from both sides, was at length obliged to accept the indebtedness and recommend that Macmillan’s break off all contact with the count. Crawford predicted, accurately, that Soderini would go on churning out pages for years to come. The Soderini affair was a serious blow to Crawford. He had counted on the prestige and income the biography would bring him and he had invested heavily in the scheme. In the end, all he had to show for his effort was a lien on his royalties.31

Meanwhile, the spate of novels continued. By now Crawford had few illusions about their quality. In a letter to the Duchess of Sermoneta he referred to them as “pot-boilers.”

The effort involved in these projects was virtually suicidal to a man in Crawford’s condition. He began to weaken in the summer of 1903 but travelled as usual to the United States that fall, where he worked on two novels and tried to cope with the problems created by Soderini. When he returned to Europe in April 1904 Bessie Crawford was deeply distressed by his frailty and thought he had been undermined by a winter in New York and by “constant anxiety and disappointments.” Despite his weakness, he continued to write. In July 1904 three of his children contracted typhoid and nearly died. Crawford helped nurse them, but when not needed in the sickrooms he wrote. He called writing by now “...a sort of mental intoxication.” He made his customary visit to the United States in the autumn of 1904 but suffered a complete collapse on his return to Italy. He was desperately ill until the following spring and the doctors virtually gave him up, despite which he still managed to dictate three or four hours a day to his daughters.32

During the summer of 1905 Crawford visited Scotland for his health. Even there, though, he worked constantly, revising proofs, translating, and working on two novels simultaneously. His problems were intensifying. His fundamental problem, what he now referred to familiarly as “the usual thing,” or “my usual condition,” or “the constant question of finances,” had been worsened by his illness, by the Soderini fiasco, and by Macmillan’s growing caution. Crawford had
already heavily drawn on future royalties and had nearly died, so by 1905 the company began to protect itself. By September 1905 Crawford was even more than ordinarily hard-pressed for money, but only after his very strong personal appeal to Frederick Macmillan was the firm willing to advance £1000 for work in progress. This time the firm demanded the deposit in London of a coin collection of equal value as security for the advance. As always, the relief was only temporary. By the spring of 1906 Crawford announced his “usual dry condition” and gaily proposed “a shower of gold as a spring cure!” Macmillan did not respond. A month later Crawford wrote plaintively that he had been counting on advances which the firm had declined to make. He told Frederick Macmillan that he was planning another novel set in Rome for the fall because “People always seem to like any Roman nonsense.” By May Crawford was “distinctly hard-up” and Macmillan agreed to an advance on the next novel, but only on publication. The firm appears to have decided to give no advances without manuscript in hand but Crawford persisted, writing in November “...if I am not actually in trouble, I am unpleasantly near borrowing.” Finally, in early December, the firm relented and sent him an advance of £1000, which was immediately swallowed up. The following January Crawford proclaimed himself “a starving author” to Frederick Macmillan.33

After his visit to Scotland, Crawford remained in relatively good health for nearly two years. He was soon working at the old pace, constantly churning out manuscript for Macmillan’s. The appearance of restored health was only an illusion, however, and Crawford knew it. He had used up his reserves. He was now at the mercy of climate, accident, or casual illness. At the same time, his financial condition steadily deteriorated. In the spring of 1907 his Italian bankers applied pressure on him to repay an overdraft of £1000. He began to propose various schemes for raising money to Frederick Macmillan, such as continuing to publish with his firm in Great Britain but finding another publisher in the United States. Macmillan promptly vetoed that idea and Crawford answered that he had expected such a response. By August 1907 he was in financial trouble once again and asked if Frederick Macmillan could devise any “pleasant fiction” to advance him more money.34

By late 1907 Crawford was again seriously ill, though desperately trying to work on his current novel. In October, his wife reported that she had accomplished the unheard-of feat of keeping her husband from writing for a whole week. Nevertheless, by the end of the month Crawford was able to propose that he and Macmillan “go shares” on the anticipated profits of the play Crawford was working on. By January 1908 he was so weak that he had to be carried upstairs by servants, but he soon recovered sufficiently to request another advance and to
complain that his books were not advertised by Macmillan’s, though Edith Wharton’s “latest atrocity” was. In the spring he was able to resume work on the current novel and in June signed another contract, calling for an advance of £1000. It was his last contract. In the autumn he fell sick once again and, writing sporadically, slowly declined to his death in April 1909.35

His delicate balancing act collapsed instantly on his death. Bessie Crawford apparently had some inkling of the true state of affairs, because she wrote to Frederick Macmillan about financial matters on Easter Sunday, before her husband was buried, which was out of character. She was already planning to reduce expenses. Crawford, she explained, had refused ever to discuss the family’s finances with her, and consequently “I feel...as if I were a poor little ruderless [sic] boat tossed about on a great cruel ocean...I have not the very faintest idea how stand as to the future.” She demonstrated how little she knew by asking how much she could expect from her husband’s last two books and how much from the previous forty-odd. By the following Monday she had learned a lot. The bank, moving swiftly, had attached her personal capital of 25,000 lire to cover her husband’s overdraft leaving her with a personal estate of 4,000 lire, besides a small life insurance policy in the United States. She had also learned somehow about the advances and the sold copyrights, and she was appalled. “Starvation is what we have before us...” she wrote Macmillan, and asked him to announce in London the sale of Villa Crawford and its furnishings. The library and yacht were to be sold separately. “Is there no money at all that ought to come to me from the ’White Sister’ [Crawford’s last book] or have you given Marion advanced money on it?” She had already discharged most of the servants. In the meantime she borrowed small amounts from her mother and from a friend.36

Eventually, things eased somewhat for her. Crawford’s last play, “The White Sister,” was successful and ran until early 1911, and this would have brought something. She was able to keep the villa after all and continued to live on there for some years, but evidently on a much reduced scale.

Crawford’s books continued to sell for some time, though precise figures are not available. Khaled, published in 1891, finally showed a profit for Macmillan’s in 1918, though several, such as The Ralstons and Casa Braccio never did. There were occasional posthumous honors, such as the request by the Republic of San Marino for a complete set of his works. But probably the best idea of what would have happened to Crawford had he lived is afforded by the experience of H. Rider Haggard, whose career and private life paralleled Crawford’s remarkably. Haggard continued to be a popular author up till the First World War. Then there was an inexorable decline in sales and general interest until in
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November 1918 he described himself as the “dearest of dead letters.”37
By then, such a phrase described many pre-War authors, including Crawford.

NOTES

1 For the only scholarly account of Crawford’s life and work see John Pilkington, Jr., Francis Marion Crawford (New York, 1964).


3 Crawford’s letters to Macmillan and Company are now in the British Library, Additional Manuscripts 54935-54938, volumes CL-CLIII.

Frederick Macmillan (1851-1936) became a partner in the firm in 1876. On the incorporation of the business in 1896 he became chairman and served in that capacity until his death. He was knighted in 1909.


5 Harvard University, Houghton Library, bMS Am1595 (1002).

6 Crawford told his mother in February 1883 that he might make as much as $4000 during his first year as an author, but “...it is improbable that such luck can last.” Two months later, he raised the figure to $6000. He told Sam Ward that he had made on Dr. Claudius half of what Thackeray had got for Vanity Fair. Houghton Libray, bMS Am1595 (1002, 1003, 1006).

7 British Library, Add. Mss. 54935 (1-2). The pound sterling was equivalent to approximately $4.85 in 1883. Crawford and Macmillan nearly always discussed business in sterling.

8 Mrs. Winthrop Chanler, Roman Spring (Boston, 1934), pp. 151-152.
Neal R. Shipley

9British Library, Add. Mss. 54935 (16-17).

10_The Dial_, 4 (1884), 229. By September 1885 Payne decided that Crawford had exhausted himself (_The Dial_, 5: 122) and thereafter slated him mercilessly. Th. Bentzon came to the same conclusion at about the same time ("L'esprit les plus inventif doit redouter le succès facile."). _Revue des Deux Mondes_, 1 August 1885, pp. 654-682. Crawford was never mentioned again in its pages.

11Houghton Library, bMS Am1595 (1047-1048); Maud Howe Elliott, _My Cousin F. Marion Crawford_ (New York, 1934), p. 189. The general promised his daughter $100,000 if an invention worked out. Houghton Library, bMS Am1595 (1042).

12Houghton Library, bMS Am1595 (1051, 1057-1058).


15For the acquisition of the tower, see Mary Crawford Fraser, _Italian Yesterdays_ (New York, 1913), 1: 56-58. The tower is described in Crawford's short story "For the Blood is the Life," _Wandering Ghosts_ (New York, 1911), pp. 165-194.


17British Library, Add. Mss. 54935 (118-119). For Roe and his popularity, see Charles H. Sergel, "The Comparative Popularity of Authors," _The Critic_, 27 August 1887, pp. 99-100. Sergel assigned the figure 1000 to the most popular author in his survey, Reverend Roe, and scaled other authors proportionately by their comparative sales. On this scale, Crawford at 41 places just ahead of Robert Louis Stevenson (40).


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22Crawford had fallen in love as a youth with Marchesa Theodoli, born Lily Conrad, an expatriated American. She re-entered his life in 1892, when he and she planned to collaborate on a novel set in early nineteenth century Italy, to be based on her family papers. Through Crawford’s intermediation the Marchesa published a novel, Under Pressure, with Macmillan in 1892. He was staying with her at her country estate at San Vito Romano when the first copy of the novel arrived. British Library, Add. Mss. 54936 (17-18, 33-34, 37-38). Crawford did collaborate with the Duchess of Sermoneta, another confidante. She wrote a short story which was his basis for “The Undesirable Governess.” Vittoria Colonna, Duchess of Sermoneta, Things Past (New York, 1929), pp. 110-124.


28George C. Tyler, “Not That It Matters,” The Saturday Evening Post, 10 February 1934, pp. 16-17.

29Francesca da Rimini was a popular subject at the time. Besides Crawford, Stephen Phillips and Gabriele D’Annunzio also wrote plays on the legend. See the review of all three plays by Edith Wharton, “The Three Francescas,” The North American Review, 175 (1902), 17-30. She much preferred Crawford’s play.


31British Library, Add. Mss. 54936 (passim); 54937 (passim).

32British Library, Add. Mss. 54937 (47-48); 54938 (133-134).


34British Library, Add. Mss. 54938 (11-12, 18-22, 32-33).

Neal R. Shipley


"DREAM OTHER DREAMS AND BETTER": MARK TWAIN'S DEVELOPING NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

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Despite the canonical status of Huckleberry Finn, it is easy to overlook Mark Twain's claim to serious artistry. His entrance into literature via journalism, his enormous popular appeal in his own day, and the ongoing children's story reputation of Tom Sawyer, A Connecticut Yankee, even Huckleberry Finn, tend to obscure for us Twain's development as a serious writer. But setting aside our current prejudice against popular fiction, Twain's major novels reveal not merely a scribbler writing for immediate gain; they also show the evolution of an artist. In particular, the changes observable in Twain's handling of narrative energies—in the way he generates, sustains, and closes his plots—highlight his struggle to embody an increasingly sophisticated sense of how narrative may shape its materials. His novels move from an imaginative freedom with apparently infinite possibilities for continuation to tight narrative control and manipulation toward preconceived goals. Twain's last work, No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger, returns to openendedness. But unlike Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, which generate their plots through spontaneous response to experience, No. 44 exploits the sheer arbitrariness of artistic manipulation. In doing so, it reveals Twain's ongoing quest for new possibilities in fiction-making.

In Twain's first fictional world—that of Tom Sawyer—the narrative mechanism seems capable of sustaining itself ad infinitum. What generates the story is Tom's lust for adventure. His restlessness with conventional life in St. Petersburg appears almost immediately, as he steals sugar when no one is looking, plays hookey from school, and hides when his aunt calls to him. In short, he takes every opportunity to break rules and regulations intruding upon his native freedom. It is important to note, however, that Tom does not desire absolute or pure freedom. As his homesickness on Jackson Island and his boredom during the summer vacation demonstrate, freedom is valuable for him only while the exultation at having just escaped or transcended some particular confinement remains fresh in his mind. Hence the narrative of Tom's adventures reflects a pattern of perpetual escape from and return to society.

The boundlessness of the narrative—the sense that Tom's adventures could go on indefinitely—is reinforced by the fact that Tom has several means of escape available to him. He often casts himself in
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the role of the romantic individualist, successively imagining himself as a chivalric lover, a war hero, an Indian, a pirate, and an outlaw. Moreover, he invests his life with mystery and horror by creeping out of his bedroom to go on midnight quests with Huck and by forming secret clubs with special signs and oaths. In short, through the exercise of his imagination, Tom fictionalizes his life; he makes it richer, more varied, and more individually satisfying than it would be in the every day world of St. Petersburg.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Tom’s story-making possibilities has to do with the fact that in Tom Sawyer, the distinction between make-believe and reality frequently becomes blurred. Tom turns work into play when he convinces his friends that painting a fence is fun. When he decides to stay home from school by pretending to be sick, he almost persuades himself that he is sick in actuality. The narrator notes: “Tom was suffering in reality, now, so handsomely was his imagination working, and so his groans had gathered quite a genuine tone.”¹ This conversion of fiction into reality occurs in connection with Tom’s adventures as well. His midnight wart-removing expedition with Huck turns into a real-life murder adventure. Or even more obviously, his make-believe treasure hunt leads to the discovery of actual treasure. As Virginia Wexman has noted, real events in Tom Sawyer are in some sense secondary to make-believe ones, insofar as they represent “the raw material out of which delightful and harmless fantasies are created.”² Thus Tom, possessed of energy and imagination, and placed in a world where make-believe can become real, can provide practically endless variations to his story so long as he continues to desire freedom.

The other side of the dialectic, the return to society, also contributes to Tom’s narratability. Tom craves social recognition almost as much as he craves freedom. This desire does not keep him from alienating prominent members of the community by his antics, but it does prompt him to choose his moments of reintegration carefully. His appearance at his own funeral is, of course, the most famous example of this, but his return from the cave and his revealing of the treasure follow a similar pattern. Tom transforms himself into a “glittering hero” in the eyes of the community, thus making the return to society as much of an adventure as the escape.

This dialectic which has generated the narrative is sustained in the novel’s ending. Tom’s oscillating desires for freedom and for public glory that have led him repeatedly to escape from and return to common life both remain intact. When the excitement of the treasure discovery dies down and Huck tries to run away from the stifling respectability of the Widow Douglas’s house, Tom seeks him out to persuade him to go back. A spokesman for conventional propriety, Tom tells Huck he will
eventually learn to like being civilized. But at the same time, Tom makes it clear that he does not intend to change his own lifestyle. Huck complains, “Blame it all! just as we’d got guns, and a cave, and all just fixed to rob, here this dern foolishness has got to come up and spoil it all!” Tom quickly responds, “Lookyhere, Huck, being rich ain’t going to keep me back from turning robber.”3 In short, though Tom rejects Huck’s suggestions of leaving St. Petersburg society altogether, he also rejects the notion of wholeheartedly adopting it. His enthusiastic description of the gang’s secret initiation rites shows that his imagination is as active and as adventure hungry as ever. The tensions that had generated the story remain intact.

Twain’s refusal to dispel these tensions would seem to indicate a fairly optimistic approach to this process of story-making. The encounter between the individual and society, between freedom and convention can be painful or frustrating. But in Tom Sawyer, Tom’s imagination and real life work together to ensure that his desires are not betrayed. Granted, there are dangers on both sides of the dialectic. The conformist pressures of St. Petersburg could stifle Tom’s individuality, as Huck feels they do his own. On the other hand, pure freedom has its drawbacks as well. Jackson’s Island teaches Tom the evils of loneliness, and his nightmares about Injun Joe show him the dangers of unchecked imagination. But invariably in Tom Sawyer, the benefits of the opposing forces cancel out the drawbacks. Stifling conventionality initiates rebellion, imaginative retreat, and quest for adventure, while isolation and danger lead back to a comfortable home. Thus the end of the story seems still poised in a condition of narratability, ready to take off on another series of adventures, because this possibility of continuation seems preferable to attaining circumstances—such as absolute freedom or absolute conformity—that would eliminate the tensions giving rise to the story.

Huckleberry Finn, like Tom Sawyer, rests on a tension between freedom and conformity. The narrative is initiated by Huck’s rebellion against the social conventions of St. Petersburg. But as the novel quickly demonstrates, the means by which Tom Sawyer had pursued his desire for freedom are not viable for Huck. In particular, the make-believe world appropriated from Tom’s books is no longer satisfactory. For example, Huck notes that all the boys resigned from Tom’s gang of robbers after about a month because, “We hadn’t robbed nobody, we hadn’t killed any people, but only just pretended.” He goes on to describe their escapades:

We used to hop out of the woods and go charging down on hog-drivers and women in carts taking garden stuff to market, but we never hived any of them. Tom Sawyer
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called the hogs “ingots,” and he called the turnips and stuff
“julery” and we would go to the cave and pow-wow over
what we had killed and marked. But I couldn’t see no profit
in it.4

Clearly for Huck, the imagination is not free to transform one’s
surroundings into something more satisfying to the self.

Not only is the freedom of make-believe associated with Tom
Sawyer unavailable to Huck; it also at times seems undesirable. Insofar
as Tom rigidly insists on imitating the patterns found in his books, his
make-believe represents not freedom at all, but simply another sort of
conformity. When Ben Rogers expresses skepticism regarding the
value of ransoms, Tom exclaims, “Now Ben Rogers, do you want to do
things regular, or don’t you?—that’s the idea. Don’t you reckon that
the people that made the books knows what’s the correct thing to do?”
[my emphasis].5 In short, despite the initial similarity of motivation
between their protagonists’ desires, Huckleberry Finn quickly declares
its independence from its predecessor. Tom’s world of make-believe,
which could in Tom Sawyer effectively mediate between freedom and
society, becomes in Huckleberry Finn simply another agent for
repression.

One of the reasons for this change is that Huck, unlike Tom, seeks
absolute freedom. He does not grow bored and restless when separated
from civilization for too long. On the contrary, the less he is bothered,
the happier he seems to be. He claims, for example, that except for the
“cowhide part” he was perfectly content to be off in the woods with his
Pap. And once he escapes, he finds his ideal mode of existence in
floating down the river on a raft. As he remarked after his stay with the
Grangerfords, “there warn’t no home like a raft, after all. Other places
do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don’t. You feel mighty
free and easy and comfortable on a raft.”6

Huck’s need for absolute freedom has been pointed out in a variety
of contexts. Henry Nash Smith suggests that the notion of freedom
provides the novel with a basic thematic unity. This notion includes
not only the fairly localized issue of freedom versus slavery, but also
the more abstract freedom associated with the individual’s desire to
break away from imprisoning society.7 From another angle, Michael
Oriard distinguishes between Huck’s and Tom’s approaches to make-
believe by pointing to Huck’s spontaneity. Unlike Tom’s fictions
appropriated from books, Huck’s imaginative activity—represented by
the lies and tales he liberally spreads around—is unmediated.8 This
spontaneous fictionalizing constitutes a sort of freedom in itself, in that
it avoids the danger of hardening into conventionality; but it is also
significant as a means by which Huck protects his own physical
freedom. He fakes his own death to keep people from searching for him. Moreover, he automatically lies when asked about his name and circumstances so that he will not be turned over to the local authorities. Whereas a young runaway would probably be apprenticed out or shipped home, George Jackson who fell out of the steamboat is invited in and treated with courtesy, thus retaining for him the option of slipping away whenever he wants.

The absolute freedom that Huck desires would seem to be non-narratable. His ideal state is a state of quietude, in which he remains undisturbed by the violence, ugliness, and repressiveness of the world at large. But the narrative prolongs itself because Huck cannot maintain this state. His freedom is constantly threatened by forces from the world outside. A steamboat runs over his raft and he ends up with the Grangerfords. He eventually leaves them and gets back to the raft, only to encounter the King and the Duke. Thus Huckleberry Finn provides a mechanism for endlessly generating narrative just as Tom Sawyer does.

Huckleberry Finn, however, evinces less optimism about this process. In Tom Sawyer, continuation was portrayed as preferable to attaining the absolutes of either freedom or social integration. But in Huckleberry Finn, Huck does seek an absolute state; hence, in the prolongation of the narrative, there runs an undercurrent of frustration. Huck’s spontaneous fictionalizing also contributes to the darker undercurrent. As Henry Nash Smith, among others, has pointed out, Huck’s tales tend to be “uniformly somber.” Moreover, because they are intended to preserve his freedom from immediate threats, they seem to possess a greater urgency than Tom’s fantasies. In short, the engagement between fiction and “real life” is adversarial rather than complementary in Huckleberry Finn. Because of this conflict, fictionmaking loses some of its privileged power, since Huck cannot arbitrarily convert life into pleasant make-believe; on the other hand, the novel gains in moral depth, since the dangers and frustrations that threaten Huck seem far more real than Tom’s wish-fulfillment.

Despite the undercurrents of frustration, Huckleberry Finn also possesses a certain comic exuberance. Huck has a zest for life that counterbalances the repeated thwarting of his attempt to find quietude. In this context, it is significant to note that not all his fictions manifest a self-preserving urgency. And even with those that are urgent, he often enters into them with the imaginative energy and attention to detail that he associates with Tom Sawyer. When he engineers his escape from Pap, for example, he wishes Tom were there to help “throw in the fancy touches.” And after concocting an elaborate story to account for Mary Jane Wilks’s absence from home, Huck remarks, “I felt very good; I judged I had done pretty neat—I reckoned Tom Sawyer couldn’t
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a done it no neater himself.” Furthermore, Huck sometimes seeks out adventure potentially dangerous to himself—as when he boards the Walter Scott—simply because Tom Sawyer would have done it. In short, at various intervals in the novel, Huck participates in an unmotivated (in the sense that it is not necessary for his freedom) embroidering of his life that implies a confidence in the power of fiction over reality.

The most extended example of this fictionalizing tendency is, of course, the evasion episode. In these chapters, Huck’s admiration for Tom gets the better of his skeptical, literalist turn of mind. Hence he participates in the extravagant plans to free Jim with genuine (though sometimes qualified) approval. Whatever the aesthetic merit of the way they are presented, these chapters reflect an approach to narrative different from the one presented by Huck’s quest for quietude. These chapters, like the earlier episodes in which Huck invokes Tom, affirm the possibility of converting ordinary experience into high adventure. This affirmation releases Huck to some extent from his literalist viewpoint, and it frees the narrative from relying exclusively on threats to Huck’s independence as a perpetuating device.

The conclusion of Huckleberry Finn confirms neither the aesthetic (embroidering life for the fun of it) nor the moral (seeking quietude in a hostile world) approach to narrative. Huck’s plan to “light out for the Territory” suggests a continuation of the narrative energies, but it is unclear whether lighting out signifies pursuit of fantasy—like Tom’s “howling adventures amongst the Injuns”—or whether it represents Huck’s ongoing quest for absolute freedom, a quest which will, as Roy Harvey Pearce reminds us, be frustrated in Oklahoma just as it has been elsewhere. In short, part of the richness of Huckleberry Finn is that it refuses to commit itself to a single attitude toward art. On the one hand, its comic exuberance and unmotivated fictionalizing celebrate the creative process for its own sake. Yet on the other hand, there runs a current which will not separate itself from the concerns of real life—suggesting that the very ongoingness of narrative and of life involves a certain degree of frustration, and that fictions may spring from necessity as well as from pleasure.

With A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court, Twain makes some significant departures from the narrative patterns of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. One of the most obvious of these changes is that the conditions which generate the narrative are destroyed at the end of the novel. Hank returns to the nineteenth century, and then dies, thus doubly terminating the possibility of further adventures in sixth-century England. But there are other differences as well. Hank’s adventures seem far more end-oriented than those of his predecessors. Whereas Tom’s and Huck’s stories spring from their innate desire for
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freedom and have no purpose other than satisfying that desire whenever opportunity arises, Hank’s actions tend to be consciously aimed at the specific goals of civilizing the Britons and maintaining his own supremacy. He becomes to a certain extent a deliberate manipulator of his environment, directing his own and others’ destinies. This end-orientedness exists at a thematic level also, for here, far more than in the previous novels, Twain uses the narrative to convey certain truths concerning society and human nature. As Robert A. Wiggins puts it, the novel does not “unfold [itself] to the reader as does Huckleberry Finn, but rather marshalls [itself] as evidence to prove a point.” In general, the changes noticeable in A Connecticut Yankee represent a shift in value from art as process to art as product, from narrative freedom to narrative control.

The plot is initiated by Hank Morgan’s abrupt transmigration from the nineteenth century into the sixth. As an outsider, an alien, Hank must make a place for himself in his new setting if he is to survive. Making a place for himself entails not only spontaneously reacting to pressures placed upon him (the way Huck does), but also ensuring his own security by manipulating the conditions that threaten him. Hence the narrative moves toward control over the environment from the outset. For example, before he has even fully gauged his situation, Hank decides that if “it was really the sixth century, all right . . . I would boss the whole country inside of three months.” Hank has no taste for the “take things as they come” lifestyle of Huck Finn. He conceives of his life not as a more or less continuous process of adjusting to his environment, but in terms of certain fixed goals that he sets for himself.

Hank’s dislike for openendedness is clearly apparent. The custom of going off in quest of adventure without any notion of where one is going completely baffles him. Questioning Alisande la Carteloise about how to find their prospective destination, he is exasperated by her ignorance and unconcern. He cannot comprehend a country that has no need for maps. Hank is equally exasperated by Sandy’s penchant for long, rambling stories. His attention often wanders during her account of their captured knights and he intersperses the narrative with trenchant comments about her inability to get to the point. As a practical-minded Yankee, Hank deprecates everything that resembles Sandy’s meandering narratives and “horizonless transcontinental sentences.”

As I have already suggested, the ends toward which Hank directs his actions have to do with securing his survival in an alien environment. First, he tries to make the world of sixth-century England more like his own by introducing nineteenth-century ideas and technology into it. He brings electricity, railroads, the telephone, and the telegraph and starts
factories, Sunday schools, and a military academy. Moreover, he attempts to restructure the economic and political system through such means as standardizing currency and singlehandedly routing the institution of chivalry. With activities such as these, he tries to give direction and purpose to the naive, “horizonless” Britons.

The second way Hank secures his survival is by fostering his reputation as an all-powerful magician. It is to this end that he creates his fabulous “effects.” Even when his miracles are more or less unpremeditated and out of his control, as with the eclipse, he carefully adds flourishes to deepen the impact on his viewers. His grand pointing gesture, he suggests, is as significant as the blacking out of the sun. His later “magical” acts, such as blowing up Merlin’s tower, or repairing the well in the Valley of Holiness, are, of course, even more deliberately calculated to consolidate his power.

These two sorts of activity, though both aim at making Hank secure, are to some extent contradictory. His supposed “magic,” while augmenting his own reputation, also serves to reinforce the illusion and superstition that his civilizing efforts would drive away. Or, from the other perspective, were he to succeed in making a nineteenth-century industrial society out of Arthurián Britain, he must necessarily lose his special position of power, since his special knowledge would presumably become commonplace. Already Clarence, who initially cowered in fear of Hank’s supernatural abilities, had by the end of the novel become almost his equal.

In addition to these contradictions, there are more abstract conflicts among the ideas Twain uses the narrative to reveal. His satire ridicules not only the conservative hierarchy of Arthurián Britain, but also Hank Morgan’s progressive liberalism. This double-edged satire provides a built-in ambiguity, making it unclear what end Twain is ultimately trying to achieve. His presentation of a deterministic view of human nature further complicates matters. Hank complains about the “inherited prejudice” of the Arthuriáns. But as is demonstrated by his narrow-minded adherence to the ideas of his own century, he too responds to historical forces beyond his control. Indeed, if we extend the logical consequences of this belief, then Twain himself must be subject to the same accusation, and any attempt to control the narrative for the sake of certain personal ends must be illusory.

The ending of A Connecticut Yankee reflects the frustration rather than the attainment of the goals toward which the narrative has pushed. Though Hank appears to have succeeded in industrializing the country after his victory over the knights at the tournament, his changes make only superficial headway against “inherited prejudice.” The people quickly turn against him after an interdict from Rome, and fittingly enough, his loyal remnant is destroyed by the carnage that his own
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technology created. Hank’s attempt to control his own destiny is similarly thwarted. He is exiled from the sixth century by Merlin, whom he had, till this point, out-magicked at every turn. By putting Hank to sleep, Merlin nullifies Hank’s quest for personal power and resumes the position of preeminence he had held until the American’s arrival. Finally, there is death to balk Hank’s efforts to control his life. Not only does he fail to achieve his ends in sixth-century England, he is also barred from completing his own story. The final events of his life are narrated by Clarence in the sixth century, and then by Twain (as frame-story narrator) in the nineteenth.

The difference in approach to narrative between A Connecticut Yankee and the earlier novels constitutes a shift from art as process to art as product. It is the effect that interests Hank, rather than the means of getting there, as when he feels compelled to use blasting powder on the well in the Valley of Holiness even though the problem is only an easily-repaired leak. But although this sort of narrative places positive value on control, on the achievement of certain ends, A Connecticut Yankee seems to express pessimism regarding the possibility for attaining these ends. Hank, the would-be manipulator of his own destiny, gets bogged down by irreconcilable conflicts among his goals. Moreover, Twain decenters his own social commentary by setting aspects of his satire and of his philosophy at odds with one another. The narrative comes to a resolution, in that the conditions which generated the story are eliminated, but it is a closure that undermines rather than reaffirms the possibility of end-oriented narrative.

Pudd’nhead Wilson, like A Connecticut Yankee, is end-oriented; it values product over process. But unlike A Connecticut Yankee, Pudd’nhead Wilson actually achieves its goal. This makes it (in terms of plot) a more mechanical, more predictable work than its predecessor; but insofar as the ending represents the successful completion toward which the narrative has been driving, it seems to evince more confidence in its own narrative approach.

Two different sorts of disequilibrium contribute to generating the narrative. One is, of course, Roxy’s switching of the babies, while the other is David Wilson’s isolation as a result of town prejudice. The subsequent career of the bogus Tom Driscoll—with his gambling, theft, and finally murder—adds complications to the plot; but from the moment Wilson takes up fingerprinting as a hobby, its resolution appears inevitable. Thus the expectation of an unravelling—of restoring the state of harmony that existed before Roxy disrupted things, and of doing so in a manner that will also vindicate David Wilson in the eyes of the town—is implicit in the narrative.

The fulfillment of these expectations takes place at the trial. It is by far the most fully dramatized scene in the novel. Wilson carefully
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orchestrates and presents his material so as to produce the greatest effect on his hearers. Moreover, the reactions of Driscoll and the audience, the pauses, the gestures, and the general emotional atmosphere in the courtroom are carefully recorded. After Wilson explains the notion of fingerprinting and verifies the accuracy of his pantographs, he continues presenting his case:

He turned to the jury: "Compare the finger-prints of the accused with the finger prints left by the assassin—and report."

The comparison began. As it proceeded, all movement and all sound ceased, and the deep silence of an absorbed and waiting suspense settled upon the house; and when at last the words came—

"They do not even resemble," a thunder-crash of applause followed and the house sprang quickly to its feet . . . 16

By presenting the scene in such detail, Twain confirms its central importance to the narrative structure as a whole.

The way in which the novel was composed further confirms its end-orientation. The published novel was taken from a huge mass of manuscripts, and the trial scene—the only ending Twain wrote for this mass—was composed fairly early. Twain then went back and rewrote earlier portions, greatly expanding the roles of Roxy and Tom Driscoll, in order to lead up to this ending.17 Twain himself refers to this end-oriented approach. He wrote to his publisher in July, 1893:

The whole story is centered on the murder and trial; from the first chapter the movement is straight ahead without divergence or side play to the murder and the trial; everything that is done or said or that happens is a preparation for those events.18

In short, not only is Pudd'nhead Wilson end-oriented; it is self-consciously so. Twain appears to have deliberately rejected the freedom of a narrative capable of endless sustenance in favor of a narrative with a telos. Furthermore, by limiting his goals to the level of plot progression, he creates a narrative capable of successful resolution. Ironically, however, Twain's self-conscious construction of an end-oriented narrative by means of the fingerprinting plot and trial scene may be merely an evasion of the deeper, more disturbing issues implicit in the novel. As Hershel Parker and others have noted, the trial scene does not adequately resolve the problems Twain raises regarding miscegenation and racial conditioning—problems he probably did not want to address directly.19 Parker also points out Twain’s carelessness
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at revision, both when he rewrote the early sections to correspond to the ending and when he took the novel out of the larger manuscript. This sloppiness—and the novel’s resultant lapses from unity—suggests that despite the superficial success of *Pudd’nhead Wilson*’s resolution, Twain’s genius was basically unsuited to making fictions concurrent with preconceived ends.\(^{20}\)

Twain returns to the end-oriented plot and to the trial scene as a closural device in “The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg” and perhaps “The Chronicle of Young Satan” as well. These works reveal more clearly what is implicit in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*—that directing a narrative toward preconceived ends is, for Twain, an arbitrary imposition. In both cases the character who unravels the plot is also the one who caused the complications.

In “The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg” it is the stranger Stephenson who generates and completes the plot. The story records the carrying out of his premeditated plan to corrupt and expose the town leaders. Acting on his knowledge of innate human selfishness and the town’s lack of acquired moral checks, the stranger sets up a step-by-step plan for its downfall. The townsmen respond just as anticipated, and the scheme culminates with the great unmasking at a public meeting. This ending toward which the narrative has driven not only demonstrates the stranger’s truth regarding the relationship between temptation and moral resilience; it also reveals Twain’s ideas about the mechanistic determinants of behavior. But the completeness of Stephenson’s control over the narrative’s progress undermines the validity of the truths he reveals, for it makes his conclusions seem arbitrary. Moreover, the narrative suggests that Stephenson is to a certain extent outside of the determined chain of events he plays upon. Twain gives a sort of excuse for the stranger’s action by noting that someone in Hadleyburg had once offended him. But the revenge seems to far exceed the initial cause. Furthermore, once his story begins, he is completely unaffected by the events he initiates (in contrast to Hank Morgan, for example). In short, because he can stand outside of the story, beginning it and ending it, his plan works too easily; and neither the problems nor the resolution seems authentic. Frank Kermode has suggested that people turn to fictions to find a greater sense of completeness than life itself can generally offer.\(^{21}\) But when a completed fiction shows its artificiality too openly, it loses its power to say anything meaningful about life.

In the final version of *The Mysterious Stranger*, Twain converts the movement toward arbitrariness from a negative into a positive value. He makes it a sort of freedom by breaking the connection between control of the environment and motive for manipulation; and once again he celebrates the endless possibilities of the human
imagination. But the return to narrative freedom is not entirely optimistic; for despite its exuberance, it admits a failure to say anything meaningful about life or truth outside the self.

The narrative is initiated by No. 44’s appearance in a sixteenth-century Austrian print-shop. All of the printers except the narrator, August, dislike him immediately and try to drive him away. Right from the start, he shows a mysterious power to resist their hostilities. He fulfills their most outrageous commands without the least difficulty or complaint. Because of this supernatural strength, the inmates of the castle believe 44 to be a pawn of the local magician. But the magician, like Merlin in A Connecticut Yankee is clearly a fake. He accepts credit for 44’s miracles simply because he is afraid of exposing his own hypocrisy. Hence it is soon apparent to the reader that 44, not the magician, is responsible for the superhuman feats.

The account of 44’s conflicts with the printers bears a certain resemblance to A Connecticut Yankee, in that 44 is a likeable alien, seeking to make a place for himself in a hostile environment. But unlike Hank Morgan, 44 is not defeated by contradictions among his own approaches; rather it is the inappropriateness of his approach that makes for his difficulties. The more he shows himself willing and able to meet the printers’ demands, the more they hate him. They envy him for his miraculous powers and despise him for his eagerness to please. Hence the story is one of an energetic but bumbling young stranger, well-meaning but hurting himself by his lack of shrewdness. Until his sudden supposed death at the hands of the magician, the narrative would appear to be leading toward comic reconciliation or pathetic defeat.

As Bruce Michelson has pointed out, the tone of the narrative changes abruptly when 44 returns from the dead, twanging on a Jew’s harp.22 Since he reveals his identity only to August, the previously established pattern for integration is shattered. 44’s subsequent antics appear to be motivated simply by the pleasure of making splendid effects. In his blithe disregard for consequences, 44 is much like the Tom Sawyer at the end of Huckleberry Finn, adventuring for the sake of adventure. But 44’s adventures are even more unfettered than Tom’s, since he is not tied to the constraints of time and space. Thus, the carnival-like mayhem of the No. 44 version disrupts all the typically controllable aspects of narrative, “boggling all our expectations and logical plot developments, confounding our sense of individual characters, our sense of place and time, and upsetting any effort by anybody in the story to be logical and serious.”23

As the narrative progresses, 44’s antics become increasingly outrageous and absurd. He lets himself get thrown in prison (disguised as the magician) only so he can disappear again. He terrifies the populace by causing an eclipse and making time run backward. His
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sole announced motive for these bizarre actions is to increase the magician's reputation. Finally, as the ultimate demonstration of arbitrary control over his effects, he banishes the procession of the dead. As August remarks, "Then all of a sudden 44 waved his hand and we stood in an empty and soundless world."24 By making and destroying his effects at random, 44 demonstrates the absolute freedom of all creative activity.

The famous dream ending confirms this notion. If reality, including the impossible antics of 44, is only a figment of August's imagination, then all events and objects must be arbitrary, unmotivated, existing only because he wants them to. It has been suggested that the process of freeing August's imagination from the narrow constraints of the Workaday self constitutes the unifying theme of No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger.25 Certainly, the idea that 44's revelation liberates August and that this liberation represents a positive achievement is affirmed in the conclusion. 44 claims, "But I your poor servant have revealed you to yourself and set you free. Dream other dreams, and better!"26 But self-conscious imaginative freedom has its darker side as well. As August realizes, there is something horrifying about being alone with the self, "a homeless Thought, wandering forlorn among the empty eternities!"27 He is free to imagine whatever he wants, but he cannot transcend his own imagination, for nothing else exists. Thus for all the playful exuberance that 44 imparts to the narrative, there remains a certain edge of urgency and desperation to the process of populating the empty void.

With its disrupted patterns, its transcendence of all logic and order, and finally, its solipsistic conclusion, No. 44 is by far the most self-conscious of Twain's works regarding the relationship of the creative imagination to the process of fiction-making. It brings together the issues of freedom and control and lays bare their artifice and meaninglessness. But besides parodying Twain's own narrative conventions, No. 44 also affirms the value of fictions as fictions, hence pointing the way to a new horizon for his art, despite the darkness implicit in the novel's conclusion and in Twain's other writings of the time.

As he grew older, Twain changed ideologically from an exuberant, racy humorist to a pessimistic philosopher. Parallel to this change in his social outlook is the development of his attitudes toward art. His grapplings with the issues of freedom, truth, and reality deeply influenced the forms of his narratives—from the precarious openendedness of Huckleberry Finn to the boundless arbitrary control of No. 44. In other words, Twain's narrative technique—his way of carrying forward his plots—responded to ideological pressures; he
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repeatedly sought new forms to express new ideas. This influencing suggests that Twain himself responded to the ideas and problems he encountered not merely as a thinker but as an artist.

NOTES


3 Tom Sawyer, p. 258.


5 Huckleberry Finn, p. 10.

6 Huckleberry Finn, p. 99.

7 Henry Nash Smith, intro. Huckleberry Finn.


9 Smith, p. xix.

10 Huckleberry Finn, p. 29.

11 Huckleberry Finn, p. 113.

12 Roy Harvey Pearce, “‘The End. Yours Truly, Huck Finn’: Postscript,” MLQ, 24 (1963), 253-56.


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18Rpt. in Gladys Carmen Bellamy, Mark Twain as Literary Artist (Norman, OK., 1950), p. 318.


23Michelson, p. 59.


26No. 44, p. 186.

27No. 44, p. 187.
MA


MARIE: INGENUE ON THE URBAN STAGE

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A number of historical currents have converged in our time to produce not merely in artists but in ordinary men and women an escalating cycle of self-consciousness—a sense of the self as a performer under the constant scrutiny of friends and strangers.

Christopher Lasch, The Culture of Narcissism

Maggie: A Girl of the Streets is a small novel with a slight heroine. Maggie Johnson is socially insignificant, culturally anonymous, and so inarticulate that her few words seem as ludicrous as they are pathetic. Yet Maggie is representative, and thus significant, in her thwarted longings, in her dreams. These very dreams, subsumed and distorted by an emerging mass culture, destroy her, and Maggie’s destruction makes her emblematic of a new pattern of American life.

Through Maggie’s development and subsequent fall, Crane tells a story of a new kind of education, of a heroine-in-training, preparing to take her place on the urban stage. Maggie, a novel of initiation, focuses on a young girl’s entry into a new, emerging culture—the culture of the marketplace—where consumption is the only good. As Maggie, her lover and her family perform in the Bowery theatre, we observe twentieth-century mass culture in its crudest form, and we see its effects. Crane brings us into a world exploding with change and accurately envisions the consequences of such upheaval.

Viewed within this framework, the blatant and infuriating hypocrisies of the characters, the juxtaposition of ironic, inflated narrative and Bowery dialogue, even the cliche plot, all become essential parts of a coherent, original tale. For in this world, truth is not only devalued, it is irrelevant; and seduction or prostitution are merely standard marketing strategies.

Frank Bergon notes that Crane’s talent “was to go over the wall to that side of experience where the spirit is quick to panic, where standards and values by which we think we live are no longer stable or even appropriate,” and he adds that, from the first chapter of Maggie, we are drawn into “a realm of experience where normal frames of reference are immediately shaken.” The reader’s panic reflects the disorientation of the characters, for the Bowery is a fearful, unstable milieu. For the foreigner or the country dweller, recently arrived, the city was a threatening place. The newly arrived who remained in the city found
their fears supplemented by despair, as the bleakness of sweated work or of other menial labor provided no satisfaction beyond subsistence. The industrial city was cold and large, and, most frightening of all, it was filled with strangers. One did not see the familiar faces of a small town each day; instead, one was estranged and alone, confronted by the threatening and unfamiliar. Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen describe the industrial city of the late nineteenth century:

The concentration of people in streets, in manufacturing districts, in dance halls and other urban entertainments, confronted people with an unremitting parade of strangers. These were, and still are, the terms of mass life. Within it, one was continually forced to make silent, often unconscious decisions, based on outward appearances.\(^3\)

Appearance became the only guide to survival, one’s only basis for judgment.

If strangers were thus to be judged by their surfaces, each observer himself was so judged. Inner bleakness, unremitting despair could be concealed, even from oneself, if one presented the appropriate facade. The characteristic genius of the new urban culture was its provision of endless channels of escape—in the very environment that was so threatening. The newly evolving industrial city was, as the Ewens describe it, an “urban stage,” “a jungle of display, an unremitting spectacle, a circus of facade”\(^4\) it was not only a place of terror but a platform of opportunity. The dispossessed worker could devise a new appearance. Appearance became the key to acceptance, to belonging; the right “look” could disguise one’s defeat and deflect the contempt of others. “The urban stage,” explain the Ewens, “generated continual opportunities for people to see themselves as part of the cityscape. As the metropolis took on its modern dimensions, it became a collection of glass and mirrored surfaces, unavoidable occasions for seeing oneself as a sight.”\(^5\) As actors in the city’s ever-shifting and spurious drama, workers could live their fantasies, could, for a moment, realize their dreams of status and respectability.

Essential to a successful performance in the new setting was costume. Fashion became paramount, consumption became obsessive when identity could be bought. Blanche Gelfant explains that in the insecure world of the city, “External fineries, extrinsic possessions become a compensation for a deeply rooted inner sense of helplessness. For people who live among each other as strangers, fashion comes to symbolize status and achievement.”\(^6\) Seduced by the promise of
fashion, one bought an appearance so he could sell a new self in the marketplace—the street.

The irony of such escape is, of course, its transitory and ultimately unsatisfying nature. Such momentary release denies the actor any chance for permanent amelioration of his misery, for it diverts him from the true sources of his discontent. But such diversion was tempting and widely sanctioned; Lasch notes that in 1907, both the Saturday Evening Post and Success magazine began departments of instruction in the “art of conversation, fashion, and culture.” The popular magazine no longer lauded the captain of industry; young men were now exhorted to become “masters of impressions....told that they had to sell themselves in order to succeed.”7 While Bowery teamsters did not read the magazines, they absorbed the message, for it permeated every form of mass culture: in the beer halls, in the theatres, one was told that dreams could come true if one learned the stance, the posture, of success. Thus emerging mass culture channeled the anger and pain of the underclass into the safest avenue of all—into an obsession with surfaces, into a fantasy world that money could buy.

Maggie’s tragedy is, as William Dean Howells notes, the “distorted perspective”8 she, like her peers, develops on the urban stage. Initially, Maggie is no actress; she possesses too many human qualities to succeed. She lacks the competitiveness, predatoriness, impersonality and indifference Gelfant cites as necessary for achievement.9 Maggie blossoms in a mud puddle precisely because she is humane in the inhuman world; in early chapters she comforts Jimmie, nurses Tommie, serves as mother to her family, weeps for them, and even steals a flower for the baby’s coffin. But soon, because she observes and learns the lessons of appearances, she is ready to take her place on the stage.

For the better part of each day, Maggie works at manufacturing symbols of respectability, collars and cuffs. Caught in a cycle of sweated labor and appalling family life, Maggie dreams modest dreams of love and protection. When the elegant bartender, Pete, enters her life, Maggie’s lessons in appearance begin in earnest.

Maggie is drawn to Pete by his mannerisms and his “extensive” wardrobe, and Pete soon initiates Maggie into the world of the streets, where she joins the crowd of the Bowery beer hall in an orgy of wish-fulfillment. Here she and the rest of the audience can indulge in a sentimental wallow listening to the song of “a mother’s love, and a sweetheart who waited and a young man who was lost at sea.”10 The audience of laborers can feel superior when a singer’s negro melody “necessitated some grotesque waddlings supposed to be an imitation of a plantation darky.” They can luxuriate in a mindless patriotism with
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songs of “Ireland bursting her bonds” followed by the national anthem (32). Such facile feeling is a glorious release for Maggie, who “drew deep breaths of pleasure. No thoughts of the atmosphere of the collar and curf factory came to her” (32).

As observer of this new world, Maggie learns the lessons of clothes. Like Dreiser’s protagonists, Maggie soon perceives that clothes are the essential emblems of success. Her hope of capturing Pete’s love is thwarted, in her mind, by her lack of appropriate apparel. “As thoughts of Pete came to Maggie’s mind, she began to have an intense dislike for all of her dresses....She craved those adornments of person which she saw every day on the street, conceiving them to be allies of vast importance to women” (34).

In terms of the universal values of the street, Maggie is right to worship clothes. Jane Addams noted that the working girl spent a disproportionate amount of her wages on clothes, but she, too, understood why:

if social advancement is her [the working girl’s] aim, it is the most sensible thing she can do. Her house furnishing...her scantly supply of books...are never seen by the people whose social opinions she most values. Her clothes are her background, and from them she is largely judged.11

More than the lambrequin bought to impress Pete and soon ripped apart by Maggie’s mother, Maggie’s own appearance must attract and impress. She must compete on the city stage with the fashionable prostitute, Nell; she must package her longing in the wrappings of confident enticement.

When appearance is paramount, it is a short step from perceiving one’s garments as crucial to perceiving one’s self as a marketable item. Dreaming of attracting her lover, Maggie “began to see the bloom upon her cheeks as something of value” (34), something she will eventually trade for an illusory security.

The seduction of Maggie continues with further exposure to the urban masquerade. At a Bowery melodrama, Maggie, like the rest of the audience, cannot distinguish between the false and the true. Fascinated by the hackneyed, artificial plot, she identifies with the cardboard hero in the paper blizzard, as he rises through noble sentiments to moral and, more importantly, financial triumph. “To Maggie and the rest of the audience, this was transcendental realism. Joy always within, and they, like the actor, inevitably without” (36). This grotesque imitation of the misery and isolation of poverty provides the audience with a sympathetic enactment of their common pain, and,
more destructively, with the false hope of rescue and economic success. It is the Horatio Alger story, the manipulative American myth, told and retold. With both insight and foresight, Crane depicts the use of mass culture as a form of social control, as both diversion and as channel for the pain of the underclass. The scene anticipates the widening impact of the mass media in the century to come, for it shows the power of manufactured illusion to create dreams, and to propose spurious ways to fulfill them. The images of the Bowery theatre are the forerunners of the images of the screen, and the lessons of such mass entertainment are lessons not merely in what to dream of, but in how dreams come true.

The implicit meaning of Crane’s theatre scene anticipates, by nearly a hundred years, the impact Jill Robinson, daughter of MGM producer Dore Schary, attributed to the Golden Age of American movies: “I think the reason we’re so crazy sexually in America is that all of our responses are acting. We don’t know how to feel. We know how it looked in the movies.” To Robinson, who grew up in the Hollywood fantasy world, not only dreams of love are formed by the screen; so, too, are attitudes that are ultimately self-defeating. “We know that in the movies its inconceivable that the bad guy will win. Therefore we don’t get terribly involved in any cause. The good guy’s gonna win anyway. It’s a marvelous political weapon.” In both Bowery theatre and movie palace, the audience is at once tantalized by fantasy and distracted from genuine, effective response to reality.

Like its successor, the movie, the Bowery melodrama teaches acting, and Maggie is again a quick study. Quite logically she concludes that, to merit her own rescuer, Pete, she must not only dress well but learn to develop the manners of a stage heroine. Buoyed by the false hopes of the theatre, Maggie dreams another empty dream.

Maggie always departed with raised spirits from these melodramas. She rejoiced at the way in which the poor and virtuous eventually overcame the wealthy and wicked. The theatre made her think. She wondered if the culture and refinement she had seen imitated, perhaps, grotesquely, by the heroine on the stage, could be acquired by a girl who lived in a tenement house and worked in a shirt factory. (37)

Fulfillment of her dreams, to Maggie, necessitates her transformation into a marketable product. Her lover will only “buy” her if she can act like the standard consumer item. Her longing fed by the tawdry fantasies of urban culture, Maggie tries to negotiate a deal in the mass market. Ironically, she is doubly a victim: she blindly accepts the
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carderist values of her society, but she cannot hold out for the best bargain. Instead of selling her only asset, she gives it away.

Only when she is forced to sell herself, when she is reduced to prostitution, does Maggie truly become a “legitimate” actress. Marston LaFrance says that nothing prepares us for the scene when Maggie appears briefly as “an entirely reconciled and successful prostitute”\(^{13}\) in elegant clothes, but this moment is the culmination of Maggie’s education. She now looks the part she has trained for, and she is now capable of acting that role. Milne Holton notes the shift in the novel from Maggie as an observer to Maggie as an object to be observed,\(^{14}\) and now we see her perform upon the city stage, throwing “changing glances at men who passed her, giving smiling invitations to those of rural or untaught pattern and usually seeming sedately unconscious of the men with a metropolitan seal upon their faces” (68).

But the new Maggie, tailored to look like the standard, saleable product, becomes, in her standardization, no one, nothing at all. Once the blossom that flourished in a mud puddle, Maggie drowns in the blackness of the enormous river, anonymous, unknown. Her final walk to her destruction is symbolic of her “progress” through the culture, for she begins as the person she so desperately wanted to be: she appears well-dressed, sophisticated, an accepted accessory to the bright lights of the theatre district. But, as Crane indicates, Maggie is no one. She is no longer even identified by name; she is a “girl of the painted cohorts” (68), and her walk soon takes her away from the reflecting mirrors of shop windows and restaurants’ glass facades to a place of darkness where the “shutters of the tall buildings were closed like grim lips” and the structures “seemed to have eyes that looked over them, beyond them, at other things,” not at Maggie. Here there are no windows in which to check one’s image, no bright surfaces or admirers to reflect and confirm one’s status. The lights are far away, a seemingly “impossible distance” away (70). Having forsaken any inner life to become truly “a girl of the streets,” Maggie has traveled to her logical end: oblivion. Seeking a false but marketable self, Maggie has only obliterated what little identity she may once have possessed.

There are other actors on the Bowery stage and all of them, like Maggie, understand the importance of appearances. Jimmie, unlike his sister, begins his career early: “Jimmie’s occupation for a long time was to stand on street corners and watch the world go by.” There he can dream and he can also present the facade of defiance and contempt so important to his sense of self. “He menaced mankind at the intersections of streets” for, at the corners “he was in life and of life. The world was going on and he was there to perceive it” (21). Again in contrast to Maggie, Jimmie has developed the aggression and competitiveness that characterize successful actors; to him the world is
made up of “despicable creatures who were all trying to take advantage of him and with whom, in defense, he was obliged to quarrel on all possible occasions” (22). While all men are potential enemies, Jimmie’s greatest hatred is for the well-dressed “swell,” his superior in appearance. His greatest joy comes when he can buy things: “a dollar in his pocket his satisfaction with existence was the greatest thing in the world” (21).

Like Jimmie, Pete is obsessed with image. In the first chapter of the novel, Crane defines Pete in terms of objects and stance; at sixteen, Pete has “the chronic sneer of an ideal manhood” on his lips, a cigar “tilted at an angle of defiance” between them. The hat he wears is “tipped over his eye with an air of challenge” and the exaggerated swing of his shoulder “appalled the timid” (8). Beloved by Maggie because of his attitude and his clothes, Pete, like Maggie, is fooled by appearances. His inability to distinguish between Maggie’s genuine affection and the false love of the better-dressed Nell leads him to reject Maggie and to forfeit the very status he lives for. Respecting only that which he must pay for, Pete trades Maggie’s adoration for the commercial attentions of Nell; attempting to buy approval, he is cheated in the deal. In the whores he pays to reassure him he is a “goo’ f’ler” (73) Pete seeks a sympathetic audience. But neither this claque nor alcohol can erase the image of the fool derided by his own emptiness.

Donald Pizer has extensively analyzed the Johnsons’ flair for family theatre, and rightly notes that “The key to the morality of the Bowery is...its self-deceiving theatricality.” In the casting out of Maggie from both home and from Pete’s bar, in the “parody of Bowery melodrama” of the novel’s final scene, Pizer finds evidence of the power of a middle-class morality applied in largely inappropriate circumstances. To these “victims of amoral, uncontrollable forces of man and society,” Pizer states, such moral values are merely false and destructive.15 Pizer accurately pinpoints one deep need in the Bowery actors: the need to appear respectable, to win audience approval. But, in the Bowery world of mass culture, respect is earned not only by playing the roles of the middle-class, “decent” character, but in roles that challenge many traditional middle-class values. The new roles, of predator, of savvy salesman ready to drive a hard bargain in the marketplace, of contemptuous and cynical man or woman of the world, can as easily and frequently be played.

Thus the same Pete who shrewdly calculates his losses when an evening’s entertainment nets no kiss from Maggie can become the virtuous bartender who won’t sully his establishment with her presence. And the brother who publicly damn’s the ruined girl congratulates himself on his evasion of his own ruined mistress. The hypocrisy of such juxtaposed scenes is infuriating precisely because the actors
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perceive no hypocrisy; one set of values, one role, is as good as another. True, the Bowery stage and the Bowery streets present lessons in middle-class virtue rewarded, but they also present exemplar of the value of manipulation and violence. All such lessons are equally noted. What is valued is what will "play" before the audience of the moment, whether the role conforms to the vestiges of middle-class morality or to the new image of predator in the urban jungle. The city streets offer a department-store variety of ways to be; one can shop for the identity of the day. And if none of these identities is grounded in reality, if one is not only deceiving but self-deceived, that, too, is inevitable. What Lasch perceives of our own time is incipient in Maggie's world: "Overexposure to manufactured illusions soon destroys their representational power. The illusion of reality dissolves, not in a heightened sense of reality...but in a remarkable indifference to reality."16

What is real hardly matters at all, and thus, in Maggie, imitation and simulation abound. Even objects lie. Pete's elegant bar is imitation leather and mahogany veneer; clean, detachable collars and cuffs can conceal the grimy shirt beneath the clerk's jacket. A beer-hall dancer takes her bows in "grotesque attitudes which were at the time popular among the dancers in the theatres up-town"; a maudlin song is greeted by "the kind of applause that rings as sincere" (32). At the melodrama, evil men in the audience cheer for the virtuous hero. There is no center of reality, no way to determine truth. By the last half of the novel, even the contrasts of vision are blurred; as Holton says, the final ten chapters have "a quality of distortion...Characters are often drunk, or confused by rumor. Scene after scene takes place in bar, beer hall, or theatre. The air is continually smoky, and images are blurred by glare, or sudden movement, or rain, or darkness."17

Even Crane's alternating styles—the inflated, mock-heroic language of narrative and the rude Bowery dialogue—work to show the bizarre nature of this distorted world. Maggie's beau is at once a simian figure of ridicule and, as Maggie sees him, a knight. Images shift rapidly, appropriately for a novel about mass culture. Sergio Perosa compares Crane's technique to the cinema, citing the use of "a kind of rapid and essential montage, which is more evocative and suggestive than descriptive...desultory and a bit disconnected, as in the case of silent films."18

Crane uses a modern technique for his vision of a world in transition, one where people define themselves and others from the outside. Life in the Bowery is lived on the streets, where one must learn to play out his dreams on the urban stage. It was Crane's particular genius to note that such a life of spectacle leads, ultimately,
to the dark river of despair. For no matter how many selves one can buy, no matter how many roles one plays, New York theatre audiences are notoriously fickle. Like Maggie, every actor must leave the stage, with its audiences, its costumes, its mirrors, and enter that midnight region where he is alone with his empty self.

NOTES

4Ibid., p. 199.
5Ibid., p. 191.
7Lasch, p. 58.
11Ewen and Ewen, p. 214.
16Lasch, p. 87.
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17 Holton, p. 47.

DETECTING THE ART OF A STUDY IN SCARLET

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... a study in scarlet, eh? Why shouldn’t we use a little art jargon. There’s the scarlet thread of murder running through the colourless skein of life, and our duty is to unravel it, and isolate it, and expose every inch of it.

A Study in Scarlet (1887)

“Art jargon” and the Aesthetic Movement had an impact upon the Victorian period which extended far beyond narrowly defined schools of painting or “fringe” artists and literary figures. In part a reaction to the serious-minded artists and writers demanding a “moral” art and architects of a strict Gothic persuasion, the Movement—whether in graphic design, arts, or literature—asserted that art, in all its manifestations, should be enjoyed for its own sake. The literary document most frequently cited, the preface of Theophile Gautier’s Mademoiselle de Maupin (1835), where the central tenet of Aestheticism, that art has no utility, is defined,1 cannot begin to indicate the extent to which Aestheticism informed the tastes and fanned the debates of Victorian society. As Robin Spencer points out, even “art” originally intended to critique the Movement, like Gilbert and Sullivan’s Patience (1881), became part of the “cult.”2 And the Movement’s persecutors changed as often as did their heroes.

As an index of the cross-over between the arts, the language and imagery of art provided more and more writers with striking metaphors for their literature. Like canvases of their time, fiction, too, was moving beyond realistic representation toward a search for the irreducible, monochromatic evocation of atmosphere, the production of an “effect.” Allusions to conventional art as texts for explicating character or crisis are not uncommon in the Victorian novel, of course. James’s The Portrait of a Lady, George Eliot’s Middlemarch, and Charlotte Bronte’s Villette, to name only a few, make careful use of works of art to reveal certain qualities of their heroines.3 Allusions to art, however, are a surprising inclusion in Arthur Conan Doyle’s A Study in Scarlet. Doyle’s use of the art metaphor to describe his detective’s crime-solving methods provides an essential gloss on the 1880’s, a culmination of the Aesthetic argument.

First appearing in Beeton’s Christmas Annual in December of 1887, Doyle’s Study was published separately in July, 1888, its paper
THE ART OF A STUDY IN SCARLET

covers bordered in pink mosaic design and titled in red, oriental-style letters.  
Though the cover may have suggested an art theme to readers familiar with these "trademarks" of Aestheticism, 
Doyle's private consulting detective-hero must have been a puzzling contradiction. 
Sherlock Holmes's precise "science of deduction" and his careful weighing of evidence jar sharply with his clearly "aesthetic" nature— 
amateur musician, opera-lover, cocaine-user. 
Not only are Holmes's personal habits wildly eccentric, his characterization of his professional duties is also paradoxical. While at one moment Holmes sees himself challenging the forces of evil (embodied in his nemesis, Professor Moriarty), at another he will coolly deny any altruistic motive, saying that his detection of crime is merely a mental exercise, a way to keep himself entertained.

The "morality" so common to the Victorian hero is deliberately smudged in Doyle's depiction of Holmes, whom critics have identified as the very embodiment of Victorian propriety, social responsibility, morality, and patriotism (we recall his ornamenting the walls of his room with "VR" in honor of the Queen). Doyle's use of "art jargon," however, and particularly in the beginning of the first Holmes story, suggests that Sherlock Holmes's ambiguity was central to Doyle's original conception of the character.

I

Like most of his contemporaries, Doyle possessed a passing acquaintance with the issues of the art world of his day. And like most Victorians, who had a casual knowledge of botany or geology, Doyle was a typical Victorian in regard to art. Doyle's family, although not wealthy, did have some connection with the fine arts. His father, a civil servant, painted in his spare time. Among his uncles, Doyle numbered a scholar-writer, a well-known illustrator and cartoonist for Punch, and a painter-art critic who served as director of the National Gallery of Ireland from 1869 until his retirement. Doyle, however, demonstrated no great attraction to art while pursuing his medical studies. But even as an occasional visitor to London in 1886, during the writing of A Study, Doyle could scarcely have been unaware of the "art news" of the day: regular exhibitions of Whistler's and other non-conformists' paintings at the Grosvenor Gallery, the "Ten O'Clock" lecture of Whistler's, delivered in February, 1885, and repeated four times in 1886, and persistent ripples from the Ruskin-Whistler libel case a few years before. In short, the key elements that will find their way into the "art jargon" of Sherlock Holmes are well-defined by 1885: Gautier's doctrine of "Art for Art's Sake," Whistler's dismissal of...
nature as the artist’s highest aim or appropriate guide, and a general debunking of the Ruskin’s insistence that good art demonstrates moral principles.

Rex Stout defines the quintessence of Holmes as the embodiment of a deeply held conceit that man is a reasoning animal, an image very much at odds with the portrait presented in *A Study*. Posing as a defender of law, Holmes claims to enlist science and mental discipline to solve crimes; yet the title of this first work suggests the paintings of Whistler and his followers, artists whose objectives defied the conventional “order.” In fact, the art jargon that opens *A Study in Scarlet* defines a role for the dilettante detective that relieves him of the burden of defending “right” and “law”; rather, it suggests an artistic or musical composition, not a case to be cracked or even an “adventure,” a word employed frequently for the tales that follow. The choice may echo Whistler’s attraction to the nomenclature of music—“nocturnes,” “studies,” “notes,” and “symphonies”—to indicate an art prompted by aesthetic motives rather than anecdotal or imitative priorities, an art evocative of no social purpose or message save self-expression.

By changing his working title from “A Tangled Skein” to *A Study in Scarlet*, Doyle further enhanced his artistic motif. The images of murder, bloody traces, and a “scarlet thread” are neatly prefigured in the first meeting between Holmes and Watson. In his laboratory, Holmes is perfecting a test to detect the presence of hemoglobin in a clear liquid solution. In the “study” that Holmes will undertake to solve, a cardiac aneurism and various bloody deeds and murderers present a challenging “scarlet thread” for Holmes to track through the “colourless skein of life.” The language subtly suggests the new artistic technique, popularized first by Whistler in England but borrowed from Velasquez and others, of a neutral background, devoid of detail and spatially ambiguous.

Further, the manner in which Doyle frames this “study” is far more deliberate and elaborate than any of his other stories, save perhaps *The Sign of the Four*. The central study is, of course, the double murders of Strangerson and Drebber. The unexplained presence of blood in a room where the dead man has been poisoned and the word “RACHE” written in blood on the wall provide the scarlet traces that require Holmes’ solution. But within this story of murder and revenge is the love story of Jefferson Hope and Lucy Ferrier. The London murders, then, become the end trace of an older story of tragic injustice, of passions of the heart denied, of brutalities and murder sanctioned under the heartless “letter” of Mormon law. The aneurism that the murderer, Hope, suffers becomes a telling psychological gloss for the mental and physical torment he has undergone.
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Less obvious, against this backdrop of murders, is the “study” that Watson undertakes of Holmes, his future flat-mate. Ironically, Watson’s methodical, even scientific, list of Holmes’s areas of knowledge is, Watson himself realizes, a failure. And though Watson blunders toward a better understanding of Holmes as the story progresses, there is always a mysterious air which is allowed to envelope the detective, a mystery even Watson is unwilling to penetrate. Yet it left to Watson to describe the “scientific” procedures of the master sleuth to readers of the detective stories. In Study, the first-person narrative of “Dr. Watson” alternates with the omniscient narrator, who tells the Mormon portion of the story. But such a division is unnecessary in later stories, for Watson becomes Holmes’s historian and biographer, a willing Boswell to Holmes’s Johnson.

II

Doyle’s Study raises interesting issues about the intended characterization of Sherlock Holmes. In a nicely self-reflexive technique, literary models for Doyle’s detective become a topic of conversation between Watson and Holmes. While Holmes repudiates the comparison between his methods and those of Emile Gaboriau’s detective, M. Lecoq, and Poe’s M. Dupin, Holmes’s creator is less dismissive of his indebtedness, particularly to Poe. Unlike Lecoq, an agent of the Surete, Poe’s Dupin is a poet and an amateur fancier of the arts. Much later in his career, Doyle pointedly praised Poe as “the supreme original short story writer,” describing Poe’s tales as “wonderful in their dramatic force, their reticence, their quick dramatic point.”

While praising Poe for precisely the excitement of the moment and the avoidance of “the didactic,” cornerstones of the aesthetic doctrine, Doyle deliberately downplays the “didactic” nature of fiction, prizeing aesthetic effect. Yet critics and readers of the Holmes stories frequently emphasize the “didacticism” of Holmes in explaining his “methods” and procedures to Watson. This represents, I would argue, a misreading of Holmes, and a deliberate recasting of the character. Explanations that don’t “explain” characterized much of the Whistler-Ruskin libel trial, and the technique becomes almost a tableau of the artist questioned by a blinkered society, skeptically querying the artist, who answers in conundrums. It is this model, rather than a serious definition of scientific methods, that Holmes’s “post-mortem” on his solution to a case accomplishes.

Arguing against such an explanation, however, would be Doyle’s own admission (supported by many of his biographers) that the “real life” model for Sherlock Holmes was Dr. Joseph Bell of Edinburgh.
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Though Trevor Hall and others dismiss this argument as an oversimplification of the issue, the notion of a “man of science” serving as the model for the detective supports a prizing of Holmes’s science over his “art.” But this image of Holmes as the “man of science,” enhanced by Holmes’—technically suspect—reliance on chemistry to aid his science of deduction, is called into question by at least one critic. Charles O. Ellison suggests that Holmes’ chemical experiments served chiefly to mystify Watson and to impress clients. The “facade of chemical research,” Ellison argues, “never very strong, became less and less well-maintained as time went on, until it collapsed entirely.”

The image of Sherlock Holmes that survives may be one that served the needs of Victorian readers far more than it expressed that actual (or early) intent of Holmes’ creator. Holmes was “a great comfort,” Ronald Pearsall suggests, “to readers who were dimly aware that the old order was coming apart . . . . Anarchy, chaos, the possibility of war with America, the immorality of the decadents—Holmes was an antidote to all these . . . .” Add to this the detective’s cold precision and his resistance to strong emotion, and the familiar image of Holmes emerges.

III

To include the tales of Sherlock Holmes within the Aesthetic Movement may seem to expand the canon to the breaking point. In fact, the use to which Doyle puts his detective reveals clearly the tensions and attraction of this sensibility in the 1880s. Spokesmen most associated with the Movement—Whistler, Wilde, and Swinburne—reject the artistic theory of mimesis and Nature’s role as animating power of art. Whistler specifically attacks Ruskin’s theories of art, asserting that art and Nature are profoundly different. Whistler’s demand for aesthetic independence—from nature and from value systems imposed by society—led to his defense of Japanese art’s imbalance and “impressionism.”

In response to Whistler, Swinburne defines Whistler’s challenge to organic, mimetic aesthetics as returns to an Oriental model: “Japanese art is not merely the incomparable achievement of certain harmonies in colour: it is the negation, the immolation, the annihilation of everything else.” This impulse on the part of the Aesthetes to make their art “more beautiful and less real,” to some extent, to “annihilate” the real world in the service of art, led them from realistic detail and toward decoration, psychological experimentation, fantasy. Theirs was a philosophical flight from crude materialism and a privileging of the phenomenological world over the constraints of reason and order. The
resulting celebration of opulence created art that Wilde describes as "superbly sterile."

Art is useless because its aim is simply to create a mood. It is not meant to instruct, or to influence action in any way. It is superbly sterile, and the note of its pleasure is its sterility. 18

The image of "negation," "immolation," or "sterility" strikes an obvious adversary posture with images of "organic unity" and the "generative center" of a work of art that Coleridge defines. But this dependence on organic wholeness, whether Coleridge's image of the snake with its tail in its mouth or the well-wrought urn of New Criticism, is rejected by the Aesthetes of the 1880s. Wilde’s insistence on art’s "sterility" declares the artist's right to produce art that serves no purpose other than its self-expression. It is a theory that admits no generating force from outside itself and which, therefore, admits no responsibility to a society falsely claiming to have engendered it.

Perhaps the most challenging feature of the Aesthetic Movement is its insistence on its intellectual life, not its organic nature—its "sterility" rather than its living function in society. The cool, dispassionate detective that Conan Doyle created displays the same contemptuous distancing from the "requirements" that society might foist upon him. Like Whistler and Wilde, Holmes creates a dispassionate art—disembodied, unwilling to admit claims of flesh and blood or utilitarian, moral, or social claims. The "art" of Sherlock Holmes demonstrates, moreover, a fascination with unique, surreal features of human nature, hothoused in exotic and unfamiliar forms, shrouded in mystery. As Holmes will insist in several tales, he plays the "game" of detection "for the game's own sake"; "the work itself," he tells Watson on another occasion, "the pleasure of finding a field for my peculiar powers, is my highest reward." "It's Art for Art's Sake," Holmes announces in "The Adventure of the Red Circle," and Watson will concede, in "The Adventure of Black Peter," that Holmes, "like all great artists, lived for his art's sake." 19 Such explicit statements seem to carry more weight than the pseudo-science of his method that critics and readers have clung to since Doyle's tales became popular.

Conan Doyle's use of art jargon in A Study in Scarlet reflects a conscious effort on Doyle's part to break with a Victorian ethos of morality and purposefulness. Holmes continues to display "quirks" that he insists are part of the "art" of his profession; but his crime-solving techniques demonstrate more self-gratification than a defense of Victorian hearth and home, law and morality. Clearly, in the course of the Holmes canon, the "adventures" become tighter structurally and
more formulaic. Perhaps the ultimate compromise that Doyle strikes with his readers is attributing to Dr. Joseph Bell his original inspiration for Holmes. By emphasizing the scientific origins of the Holmes original, Doyle deliberately blurs the aesthetic.

But the Holmes of the later stories was not the same eccentric that his author first envisioned in 1886. The “Holmes” of such a compromise may have been born over lunch, in 1889, with Oscar Wilde. Lunching across from the quintessential “Aesthete,” Doyle may have resisted such a designation for his detective. Though he would later correspond with Wilde, politely praising Wilde’s Picture of Dorian Gray, there is no evidence that the two were ever friends. And to Wilde’s answering letter, eloquently attacking the critics of his Picture for missing the “artistic and dramatic effect” in their hunt for the story’s moral, Doyle never replied.

NOTES

1For another source, see Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Poetic Principle,” originally published in Sartain’s Union Magazine, October 1850. Poe deplores “the heresy of The Didactic” that has “accomplished more in the corruption of our poetical literature than all its other enemies combined” [in The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. James A. Harrison (New York, 1902) 14: 275].


3James uses a “portrait” image to demonstrate the various ways characters in the novel evaluate the “art” of his heroine’s life. In Middlemarch (Bk. II, Ch. 19), Dorothea is observed by Ladislaw and Naumann as she views “the reclining Ariadne, then called the Cleopatra.” Naumann, who recalls the “Nazarene” painters of the 1820-30s, contrasts Dorothea’s Christian purity with the sculpture’s pagan display. The scene recalls Bronte’s heroine, who critiques the fleshy “Cleopatra” in the gallery of Villette, revealing her own discomfort with sexuality.

4There is an illustration of the cover in The Annotated Sherlock Holmes, ed. William S. Baring-Gould (New York, 1967) 1: 12. The print of Doyle’s title recalls the title banner of Beeton’s, possibly because Doyle used the same publishers (Ward & Lock) to republish his Study, and the publishers felt the similarity of print might remind readers of the connection. The print has a distinctly oriental or “foreign-face” cast to it and was probably a hand-cut title page, though it resembles the “Tokio Series” of H. C. Hansen Type Foundry.

5Gordon L. Iseminger, in “Sherlock Holmes: Victorian Archetype,” Baker Street Journal n.s. 29 (1979), 156-166, notes
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that Holmes advises his client to lie, steal, and perjure himself to protect his interests in "A Scandal in Bohemia" (162). He concludes that Holmes' taste for music, his pipe, and his cocaine, since they enhance his introspection, are all "utilitarian" (165). S. B. Liljegren points out Doyle's debt to Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* for the plot and character of *The Sign of the Four* and Holmes himself (see "The Parentage of Sherlock Holmes," *Irish Essays and Studies*, Stockholm, 1971).

6 Holmes' exclamation, "The game's afoot!" represents a frequent image of tracking or hunting the criminal—a sporting interest rather than moral motives.


8 Grosvenor Gallery, exhibiting paintings refused (or likely to be refused) by the Royal Academy, opened in 1877. Almost immediately, the Gallery hung Whistler's "Nocturne: Falling Rocket," prompting Ruskin's attack in *Fors Clavigera* on 2 July 1877, and occasioning Whistler's libel suit against Ruskin. Whistler's lecture attacking art critics and criticism was delivered at 10 P.M., 29 February 1885, at St. James's Hall, Picadilly. It was repeated at Oxford and Cambridge, and four times the following year. Whistler published the address in 1888.

9 Quoted in Pearsall, p. 194.


11 See the discussion in the Philadelphia Museum of Art's *From Realism to Symbolism: Whistler and His World* (Philadelphia, 1971), pp. 15-16. In *The Eighteen-Nineties: A Review of Arts and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1927), Holbrook Jackson notes the decade's "intense preoccupation" with colors, and credits Whistler with this interest, as well as increased attention to decorative elements in interior design and art exhibition.


13 Trevor H. Hall provides a thorough discussion of the prototype of Holmes in *Sherlock Holmes and His Creator* (New York, 1977), pp. 78-90. Hall refutes Michael Harrison's theory that the character and story were based on a murder reported in the London papers as "The St. Luke's Mystery." [See "A Study in Surmise," *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* 57.2 (Feb. 1971), pp. 58-79.] Hall and Nordon argue that the "model" of Dr. Joseph Bell for Doyle's detective was more compliment to Dr. Bell than fact.
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15 Pearsall, p. 58.


18 The phrase appears in Wilde’s letter to Walford Graham Robertson in 1888 (Huntington Library Manuscript, WR 667): “Someday you must do a design of the sonnet: a young man looking into a strange crystal that mirrors all the world; poetry should be like a crystal, it should make life more beautiful and less real.” The longer quotation is from Wilde’s letter to R. Clegg (? April 1891) printed in The Letters of Oscar Wilde, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (New York, 1962), p. 292.


J.-K. HUYSMANS AND TWO FRIENDS: JOHN GRAY AND ANDRÉ RAFFALOVICH

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I

Shortly after its publication in 1884, A Rebours came to the attention of young British writers and artists. Aesthetes in England who had devoured Walter Pater's Renaissance were eager for an even richer diet, and they found it in Huysmans' daringly different volume. So enamoured were they with this "Breviary of the Decadence," as Arthur Symons labelled A Rebours,¹ that soon, consciously and unconsciously, they began to imitate its style and borrow its themes. The impact that Huysmans had upon such British aesthetes as Oscar Wilde, George Moore, Aubrey Beardsley, and Max Beerbohm has already been traced.² Two other interesting writers that the author of A Rebours influenced significantly are John Gray and André Raffalovich. At best, Gray and Raffalovich have had an appeal only to a limited number of readers, but both are slowly becoming more widely known.

Some associate John Gray primarily with an evocative volume of poems, Silverpoints (1893). Others know him as a member of the Wilde circle and that he is mentioned in De Profundis when Wilde bewails the fact that he should have remained on friendly terms with Gray instead of taking up with Lord Alfred Douglas. Better informed readers know that nothing of any substance was published about Gray and Raffalovich until the early 1960s.³ There had not been that much interest in Raffalovich; and in Gray's case, after his death in 1934, his family and friends preferred to keep his name out of the public eye. Upon his death, Gray's manuscripts and papers were collected and stored in the Dominican Chaplaincy, Edinburgh. Though the Dominicans were cognizant of Gray's literary accomplishments, it is thought they did not want his later years as a dedicated priest sullied in any way with undue emphasis on his early days as decadent and dandy, especially since some forty years before he had been connected by scandal with Wilde. In 1895, at the time of Wilde's folly and public humiliation, a barrister represented Gray at Wilde's trials with a watching brief in case his name were mentioned. It was not.

Through Wilde, Gray had met many of the celebrities of the period. He became acquainted with Aubrey Beardsley, Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, Arthur Symons, William Butler Yeats, and many another poet
and some minor publishers. On his own Gray established relationships with several figures in the Parisian coteries of the 1890s, particularly with Pierre Louys and Paul Verlaine. The most significant of all Gray's friendships, one that continued for more than forty years, began in 1892 when Arthur Symons introduced him to André Raffalovich, an aristocratic Parisian Jew from a prominent banking family. Raffalovich, who liked to consider himself a patron of the arts, offered Gray the kind of encouragement a young author likes to hear. Gray was impressed with Raffalovich's warmth, his polished manners, his intellectual attainments. He soon learned that Raffalovich had published several critical essays, four volumes of verse, and a novel.

*Cyril and Lionel*, Raffalovich's first book of poems, was published in London in 1884; it went virtually unnoticed. His second book of verse, *Tuberose and Meadowsweet* (1885), created some excitement after Wilde mocked it in the *Pall Mall Gazette* of 27 March 1885. His third book of poems, *In Fancy Dress* (1886), and a forth, *It Is Thyself* (1889), created little stir; nor did his novel, *A Willing Exile* (1890), receive critical acclaim. Raffalovich's books, however, did put him in touch with other writers in England and France; and it was through Raffalovich, it has been suggested, that Gray first met Huysmans.4

André's mother, a woman of impressive beauty and creative intelligence, had established a salon in Paris to which she invited prominent artists and writers, financiers and scientists, professors and politicians. She often entertained such figures as Sarah Bernhardt, Colette, Robert Louis Stevenson, Mallarmé, and possibly Huysmans. If indeed Huysmans had been a guest at Madam Raffalovich's home, it is likely that Gray would have met him there.

As a devotee of French literature, Raffalovich greatly admired the author of *A Rebours* and possessed virtually every edition of his works.5 The admiration that Raffalovich had for Huysmans was shared by Gray; both read *A Rebours* as a breviary. When Huysmans' novel first came to their attention can only be conjectured. Most likely, Raffalovich obtained a copy shortly after its publication; Gray probably came across it in his late teens when he first developed a keen interest in French literature. Like Raffalovich, Gray was an eager young Francophile and he took readily to one of the most sensational books of the eighties. Such being the case, it is reasonable to question why Gray did not allude to *A Rebours* in any of his articles or letters. One answer undoubtedly lies in the fact that Gray felt Wilde had just about captured the work and made it his own. Gray certainly was aware of the extent to which Wilde had been influenced by *A Rebours* in his writing of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*; but, unfortunately, there is no record of any thoughts Gray might have had on Wilde's use of "the poisonous
book" of which Dorian owned nine copies, each bound in a different color to suit various moods and fancies.

Gray had a high regard for The Picture of Dorian Gray, and there is no reason to assume that he looked upon Wilde’s novel as a pale imitation of A Rebours, as some of Wilde’s captious critics now contend.\(^6\) Gray must have been fascinated by Wilde’s transmutation of Des Esseintes’ palace of art into Dorian Gray’s New Hedonism. Wilde, on his part, often addressed Gray as “Dorian.” Other times, Wilde referred to Gray as the poet—and Gray played the role in earnest. His verse was as fastidious as his dress. He loved to recite his latest poems at literary salons, and he did so in a gentle, affecting voice. That he read extremely well was remarked upon by Arthur Symons. In one of his letters to Raffalovich, he commented how Gray won Walter Pater’s admiration and friendship after the latter heard the former recite one of his poems. “A certain expression passed over Pater’s face,” Symons noted, “and he asked Gray to say it over again. ‘The rest is silence.’”\(^7\)

Almost every account of Gray’s movements between 1891 and 1893 alludes to John Gray as “Dorian” Gray. But then Gray began to object to the name. One reason he did so hinges on Wilde’s carrying on in scandalous fashion with Lord Alfred Douglas. For John Gray to be dubbed “Dorian Gray” implied that Gray, like Douglas, was one of Wilde’s intimates. Exactly what relationship existed between Wilde and Gray cannot be documented. The Wilde-Gray relationship is one complicated by many factors, but what is definitely known is that a rupture in their friendship had already occurred when Wilde stood trial in 1895. Gray did not offer his support. Like virtually all of Wilde’s friends and associates, he kept discreetly away.

A few years before, Gray had been prominently referred to in the press as one of Wilde’s protégés. He had also been identified as the real-life hero of The Picture of Dorian Gray. On the front page of its 6 February 1982 issue, for example, the London Star described Gray as “the original Dorian of the same name.” The unidentified writer for the Star knew that several of Gray’s close friends usually greeted him, not as John, but as Dorian. William Rothenstein in one of his letters remarks that one day he saw Dorian Gray wandering about Chelsea under the name of John Gray.\(^8\) And Ernest Dowson noted that one night he heard “Dorian Gray [read] some beautiful and obscure versicles in the latest manner of French Symbolism.”\(^9\) At first, John Gray delighted in the appellation “Dorian.” In a letter that he sent Wilde, dated 9 January 1891, he even closed with the words “Yours ever, Dorian.”\(^10\)

At the time, Gray had been proud to be seen with Wilde. He found an extraordinary stimulus in Wilde’s talk, and not being a university
man, Gray at first looked up to Wilde as someone who could impart to him the education that a young poet required. Within a short period, their relationship grew intense and idealized, very much like that of Lord Wotton and Dorian Gray. On the literary level, however, John Gray did not find Wilde as valuable a mentor as he found Huysmans, and though Gray failed to record his early indebtedness, the influence of *A Rebours* can be found in several poems he wrote early in the nineties, especially in his first published volume, *Silverpoints*. This landmark of “decadent” verse is the kind of book that Des Esseintes would have treasured in his library; for Gray, like Huysmans, believed that every well-written volume should be beautiful inside and out. Gray’s delicate *Silverpoint* poems, accordingly, were printed on handmade Von Gelder paper with extra-wide margins and uniquely bound in tall and very slender (eleven by twenty-two centimeters) volumes covered with green cloth adorned with wavy gold lines running from top to bottom. Superimposed upon the lines of the covers are sixty-six flame-like willow leaves and blossoms, also in gold. The green and gold have special meaning, for in each poem of the twenty-nine making up the anthology, there is some allusion to nature or plants; and as though to imply the superiority of art over nature, the gold pattern dominates the green color.

II

One of the most Huysmansian poems in *Silverpoints* is “The Barber.” In this work, Gray’s artificer is like another Des Esseintes who employs cosmetics, wigs, and strange dyes to improve upon nature. In his second stanza, moreover, Gray writes of “beryls and chrysolites and diaphenes,/ And gems whose harsh names are never said” with the same enthusiasm that Huysmans catalogued precious stones in Chapter IV of *A Rebours*. As is widely known, when it came to gems, *A Rebours* proved a decisive factor in the setting of a fashion; for virtually every young symbolist at one time or another was influenced by Des Esseintes’ fascination for exotic stones and experimented with extravagant jewel imagery. Gray was no exception.

In another work entitled simply “Poem,” Gray makes use of geraniums, houseleeks, and daisies highly reminiscent of Des Esseintes’ interest in real and artificial flowers that Huysmans wrote about in Chapter VIII of *A Rebours*. “The daisies’ leprous stain/ Is fresh,” Gray wrote in his first stanza. “Each night the daisies burst again,/ Though every day the gardener crops their heads.” In his second stanza, “a wistful child, in foul unwholesome shreds/ Recalls some legend of a daisy chain/ That makes a pretty necklace.” In his final stanza, Gray writes how the sun, the leprous flowers, and the foul child form a
questionable trinity, and the reader is left to ponder why the child made
the daisy necklace in the first place.

The sinister daisies recall, one critic points out, "the splenetic
irony...found in Baudelaire, in la névrose of the Goncourts, and in the
malaise de siècle of Huysmans."11 Another critic maintains that "the
real source of the sinister daisies...is not...the Fleurs du Mal, but their
mutation A Rebours, where Des Esseintes is described as cultivating a
set of monstrous plants...."12 As for Gray's descriptions of the
daisies' daily execution, this same critic regards them more an evocation
of Huysmans than Baudelaire: "Gray's use of this imagery is one more
piece of evidence that he adopted Huysmans' version of Baudelaire."13

Gray used similar flower imagery in several other poems,
especially in the lead poem of Silverpoints, "Les Demoiselles de
Suave." Just as Des Esseintes fabricated flowers and preferred his
artificial creations to real blossoms, so Gray, too, in this poem exalts
the artificial over the real. His self-conscious ladies of Sauve command
the attention of nature, as though nature is beholden to art. And at the
poem's end, the garden in which they find themselves becomes more
like a palace as these "Courtly ladies through the orchard pass/ Bend
low, as in lord's halls; and springtime grass/ Tangles a snare to catch
the tapering toe." Gray's choice of flowers, artificial and real, like that
of Des Esseintes', is unique and symbolic.

None of Gray's secular poems, as far as can be determined, ever
came to Huysmans' attention; but Raffalovich took it upon himself to
direct a copy of Gray's Spiritual Poems (1896) to the author of A
Rebours. Unfortunately, Huysmans did not comment specifically upon
any one of the forty poems making up Gray's volume. Conjecture
allows the inference, however, that Huysmans admired Gray's religious
zeal and his fascination with those ecstatic moments of mystical union
with Christ on the part of various saints that the poet so beautifully
expressed in several of his verses. Indeed, in one letter that Huysmans
wrote to Raffalovich, he did state that he found Gray's devotional works
quite interesting, and he even went so far as to draw a favorable contrast
between Gray's efforts in a most demanding genre with what was then
being written in France, "where religious poetry consists only of low
canticles."14

In another letter Raffalovich wrote Huysmans in 1896,15 he
inquired if the novelist had read an essay of Gray's, "The Redemption of
Durtal," that had been published in the fourth number of the Dial.
Huysmans responded that he had.16 Though he could not read English,
it seems that Huysmans had a friend translate Gray's provocative
discussion of En Route and Là-Bas into French for him. Huysmans
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was naturally curious about what Gray had to say about Durtal, the hero of both novels, behind whom Huysmans lurks ill-disguised.

The title of Gray’s article, “The Redemption of Durtal,” indicates the subject he was most concerned with at the time, repentance. Having his own less-than-virtuous existence in mind, Gray could write with special understanding of Huysmans’ *En Route*. It was Huysmans’ degree of treatment that allowed Gray to label this novel “peculiar”: “the penitent being a man of profound baseness” with his “spiritual progress...narrated...as far as an author dare, and as exhaustively as skill and patience are capable.”17 In his analysis of Huysmans’ fictionalized study of conversion, Gray began with the problem of Durtal’s spiritual malaise and ended with his acceptance of the Faith. “The record is closely consecutive,” Gray commented; “digressions are few and under the direct warranty of M. Huysmans’ art.”18 What impressed Gray most about the novel is Durtal’s “constantly looking, stupidly, for a miracle to take place in him,” a violent destruction of his past, the swift summoning to being of some fruit of long, laborious growth,” his craving “in his peculiar vulgarity of his worthlessness, a theatrical sign, an explosion of redemption and miraculous repair, an alchemic operation in favor of his rag of spiritual disposition.”19

Gray could see his own spiritual problems in those borne by Durtal. He, too, like another Durtal, had been “constantly looking, stupidly, for a miracle to take place in him.” Several paragraphs later, Gray, still identifying closely with Durtal, ends his essay with the statement that, “at the point of utmost progress in *En Route*, Durtal was still at the beginning of the purgative life, and that even after a very long time he would still be at the beginning.”20

That a young British writer had written so enthusiastically of him and his novel *En Route* was flattering to Huysmans. He was less than enthusiastic with some of the views Gray had expressed. In a letter to Raffalovich, Huysmans acknowledged that he found Gray’s essay adulatory; still, he found it necessary to add that he discovered signs of “non-comprehension, so frequent among critics, of all the mystical, or simply real, side of the book.”21

To what extent *En Route* may have influenced Gray’s own conversion can only be conjectured. On 14 February 1890, however, he took the final step and was conditionally baptized. Shortly thereafter he was confirmed. Of importance is the fact that, at the same time Gray was taking instructions in his adopted faith, Wilde was writing *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Could Wilde have had John Gray in mind when he wrote that “it was rumored of [Dorian]...that he was about to join the Roman Catholic communion; and certainly the Roman ritual...had a great attraction for him.”22 If so, Wilde knew John Gray

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better than John Gray knew himself; for Wilde also wrote in his novel that Dorian had “a special passion...for everything connected with the service of the Church,”23 but that “mysticism, with its marvelous power of making things strange to us..., moved him [only] for a season....”24

Gray’s initial conversion did not endure. Despite his baptism and confirmation, he continued to lead a most mundane and meaningless life. He refused to adhere to the moral implications of his Faith. Whether it was weakness or indifference he probably did not realize at the time. Not until nine years later, after a great deal of soul-searching, did he make a significant observation. “I went through instructions as blindly and indifferently as ever anyone did,” he lamented, “and immediately I began a course of sin compared with which my previous life was innocence.”25 Why Gray fell away from the initial fervour of his attraction to Catholicism he never did say. What is most significant, however, is that he underwent a second conversion a few years later. Towards the end of 1894 or early in 1895, at about the same time that he broke with Wilde, Gray, empty and desperate, once again turned to things of the spirit.

Gray’s metanoia was now so deep and lasting that he determined to prepare for the priesthood. Towards the end of 1898, he made a break with the London literary scene. On October 25, he entered The Scots College, Rome, a candidate for holy orders. Though now in his early thirties, he nonetheless quickly settled into the life of a student. From all reports, he got on well with the other seminarians, most of whom were at least ten years younger than he. They were different from his former artist and literary friends, but they accepted Gray as readily as he adjusted to them. That he had an unusual aquarium, grew purple hyacinths, and had a tortoise for a pet was, after all, his business, not theirs. If any of them had read Huysmans’ A Rebours and remembered Des Esseintes’ odd aquarium, his love of exotic flowers, and his bejewelled tortoise, they never mentioned it to Gray.

After completing his theological studies, Gray was ordained on 21 December 1901, in the Basilica of St. John Lateran. The tale that Gray’s ordination required the special intervention of the Pope cannot be documented; nor can it be substantiated that a solemn promise was extracted from Gray not to stir up scandal by taking up with former questionable friends. In any case, Gray went to Edinburgh, where he served as a priest for the remaining thirty-six years of his life.

Raffalovich was not one of Gray’s “questionable” friends, for he too converted to the Church of Rome. Indeed, it has been speculated that Raffalovich would also have sought ordination but for his poor state of health. It is interesting to add that about the time of Gray’s
ordination Raffalovich was so zealous a convert that he even sent Huysmans a large crucifix as a gift. He did so mainly because he admired Huysmans' *En Route*, the influence it had upon him, Gray, and countless others it had brought into the Church. What influence Huysmans had upon the spiritual life of Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, Henry Harland, and other poets and painters of the period who also converted to Catholicism cannot be measured, though it has been claimed that they, too, like Gray and Raffalovich, "followed their master, Huysmans, into the Faith for his reason: ...the Church was the only body to have preserved the art of past centuries, the lost beauties of the ages."26

III

Wilde was also drawn to *En Route*. When it was first published, he was too busy with other matters to read Huysmans' novel, though undoubtedly he scanned Gray's article, "The Redemption of Durtal." His trials changed things. After his conviction for immorality and his sentencing to two years at hard labor in one of Her Majesty's prisons, Wilde requested permission to read certain books, one of which was *En Route*.

Neither Gray nor Raffalovich had any way of knowing of Wilde's interest in Huysmans' novel. Gray did know, however, of a questionnaire that Raffalovich had sent to Huysmans and other prominent writers on the subject of homosexuality.27 Raffalovich published his research in 1896 in a treatise he entitled *Uranisme et Unisexualité: Étude sur Differentes Manifestations de L'Instinct Sexuel*. Since the entire subject was taboo in England, made especially so by Wilde's notorious trials, Raffalovich published his study in France.

*Uranisme et Unisexualité*, which incorporates a forty-seven page pamphlet, *L'Affaire Oscar Wilde*, Raffalovich had published in 1895, is, to put it mildly, unkind to Wilde. Raffalovich, who had a homosexual nature himself, posited in his study that there were two distinct types of sexual inverted. The "inferior" type (such as a depraved Oscar Wilde) simply craves venereal pleasure. The "superior" type sublimes his disordered appetite in order to enhance the intellectual and spiritual side of man.28

As was his custom, Raffalovich sent copies of his book to friends and acquaintances. After Huysmans read his copy of *Uranisme et Unisexualité*, he wrote Raffalovich: "Your book brings back to mind some horrifying evenings I once spent in the sodomite world, to which I was introduced by a talented young man.... I only spent a few days
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with these people before it was discovered that I was not a true homosexual—and then I was lucky to get away with my life...."29

Raffalovich’s pioneer study of sexual inversion brought him a measure of attention. His treatise was so well researched and clearly written that, after its publication, he was generally referred to as Dr. Raffalovich, though he did not possess a doctorate—medical, academic, or honorary.30 Several psychiatrists were highly impressed with the work. Havelock Ellis, for one, quoted liberally from Uranisme et Sexualité in his own Psychology of Sex, which was published in America in 1897 and brought him an unsought-for notoriety. Ellis, it might be added, was an early devotee of Huysmans and once called upon him in Paris. Years later Ellis wrote, “When I look back, Huysmans remains for me, of all the men I have ever known, perhaps the most unalloyed embodiment of genius.”31

Gray and Raffalovich were just as convinced of Huysmans’ genius as was Ellis, but for them Huysmans was as much a genius of spirituality as a genius of literature. And when their good friend Aubrey Beardsley was dying of consumption and had to leave the damp climate of England for southern France, they wanted the young artist to meet the author of En Route. In a letter that Beardsley wrote to Raffalovich, dated 13 April 1897, he thanks Raffalovich for arranging a meeting with Huysmans in Paris, but for reasons unknown the meeting did not take place.32

Beardsley’s death at the early age of twenty-six deeply affected Gray and Raffalovich, and they both made a trip to Menton to attend a funeral mass said for their friend at the Cathedral on 17 March 1898. To honor Beardsley’s memory, Gray wrote an obituary in French and submitted it to La Revue Blanche.33 Though Huysmans did not refer to Gray’s tribute to Beardsley in anything he wrote, he more than likely read it shortly after it appeared in print. It is reasonable to infer that Raffalovich, otherwise, in one of his letters would have called it to Huysmans’ attention.

Gray left all such correspondence to Raffalovich, and Huysmans dutifully responded to each one of Raffalovich’s letters. Gray, apparently, did not exchange any letters with Huysmans, but in a letter written as late as 1904, Gray mentions Huysmans in a letter to Raffalovich. “I have given a great part of this morning to reading Huysmans on Grunewald,” he wrote. “It has given me such very great pleasure and I see quite well why. I used to think clumsily enough that the painter had a modern soul capable of wilful revolt against the sugared trash of the devotional picture, an explanation entirely inept. Huysmans puts the whole thing on a superb human basis....”34
G. A. Cevasco

Inspired by Grunewald as interpreted by Huysmans, John Gray attempted to put spiritual experiences on "a superb human basis." He did so quite successfully in his later spiritual poetry, especially in various works that he published in his last volume of verse, Poems, which appeared three years before his death on 14 June 1934, exactly three months to the day after the death of his companion of more than forty years, André Raffalovich.

Any attempt to sum up the influence that Huysmans had on Gray and Raffalovich is fraught with the dangers of oversimplification. Would their lives have been significantly different had they not fallen under the spell of Huysmans' books? Admittedly, Huysmans' literary influence did little to turn either Gray or Raffalovich into outstanding writers. A fair-minded estimate, however, allows the inference that, although it is likely Raffalovich's works will continue to gather dust, Gray's poetry will continue to be read. Bibliographical evidence indicates that Gray's works are slowly becoming more widely known, that his life will continue to attract more and more scholars.35

What is equally important is that the author of A Rebours proved a valuable stepping stone in the lives of the "Two Friends." Unlike Wilde, who through folly and insolence destroyed himself and disgraced his family; or Dowson and Johnson, who dissipated their lives away with alcohol; or other prominent nineties figures who had to be institutionalized, or who died at their own hand; Gray and Raffalovich were survivors of what Yeats labelled the "Tragic Generation." Certainly it is not too rash to conclude that the forces which directed their lives and their literature were to a large extent set in positive motion by one of their leading idols, J.-K. Huysmans.

NOTES


3In 1963, Brocard Sewell edited Two Friends: John Gray and André Raffalovich (Aylesford, Kent), a collection of essays by
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5Sewell, *Footnote to the Nineties*, p. 58.


7Uncatalogued letter, Dominican Chaplaincy, Edinburgh.

8G. F. Sims Catalogue No. 25, item 145.


10This letter is in the Donald Hyde Private Collection, New York, NY.


13Ibid., p. 133.


16Ibid.


18Ibid.

19Ibid., p. 10.

20Ibid., p. 11.


23 Ibid., p. 155.

24 Ibid., p. 148.

25 Uncatalogued letter from Gray to Raffalovich, 10 February 1899; Dominican Chaplaincy, Edinburgh.

26 McCormack, p. 40.


28 P. W. J. Healy in his "Uranisme et Sexualité: A Late Victorian View of Homosexuality" (*New Blackfriars*, 59 [1978], 56-65) maintains that Raffalovich's relationship with Gray was of the "superior" type.


30 Even Baldick, a scholar extremely careful with facts, in his *The Life of J.-K. Huysmans* refers to the author of *Uranisme et Sexualité* as Dr. Raffalovich.

31 *From Rousseau to Proust* (Boston, 1935), p. 11.


33 "Aubrey Beardsley," *La Revue Blanche*, 16 (1898), 68-77.

34 Uncatalogued letter from Gray to Raffalovich, 21 November 1904; Dominican Chaplaincy, Edinburgh.

VERBAL GEOGRAPHIES: SYNGE'S PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD

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J. M. Synge’s *The Playboy of the Western World*, from title to final lines, is filled with some of the most extraordinary, extravagant, and evocative language ever to appear in a play. Through the telling of his story, Christy Mahon is transformed from “a dirty stuttering lout” to the “jewel of the world.” By the time his story is discovered to be a lie, it has become the truth. As the play explores the potentiality of words, it reveals their power to restructure the landscape. Private and communal interpretations of space continually shift and the boundaries of regions become dynamic. The plasticity of the private meanings given to space exposes fluctuating worlds which are alternatingly intimate and alien, meaningful and insignificant, ordered and chaotic, full of possibility and painfully restrictive.

*The Playboy* reflects characteristics of all the regions of Ireland: east, west, north, and south. Each region is given a meaning, which alters according to the emotional state of the characters. Beyond Ireland’s compass points are the kingdoms of wonder: the vast “western world” and the exotic “eastern world.” Through the play’s dialogue, the areas change and contract into one another. And the inspiration for these shape-changing words is love: a love implicit within the possible meanings of the landscape.

Although the play mirrors a variety of areas, Synge apparently chose to set it in Mayo for specific reasons. He told his friend Stephen MacKenna that the outlandish plot was not so “foreign” as its detractors had claimed: “The story—in its *essence*—is probable given the psychic state of the locality.”¹ Not only in its essence, but in nearly every phrase of its dialogue, the play is thoroughly Gaelic, as Declan Kiberd documents in *Synge and the Irish Language*, an examination of Synge’s profound debt to traditional literature in Irish.² Beyong being wholly Irish, the play is most specifically reflective of County Mayo, where, in Synge’s assessment, the “psychic state” exhibited an even greater tendency toward extreme and oppugnant emotions and contrariety of speech than Synge had seen elsewhere in Ireland. After a trip through the region with Jack Yeats in 1905, he wrote to MacKenna that “as we had a purse to pull on we pushed into out-of-the-way corners in Mayo and Galway that were more strange and marvelous than anything I’ve dreamed of.”³ Edward Stephens and David Greene comment on the
chaotic quality of Mayo life and reveal that Synge’s most brutal poem, “Danny,” is based on a Mayo tale. When Synge came to write The Playboy, they note, he removed the story from Aran, where he had first heard it, to what he must have felt to be a more appropriate setting. Stephens and Greene conclude that “the potentiality for violence which Synge must have sensed in the people he met and in their stories found a response in his own love of violence.” The expression “love of violence” is somewhat misleading; Synge was neither a brute nor a devotee of common criminal brutality. Yet repeatedly he finds himself simultaneously appalled and attracted by the violence of the rural poor, and his own misgivings are echoed by those of his contemporaries and who accused him of viewing peasant life as a freak show.

His fascination with violent behaviors is clearly related to his creation of harsh, oppositional dialogue. In her study of Synge’s adaptation of medieval literary forms, Toni O’Brien Johnson suggests that verbal incongruity is disturbing because it reflects moral incongruity, as is true in The Playboy and much traditional Gaelic literature. As Declan Kiberd demonstrates, the traditional literature is resplendent with intricate oppositions and provides the base for Synge’s linguistic performance in The Playboy. Ardently drawn to this language of incongruity, Synge—unlike his contemporaries—felt no compulsion to alter or apologize for it. The romantic frenzy of Christy Mahon depends upon Christy’s ability to change the outlines of the mundane world through straining the fabric of language into nearly unrecognizable shapes.

Only in this crazy world of extreme emotions could a play be set which so depends upon massive flights of imagination, for common morality is inverted and maps of value must be recast again and again. The story itself contains surprises and contradictions. One night, a frightened, ragged man appears at a lonely pub supervised by the publican’s spirited daughter, Pegeen Mike, who is engaged to the snivelling Shawn Keogh. The stranger, Christ Mahon, tremblingly reveals that he had murdered his own father by a blow to the head. Throughout the night and the following day, the local people regard his deed with increasing awe and fascination, and proclaim him “a fine lad with the great savagery to destroy your da.” In spite of his admission that he is slow, shy, and clumsy, he gradually rises to his reputation as a daring, fearless character. Under the power of the townspeople’s adulation and the inspiration of his new love for Pegeen, he wins at sports, drives off Shawn Keogh, and makes a conquest of Pegeen. Unfortunately, Christy’s father appears—quite alive. Despite the maneuverings of his ally, the Widow Quinn, Christ is found out and all turn against him. In anguish and rage, he strikes out and kills his
father once again; but now Pegeen and the villagers bind him and prepare to deliver him to the police. When his father reappears—once again, quite alive—Christy takes hold of the situation with new boldness. Humbling his surprised father with sharp words, he leaves the town claiming, “I’m master of all fights now.” Pegeen is left to lament the loss of the one man who has proven to be her match.

If conventional values are turned topsy-turvy in this play, the boundaries between various worlds are equally malleable. Mental maps are not rationally arguable, but made valid or invalid through their psychic function. In the play, three sets of worlds are thus changed according the moods of their human inhabitants. Mayo—as seen by residents—intersects with the grand world outside, made accessible through Christy’s grand presence. Christy’s own sense of Mayo—as a refuge and intimate place—changes his previous perception of the big world outside as a terrifying and lonely place. Finally, Christy’s heroic world—the one the villagers have made for him and dubbed him ruler of as “playboy of the western world”—supplants the formerly frightening world outside. Mayo is left a poor place full of fools and villains, as Christy returns to a changed universe.

The Mayo residents regard their home with a complex blend of satisfaction and cynicism. Pegeen describes it as

this place where you’ll meet none but Red Linahan, has a squint in his eye, and Patcheen is lame in his heel, or the mad Mulranies were driven from California and they lost in their wits....Where now will you meet the like of Daneen Sullivan knocked in the eye from a peeler, or Marcus Quinn, God rest him, got six months for maiming ewes, and he a great warrent to tell stories of holy Ireland till he’s have the old women shedding down tears about their feet. Where will you find the like of them, I’m saying? (CW, 4: 59)

According to Declán Kiberd, such details mock the list of attractive traits and noble feats which are characteristic of the medieval Cuchulain saga, and, he adds, this mockery is itself typical of later Gaelic literature’s tendency to combine the heroic with the banal. He notes that in such mockery, “the irony goes both ways, mocking also the portentous bearing and blind violence of the ancient protagonists.” Kiberd’s commentary may help to explain the curious pride which Pegeen’s list reflects. While pointing to the deficiencies of the men around her, she makes veiled criticism of the rigid propriety of the outside world. Even Shawn Keogh is extravagant—and thus at least mildly interesting—in the fanaticism of his inhibitions.
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Yet none of the local men can fulfill any dream of heroism or virtue. When Shawn Keogh runs out of the pub in fear that Father Riley might later appear and find him alone with Pegeen, her father sarcastically snorts, “Oh, there’s sainted glory in this day in the lonesome west.” Shawn’s priggishness is as close to sainthood or glory as the residents will come. Even the Widow Quinn’s inadvertent murder of her husband was “a sneaky sort of murder did win small glory with the boys itself.” Christy’s murderous deed is thus certain to win admiration, for as one local man remarks, “Bravery’s a treasure in a lonesome place, and a lad would kill his father, I’m thinking, would face a foxy divil with a pitchpike on the flags of hell” (CW 4: 75).

In contrast, all the inhabitants imagine a glorious world outside of Mayo and describe it in the most exalted terms. The eastern world is indeed a rich place, for Pegeen tells Christy she was “thinking of you should have been living the like of a king of Norway or the Eastern World.” In an early draft of the play, she frets that “I’m thinking a lad the like of you would win the queen princesses of the Eastern world.” In one ironic scene, a local girl finds that eastern glamour in Christy’s worn boots. Responding to another girl’s breathless question, “Is that blood there, Sara Tansey?” she replies,

That’s bog water, I’m thinking, but it’s his own they are surely, for I never seen the like of them for whity mud, and red mud, and turf on them, and the fine sands of the sea. That man’s been walking, I’m telling you. (CW 4: 97)

Something as dramatic as blood is revealed to be bog water, but within Sara’s imagination, even bog water is reflective of the glamorous outside world. Like the mythic heroes of the past, Christy brings the exoticism of far-away lands. While Pegeen has earlier said she was “tempted often to go sailing the seas till I’d marry a Jew-man with ten kegs of gold,” Christy now brings with him from Kerry the strangeness of the “Jew-man,” the remoteness of the sea, and the imaginative riches of “the kegs of gold.” Mayo has become superior to the seas and the eastern world because it contains their wealth in addition to its own intimacy. Christy even seems to hold the heavens, and alarms Father Riley who calls him “that young gaffer who’d capsize the stars.” When he is later dubbed “the champion playboy of the western world,” the west takes on the romance of the east while retaining its domestic appeal.

The region from which Christy really comes, Munster, is as remote to the townspeople as Asia or Norway. They live as if at the center of some ancient map, in which the home country is magnified beyond its actual size, and in the nearby harbors, as well as the distant
corners, swim sea monsters and impossible creatures. So Pegeen can
tell Shawn to find himself “a radiant lady with droves of bullocks on
the plains of Meath, and herself bedizened in the diamond jewelleries of
Pharoh’s ma” (CW 4: 155). Meath, Egypt, and timorous Shawn
Keogh from Mayo are conjoined through sheer imaginative language,
bred by the enclosure and isolation which enables Pegeen to imagine all
remote places as one.

The play is filled with references to other parts of Ireland: most as
fanciful and uninformed as Pegeen’s, while also strangely accurate.
There are evidences of what has been called “the Irish language’s special
affection for compass directions often connected with purely associative
geography.”10 Leslie Foster has diagrammed these references and
discovers that the play is full of “tribal rivalries” and associations of
wonder, wandering, and insanity with the west; remoteness and riches
with the east; wealth and fertility with the south; imprisonment and
Protestantism with the north. Foster remarks that

Mayo is eager to think Munster as a breeder of liars; Kerry
is pleased to mock the fools of Mayo; both ridicule the
timidity and sterility of Dublin and Meath; and all (except
the village girls) scorn the prison-making preachers of the
north. Travellers are suspect and the highways are lonely
and dangerous places.11

Here is the insularity Synge finds at the heart of the rural world. While
not as stark as the landscapes of The Aran Islands, this place is
similarly empty and removed from converse with outsiders. At the
same time, it is less homelike and intimate than the glens of Synge’s
Wicklow; it appears more vulnerable to dangerous intrusions. In spite
of the threats implicit in the highways connecting to unknown places,
those highways and seas remain alluring. And so, the outsider is both
threat and object of fascination, for a traveller from Munster is as exotic
as a king of Norway or as erotic as the dream of the Widow Quinn
when she is “looking out on the schooners, hookers, trawlers, is sailing
the sea, and I thinking on the gallant hairy fellows are drifting beyond,
and myself long years living alone” (CW 4: 127).

If the world outside seems so marvelous to those who do not
wander from a particular place, it is not so to the wanderer himself. For
Christy, the wandering placelessness of his recent life has been as
debilitating as the lack of mobility he earlier felt on his father’s farm.
On neither his father’s farm nor the road could he be “at home.” He
feels distinctly outside life and the small Mayo town seems to him a
perfect home: unlike the farm of his father, a home made of love.
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The outside world is the “shadow” of this play, and like that which hangs over Synge’s first play, The Shadow of the Glen, it is loveless and lonely. Geographer Edward Relph suggests that the differences between being “inside” or “outside” are like “the difference between safety and danger, cosmos and chaos, enclosure and exposure.” Nomadic life places Christy in a world outside human feelings and concern. Without love, he is in psychological danger, his internal maps of meaning are in chaos, and he is exposed to the attacks of the hostile environment.

Christy has felt outside of human contact since beginning his travels. He tells Pegeen,

I’ve seen none the like of you the eleven days I am walking the world, looking over a low ditch or a high ditch on my north or south, into stony scattered fields, or scribes of bog, where you’d see young limber girls, and fine prancing women making laughter with the men. (CW 4: 81)

Pegeen does not understand his genuine despair, and her admiration leads her to interpret his remark as the complaint of a daring, yet sensitive, world adventurer. Since he is not yet cognizant of her love, her perspective has yet to transform the way he sees travelled landscape. Instead, Christy feels like a voyeur who looks over a barrier to scenes of intimacy enclosed within the space whose exterior borders he must walk. He feels too that he has vaulted that barrier since meeting Pegeen, and should he be forced to leave again, he would be “wandering like Esau or Cain or Abel on the sides of the Neiffin or the Erris Plain.” He tries to explain,

…it’s a lonesome thing to be passing small towns with the lights shining sideways when the night is down, or going in strange places with a dog nosing before you and a dog nosing behind, or drawn to cities where you’d hear a voice kissing and talking deep love in every shadow of the ditch, and you passing on with an empty hungry stomach failing from you heart. (CW 4: 109)

Christy can hear the world animated around him, the rich landscape full of motion, noise, and love, but has no part in it. It is a world of odd light and deep shadows which magnify his sense of solitary pain. Again, Pegeen cannot entirely understand what he is saying. But in a speech Synge chose to omit from his final version of The Playboy, Pegeen answers, “it is the whole world is lacking decent company and not poor men only would be lonesome and they great thousands in
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north Mayo now...I’ve heard the poets to say the heart itself is lonesome in the lover’s kiss” (CW 4: 108). Pegeen knows that what passes for genuine love rarely has the power to transform the environment.

We can begin to see just how love does transform the landscape by comparing a set of exchanges, one from Act I and another from Act III, after Christy and Pegeen have expressed their mutual love. The phrases are drawn from Gaelic tradition, but fully integrated into the process of verbal shape-changing which characterizes the play. When Pegeen tells him that she imagines his life to have been like some king of the eastern world’s, he laughs piteously,

...And I after toiling, moiling, digging, dodging, from the dawn till dusk with never a sight of joy or sport saving only when I’d be abroad in the dark night poaching rabbits on hills...(CW 4: 83)

In an early draft of the play, Christy’s desolation is even more pronounced:

There’s many a night I was out poaching on the hills beyond...and I looking up at the stars and moon the time there’d be a white fog spread on the bog and you wouldn’t see a thing but a bit of chimney maybe in this or the bough of an old ash tree beyond in another and I’d hear a rabbit beginning to scream God help it and I hard set to know what kind of walking sinner I was at all. (CW 4: 82)

Here again, Christy’s awareness of himself is heightened until it becomes painful. He is cut off from all other life and lost in the midst of an inexplicable sense of his doom and forlornness.

However, in the exchange of the courtship scene of Act III, we see a very different potential realized in the outside world. Sensory stimuli are as strong as in Christy’s speeches of isolation, but affect the participants differently as they imagine themselves amid the wild mountains of Neifin. Christy suggests,

...when the airs is warming in four months or five, it’s then yourself and me should be pacing Neifin in the dews of night, the times sweet smells do be rising, and you’d see a little shiny new moon maybe sinking on the hills. (CW 4: 147)
As Pegeen teasingly reminds him, these are the same kinds of woods in which he once poached animals in his isolation. He responds that she won’t care if his is a poacher’s love or an earl’s when she’ll feel his embrace and “I squeezing kisses on your puckered lips till I’d feel a kind of pity for the Lord God is all ages sitting lonesome in his golden chair.” Christy, as playboy of the western world, now located in Mayo, rules a domain that even God might envy. The empty, broad spaces and disturbing shadows of Christy’s lonely world are transformed into well-lighted, intimate, and pleasingly small spaces:

Let you wait to hear me talking till we’re astray in Erris when Good Friday’s by, drinking a sup from a well, and making mighty kisses with our wetted mouths, or gaming in a gap of sunshine with yourself stretched back unto your necklace in the flowers of the earth. (CW 4: 149)

When he imagines poaching again, it is in utterly different terms. Instead of remembering having served “six months for going with a dung-fork and stabbing a fish,” he imagines a noble life of spearing salmon with Pegeen. Christy then ascribes this sense of intimacy out-of-doors to the emplacement he feels within the circle of Pegeen’s “poor thatched place.” When she worries that he will return without her to his world, he tells her that nothing is as important as “every jackstraw roofing your head, and every stony pebble is paving the laneway to your door.” Christy has brought fully together the grandeur of the eastern world, the domain of the western world, and the region of Mayo. Finally, he has contracted all these worlds into the small household of Pegeen Mike.

Synge considers the question of how love changes a landscape in several of his late poems. “In Kerry,” for example, directly asks just this question:

We heard the thrushes by the shore and sea,  
And saw the golden stars’ nativity,  
Then round we went the lane by Thomas Flynn,  
Across the church where bones lie out and in;  
And there I asked beneath a lonely cloud  
Of strange delight, with one bird singing loud,  
What change you’d wrought in graveyard, rock, and sea,  
This new wild paradise to wake for me...  
Yet knew no more than knew these merry sins  
Had built this stack of thigh-bones, jaws, and shins.  
(CW 1: 55)
The obscurity of the last lines is clarified by earlier versions of the poem. Version XII asks, “what paradise what merry sins/ Had left this little stack of jaws and shins” (CW 1: 118). Version XIV wonders “if our happiness and merry sins/ Would build like these a stack of jaws and shins” (CW 1: 119). In his final draft, Synge apparently tried to draw together two ideas: the unknown and mysterious history of the dead and the eventual disintegration into which lovers must fall. While the last lines reflect the lover’s presentiment of mortality, the lover’s experience is so strong as to transform even a graveyard into a “new wild paradise,” where thrushes, stars, clouds of delight, and singing birds prevail.

As Synge’s last lines suggest, the threat of decay always hovers at the rim of consciousness. And with intimacy and alienation, there is always the threat of inversion: in The Poetics of Space, Gaston Bachelard warns, “outside and inside form a dialect of division, the obvious geometry of which blinds us...Outside and inside are both intimate—they are always ready to be reversed, to exchange their hostility.”13 When Christy is discredited by his father’s appearance, love—“insidedness”—is withdrawn from the landscape and he is left bewildered and horrified. He, the champion playboy of the western world, becomes just a “Munster liar” in Pegeen’s eyes. When the potentiality of his words is denied, his dominion shrinks. The people now clamor that he is only “the lad thought he’d rule the roost in Mayo.” He is, again, an outsider:

And I must go back into my torment is it, or run off like a vagabond straying through the Unions with the dust of August making mudstains in the gullet of my throat, or the winds of March blowing on me till I’d take an oath I felt them making whistles of my ribs within. (CW 4: 163)

In spite of Pegeen’s rejection, Christy still yearns after one particular home. Although the Widow Quinn attempts to console him with thoughts of sweethearts “in every parish public, from Binghamstown unto the plain of Meath,” he refuses to be consoled, saying, “It’s Pegeen I’m seeking only and what’d I care if you brought me a drift of chosen females, standing in their shifts maybe, from this place to the Eastern World.” Christy, having been the innocent inspiration for the myth of the glorified Mayo, now cannot escape it.

Since Christy cannot have the intimate home space he desires, he reemerges into an outside world that he proceeds to transform through the bold assumption of authority. After he “kills” his father again and Pegeen declares her disdain for his “dirty deeds” by-branding him with a burning sod, Christy loses all inhibition. The stage directions suggest
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that he speak with "his voice rising and growing stronger," "almost
gaily," and "delighted with himself." He finally taunts the crowd by
claiming that "I'm thinking Satan hasn't many have killed their da in
Kerry and in Mayo too." He is now the champion criminal of all
Ireland. His sphere of rule and concern move out and away from Mayo.
Mayo is reduced to nothing and as his father tells the townspeople, "My
son and myself will be going out own way and we'll have great times
from this out telling stories of villainy of Mayo and the fools is here"
(CW 4: 173). Only Pegeen is aware of what has happened, not only to
herself, but to her community. It is her last lament which closes the
play: "Oh my grief, I've lost him surely. I've lost the only playboy of
the western world."

The potentiality of landscape to change as a person changes is
illimitable in The Playboy. Christy Mahon and the residents of Mayo
have transformed their environment through their dream of a heroic
place. In his study, A Colder Eye, Hugh Kenner explores what he
claims is a characteristically Irish belief that speech can alter
environments, transform the accepted meanings of English words, and
make anything true just by the saying of it, so that even "a tale itself,
one told, is no longer there either; and as recent a past as yesterday
afternoon is no more than what the speaker of the moment says it was,
and only so long as he's talking."14 Because of this verbal agility,
Kenner appears to be saying, the Irish make superb poets but dangerous
politicians.

Kenner's controversial argument brings to mind The Playboy's
finale; Christy has fully reshaped his world through speech. But
whereas Kenner argues that a government by mob rumor may result
when the verbal act is supreme, the play concludes with the triumph of
private statement over group consensus. Christy continues to define
his environment long after Mayo has ceased to confirm his authority.
In spite of the nationalist pressure brought to bear upon the Abbey
Theatre, the play rejects any positive portrayal of group consciousness.
When Mayo shrinks again at the end of the play and the world
maintains its new glamour for the changed Christy, his outsider's
knowledge is gained at the town's expense and Mayo is left to
wither.15

Synge might have argued that community life in Ireland was so
repressive that the private imagination could flourish only in
opposition. Without exception, his major characters are outsiders:
tramps, isolated women, tinkers. On the other hand, the power of rural
communities had been shrinking as the old way of life changed. By the
early twentieth century, rural life in Ireland had so altered that the
commonly held meaning of places ceased to be definitive. Particularly
for a man like Synge—urban, landless, modern—"place" was a
repository of personal significances rather than traditional territories. While *The Playboy* does deny the fundamental truth that an individual lives, inexorably, within a group, the play presents a radical alternative to "government by rumor" in its elevation of the private conscience. The play articulates the premise that the barbed-wire boundaries of past meaning can become more fluid, more adventurous, through the shape-changing powers of verbal geographies.

**NOTES**


6. See Kiberd, pp. 106-162. He details numerous rhetorical oppositions in early Irish literature: heroic and banal actions, localities and appearances; elevated and vulgar speech; classical and Celtic allusions; literary and folk traditions; religious and sexual connotations.

7. Quotations from Synge’s works are from the four-volume *J. M. Synge: Collected Works* (London, 1962-68), hereafter cited in the text as CW.


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15 Brenna Katz Clarke notes that almost every Abbey "peasant play" involves an outsider who initiates the action within a small community and leaves at the play's end. She concludes, "...the playwright saw the peasant as repeatedly disturbed by outside forces and that, in some cases, it was desirable to shake up peasant life which tends to be fixed and conservative." See Brenna Katz Clarke, *The Emergence of the Peasant Play at the Abbey Theatre* (Ann Arbor, 1982).
THE MAKING OF URSULA BRANGWEN’S IDENTITY: 
THE PATTERN OF THE RITUAL SCENES 
IN THE RAINBOW 

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While The Rainbow has been belatedly recognized as one of the 
great novels of the twentieth century, the second half of the novel, 
which focuses on the maturation of Ursula Brangwen, has been 
generally judged the lesser half. Most of the criticism is directed 
against the radical manner in which it departs from the rich rhythms and 
structure and the unique mode of characterization of the first half. 
Numerous critics have pointed out the flatter characters and the 
mechanical structure in the latter half of the novel as a sign of artistic 
inferiority, and much criticism has also been leveled against those 
sections—Ursula’s ritual scenes—which most echo the first half and 
help to unify the novel; it is with the individual and collective logic of 
these scenes as they form a progressive series of epiphanic moments 
instrumental in the gradual formation of Ursula’s identity that I am 
concerned here. 

David Daiches finds the moon symbolism in the first major ritual 
scene between Ursula and Anton Skrebensky vague: “The symbol does 
not really work in its context.” In general he finds such writing 
“murky and overinsistent.” Roger Sale criticizes the same scene, 
describing it as “out of control,” “desperately wrong,” and “vague,” and 
compares it unfavorably with an earlier ritual scene in the first half of 
the novel: “All this contrasts sharply with the firmness and assurance 
of the scene with Will and Anna in the field. The vagueness here is a 
real vagueness.” S. L. Goldberg also writes of “vagueness” and 
“hollow rhetoric” and notes “a degree of over-pitched insistence, an 
extravagant verbal energy that is devoted not to rendering the action 
 dramatically, but to forcing a special sense of it,” which he connects 
particularly with a later ritual scene between Ursula and Skrebensky that 
occurs upon Anton’s return from Africa. Graham Hough writes of the 
last of Ursula’s ritual scenes—her encounter with a group of horses at 
the very end of the novel—that what happens “ought to be a mystery, 
but in fact it becomes a muddle.” Even Arnold Kettle, in defending 
the second half as more complex, “more moving, more courageous, 
more fully relevant to the twentieth-century,” attempts to justify its 
form in a manner that all but concedes the validity of such criticisms. 
He suggests that Ursula’s unrealized vision “should be given no
coherent, concrete expression . . . but a misty, vague, and unrealized vision which gives us no more than the general sense that Lawrence is, after all, on the side of life."9

Other critics particularly criticize these later ritual scenes for being verbose and repetitive, suggesting that the Ursula-Skrebensky relationship should have been treated far more summarily. Keith Sagar writes of the "repetitive and overwritten symbolic passages" which "draw out interminably the breaking of this" relationship.10 George H. Ford, referring to the Ursula section of the novel, writes, "Repetitive scenes, which function well elsewhere, remain here, sometimes, merely repetitive,"11 and F. R. Leavis, in listing the imperfections of the novel, writes, "Above all, the sterile deadlock between Ursula and Skrebensky . . . seems too long-drawn-out."12

The array of negative judgments is formidable and the contrast between the two halves of the novel upon which such judgments are in part based is indisputable. However, any appraisal of a novel as historically oriented as The Rainbow should, of necessity, place the changing, temporal context of successive Brangwen generations at the heart of its aesthetic criteria. In fact, one of the great achievements of the novel is the manner in which it dramatizes the varying manifestations of the general principles of human behavior as simultaneously influenced by both historical and personal contexts. The insights which individual scenes embody are always partially relative, the aspect and degree of truth contingent upon the particular nature of the characters, place, and time involved. In general, the most fundamental tensions in Lawrence's fiction are produced by the struggle between the universal and the particular, the archetypal and the historical, and in The Rainbow—the most historically conscious of his novels, covering the transitional generations from the agrarian to the industrial era and from a preliterate to a highly self-conscious culture—such relativistic, temporal considerations are especially important. Lawrence's continual attempt to depict the commonality of human experience in every character and every scene in the novel is balanced by a corresponding insistence on the relativity of historical and individual contexts through which such universal elements are refracted.

Although the fundamentally dualistic character of Lawrence's vision—as outlined, for instance, in his theoretical Study of Thomas Hardy—is generally recognized by critics, application of that dualism to the subtleties of The Rainbow has proved more elusive. The critical judgments which I have cited seem to me primarily due to just such a failure to appreciate fully the essential dualism of Lawrence's conception of human nature and the manner in which it both determines the novel's characterization and plot and is reflected in its style and
structure, thus making inappropriate the application of a monolithic aesthetic model to both halves of the novel. That failure, in turn, can be largely attributed to the latent nature of the novel’s structure in which that dualism is embodied. Unlike a more traditional, Victorian novel in which a character develops in a more or less straightforward fashion and the stages of development can be explicitly noted at appropriate points by an omniscient narrator, Lawrence’s understanding of character development, at least in his early fiction, tends toward what might be termed a conservative realism—a sense of man’s natural inertia against growth, his changing only in a stubborn, practically imperceptible, and continually fluctuating manner, concerning which any simple authorial announcement of a clear plateau definitively attained would be formally inappropriate. Therefore, it is primarily by means of the novel’s organic structure that the progression of otherwise episodic scenes is given coherence and the development of Ursula’s character can be measured.

While Lawrence may seem to adopt a traditional, omniscient, and thus “objective” narratorial stance, the novel is governed instead, in accordance with his dualistic vision, by a continually shifting and restricted point of view in which Lawrence intermittently adopts not only the viewpoint but also the emotive rhythms of a central character of a scene. For instance, in describing Skrebensky’s indulgence in liquor to drown his inner pain, Lawrence writes so that the rhythms of his prose echo an increasingly intoxicated Skrebensky:

He only became happy when he drank, and he drank a good deal. Then . . . he became a warm, diffuse, glowing cloud, in a warm, diffuse formless fashion. Everything melted down into a rosy glow, and he was the glow, and everything was the glow, everybody else was the glow, and it was very nice, very nice. He would sing songs, it was so nice.13

The rhythmic and sonorous language of the opening sections of the novel is undeniably more immediately pleasing than the harsh and violent tones in which Ursula’s ritual scenes are painted, just as the structure of the first half is more perceptibly balanced than that of the second. Yet, such harmonies do not represent simply some ideal prelapsarian absolute to which Lawrence would have us return if possible. Each section’s formal characteristics are an intrinsic reflection of its particular content and historical background; and the style which Lawrence employs in describing Ursula’s ritual scenes and which Daiches calls “overinsistent” and Sale labels “out of control” when compared with “the firmness and assurance” of the earlier sheave-
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gathering ritual between Will and Anna is no less appropriate to Ursula’s generation and the vision of the second half of The Rainbow than the more “controlled” style is to an earlier generation of Brangwens and the vision they embody. Ursula, not her depiction, is out of control, and rather than being the “misty” and “vague” success that Kettle suggests, the latter half is organized about ritual scenes rendered in a precise and purposeful manner according to Lawrence’s vision of the particular characteristics of the modern age.

The language of these ritual scenes is more prototypically Lawrencian than in the example describing Skrebensky’s gradual intoxication and, therefore, not so manifestly infused with the consciousness of the characters described. Thus, it is easy to mistake attitudes which in large part belong to a character and reflect his own personality and background for Lawrence’s when at best they are only partially his. This sort of oversimplification is responsible, for instance, for the many misreadings of the famous Cathedral scene in which Will Brangwen’s thoughts during his quasi-mystical, ritualistic experience are mistaken for Lawrence’s. Although Lawrence employs terms suggestive of his own vision, that vision embodies a dynamism quite the opposite of Will’s desire for “neutrality” (p. 199) and stasis; Lawrence’s goal of balanced polarities never included their mutual cancellation, and for Will such a desire for neutralization tellingly results in a gradual loss of spirit and a kind of neutering as well. Rather than embodying some Lawrencian ideal, such ritual scenes reflect the interpretation of universally experienced elements by the limited and partially distorting context of individual experience—in a sense, a union of Lawrence the Prophet and Lawrence the Novelist. Thus, it is only through the composite pattern of the ritual scenes in the second half of The Rainbow that Lawrence’s vision of and answer to the modern age is expressed, and it is only by closely examining these scenes both in their particular context and, comparatively, within the overall series that their individual function can be understood. Not only are they not redundant, but, as it is my purpose to show, they also form a progressive series of identity-building crises for Ursula, each one an essential link built upon the preceding scenes and providing a necessary link to the next. First, however, before examining them, it is necessary to delineate those underlying, generative principles on which they are built.

I

For Lawrence, man should ideally be balanced between his instinctual nature and his conscious, rational side, between “being” and “knowing”—a balance dependant upon the proper coordination of
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activity and passivity. The properly adjusted individual requires initial passivity to sensitize him to the larger rhythms of nature and the instinctual reflection of those rhythms within himself; out of such passivity should naturally evolve a vital and organic activity in line with those rhythms. The more manifest and superficial cerebral faculties should be coordinated with such deeper rhythms, symbiotically being guided by them and in turn guiding them, rather than dictatorially determining them.

However, in reality such balance is impossible to maintain continually. The coordination between mind and body, reason and instinct, is tenuous and intermittent; one aspect—in Ursula’s generation, the mind—tends to become overly dominant, opening a breach between the two halves which, if not closed, is likely to widen. The function of ritualistic action is to prevent or to heal this split by reaffirming those instinctual and archetypal aspects from which man periodically becomes estranged, thus reestablishing a healthful balance between mind and body. In a traditional, agrarian society, the natural environment coupled with inner needs makes the ritual participant receptive both to nature and to his own unconscious, and from that passive receptivity he ideally should be propelled into action: first, the rhythmic and therapeutic dance of the ritual itself occurs in which instinct guides, and then, after the ritual has ended and the participant’s emotional state has been appropriately altered, realistic action can be more accurately formulated to rectify the imbalance that originally motivated the ritual.

Lawrencian ritual characteristically thus functions as a mediating or corrective act, inescapably contextual, rather than an absolute end in itself, an unchanging vehicle designed to embody momentary perfection through an escape of time and space. It is a catalyst initiating union both between individuals and between those internal aspects of self. It arises from the interaction between particular emotional needs and a precipitating external event, both situated in a specific time and place; and, in turn it is the kernel from which the rhythms of subsequent characterization and action evolve. Thus related to both its immediate context and the larger historical environment, the ritual itself reflects and is conditioned by those more ephemeral, individualized and individualizing elements even as it tries to reduce or even escape from them. Attempting to redress an imbalance, it must of necessity be unbalanced itself, a counter to the “daytime” imbalance it is meant to rectify; its emphasis and intensity will be determined in part by that “daytime” context. Readings that reductively emphasize only the “deeper” archetypal and more universal qualities of Lawrence’s characters and their ritualistic actions thus insure that those scenes will seem more repetitive than they indeed are.
An ideal balance would seem to exist for the earliest Brangwen generations. Ritual exists naturally in their daily round of activities and can relatively easily reestablish the necessary connection between man and nature, thus keeping mind in touch with body. The flowing, rhythmic language in which the Brangwens’ agrarian life and the rituals naturally generated by it are described reflects this easy harmony. However, for these early Brangwens closely in touch with the instinctual life, so accessible and successful are the daily ritual opportunities that the difficulty is not one of reestablishing such internal coordination between body and mind, but rather of converting such harmony into activity of a sufficiently directed and forward-looking nature. The tendency is toward lethargy and somnolence, and it might be argued that the immediacy of the aesthetic pleasure Lawrence’s prose produces in describing such an outlook embodies these very limitations, for, unlike the greater complexity of the aesthetics and vision of the second half of the novel, such rhythms do not require the reader to extend himself intellectually and go beyond the immediate description to attain satisfaction.

For modern man—those characters who belong to Ursula’s generation—the task that ritual must accomplish is far greater and more difficult even though its ultimate aim remains the same: to right the imbalance within man through reaffirmation of the instincts so that he can properly direct his further efforts toward the fulfillment of his essential needs, spiritual as well as physical. As each successive generation of Brangwens moves further from the land and the natural controlling rhythms of an agrarian communal life with its daily rituals, there are inevitably fewer truly organic and cathartic rituals. For Ursula, not only is there no real contact with nature or community, but the institutionalized “sacred” time has been reduced to once-a-week—“the Sunday world” (p. 269)—and Ursula complains that even that day has become secularized. The disappearance of ritual is reflected in the second half of the novel and is responsible for the appropriately mechanical nature of both structure and characterization; the natural rhythms which emanated from earlier ritual scenes and organically shaped the plot in the first half are no longer generated. From Chapter Ten through Chapter Fourteen—the first one hundred and seventy pages of the second half of the novel and approximately one-third of the novel’s entire length—there is only one fully realized ritual scene: the moon dance between Ursula and Skrebensky.

The enormous changes in environment between the agrarian generation of Tom Brangwen and the largely industrialized generation of Ursula thus are accompanied by corresponding changes in man’s character. In fact, the very freedom which civilized man’s intellectual development makes possible is responsible for a progressively radical
split between the conscious mind and the instincts. That freedom does not, at least in the modern era, create a corresponding wisdom to guide the mind toward reuniting with the instincts. Therefore, the proper context needed to prompt naturally a ritual is not only likely to prove rare, but in the end it will also need to be more extreme in order to overcome the extremity of the split. Furthermore, without the support of nature and community, both the fact and success of a ritual will depend increasingly on the individual qualities of the participant rather than on his social or generic role in the ritual, thus placing a greater emotional burden upon him and requiring greater strength of him. Rituals of greater intensity are likely to result, often as a sudden climactic outburst of a partially-repressed emotional crisis.

The increasing intensity of the later ritual scenes is thus no accidental authorial imposition; the tonal intensity stands in inverse proportion to the frequency of ritual in the participant’s life and can be clearly noted by comparing Lydia’s gradual and passive return to life after her husband’s death through a daily and seasonal ritualistic intercourse with nature14 to any of Ursula’s later rituals. Lydia’s rebirth can be accomplished so passively because of her environment which actively forces upon her ritual participation in spite of herself. The growth in intensity can also be noted within the course of Anna’s or Ursula’s life. Anna’s sheave dance, a ritual still naturally linked with nature and thus organically growing out of the environment, is far less harsh and insistent than her later dance of active domination in her bedroom. While Ursula’s ritual scenes are so varied and numerous that it is impossible to delineate any simple progression, the increased intensity can be noted by comparing her first ritual scene—the original moon dance with Skrebensky in which her destructive qualities are partially restrained—with her last ritual encounter with him when she totally releases those destructive tendencies and indeed does “destroy” him. In Ursula’s generation, intensity becomes violence, whether in personal ritual or the group “ritual” of the Boer War in which Skrebensky participates, for there is no constant, organic social context to order and contain the anarchy of individual emotions.

Although the earlier, traditional Brangwen generations are too passive, motivated only by the deeper instinctual activity without subsequent ability to channel that energy into directed action in the future, Ursula and her era thus tend to be excessively and falsely active. Ursula’s early frenetic movement from one segment of society and from one “hero” to another reflects such false and useless activity, lacking an organic base. Such activity results from the reversal of the natural human rhythms; an initial passivity attuned to inner instinctual rhythms and leading to rational external activity is supplanted by the dictatorial and willful imposition of “rational” control upon an all too
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passive and increasingly anarchic inner self. Separated from the guidance of the instincts, such control is neither rational nor controlled.

The fecundity of Anna Brangwen's life would seem to stand in sharp contrast to the frenetic and empty activity of her daughter, Ursula; yet, both Anna and Will reflect an earlier phase in the modern age's transposition of the roles of instinct and the conscious mind—one which, relying on the imposition of will, maintains primarily only a facade of control, of "firmness and assurance." Anna is the arch-controller, and in the sheave-gathering scene, she firmly controls the rhythms of the dance by keeping Will at a distance as she subsequently will throughout the course of their marriage. By imposing her will, she precludes any true receptivity to deeper, instinctual rhythms which should be her true guide. These negative qualities in Anna are reflected in even greater degree in her fertility dance ritual which occurs during her pregnancy and which should be a celebration of life but becomes in its later stages primarily a dance of domination over her fearful husband and an early step toward her later isolation and spiritual sterility. Here one can already see the transition from willed control—itself a flaw—to the hysterical loss of control that Ursula and later her sister, Gudrun, in Women in Love will experience.15

Although such frenetic activity, further intensified in the ritual action resulting from it, reflects the very diseased imbalance which the ritual itself must correct, such activity can provide the means against itself by which the extreme imbalance can be righted and the fever calmed. While earlier rituals need merely to reestablish contact with the temporarily detached instincts, such later rituals must first destroy the false dictatorial control which resists such renewed contact, and, as we shall see, Ursula's energies are increasingly employed efficaciously to make possible a return to a more neutral state receptive to basic inner rhythms. Just as such basic polarities as activity and passivity, and interiority and exteriority are interwoven rather than simply differentiated in Lawrence's vision, creation and destruction are also inextricably bound, and most of Ursula's growth in The Rainbow involves her destruction of those negative influences of the modern age personified most fully in Skrebensky. All ritual action inevitably combines the complimentary elements of death and rebirth, destruction and creation, and in the deranged environment of modern society, the better part of resustenance and rebirth is likely to be death and destruction. It is a view articulated fully by Rupert Birkin in Women in Love and one which helps explain his own use of passionately critical rhetoric. In that novel the deaths of Gerald Crich and Gudrun, representing the death of a negative aspect of Birkin and Ursula as well, are an inextricable part of their counterparts' rebirth. The contention of critics such as F. R. Leavis, that the last "optimistic" paragraph of The
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Rainbow is "wholly unprepared and unsupported, defying the preceding pages,"16 ignores this dynamic which governs not only the entire ritual sequence but is implicit in the central metaphor of the novel—the Biblical Flood in which destruction leads to the rainbow of peace and unity.

At the same time, while Ursula seems the most active Brangwen, both in her frenzied rituals and in her pursuit of other worlds, she is also the most passive, although in a different manner from the earlier Brangwens; and her frenetic activity itself is one of the symptoms of this fundamental passivity—a sign of her impotence due to the lack of any real identity out of which Lawrence saw humanly efficacious activity organically evolving. These traits are endemic to her generation; part of the cult of otherness which Lawrence connects in Twilight in Italy with the false complementary visions of Protestantism and Industrialism, they are also reflected in the moribund passivity of Anna’s later years once her prolific child-bearing years have passed. Instead of using ritual, which encourages the immersion in self, to reaffirm one’s identity, the modern age looks only outward, attempting to appropriate its identity by identification with another—whether that other be “thy neighbor,” Christ, or a godlike machine and its embodiment in automaton-like institutions. Of course, that other, belonging to or conceived by the age, is also likely to have no real identity. It is this dysfunction which turns Skrebensky into a machine-like soldier subordinating himself to his country’s cause and which leads Tom Brangwen, Jr., like Gerald Crich, to worship the machine-god of the coal mines even while he bitterly mocks its falseness.

As opposed to such external, false pursuits of identity, participation in ritual is a keystone in a true process of identity formation for Lawrence’s characters as it is for actual initiates in more primitive cultures. While the early Brangwens, never doubting who they are even if they do at times partially misconceive themselves, need ritual primarily as a reaffirmation of a clearly felt self, Ursula must first construct her sense of self stage by stage, initially ridding herself of the false pursuit of something outside herself through which her sense of her own nullity is camouflaged. That she takes so long and needs so many rituals to complete her journey to health and identity is appropriate to the extremity of her generation’s imbalance. Her realization that her problem, indeed the problem of life in general, is fundamentally an internal one concerning identity follows the initial ritual series of intense interactions with Skrebensky in which the first layer of misconceived identity, based on the belief that one’s identity is constructed by copying models external to oneself, is exorcised; in turn, it immediately precedes her participation in the final series of rituals which are instrumental in her construction of a true identity. Looking
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at a microscopic organism, she ponders its purpose and realizes that it is "to be itself" (p. 441). The subsequent reappearance of ritual in the final two chapters of the novel thus signifies Ursula's climactic movement toward healing her internal split and is the principle sign of hope in the novel; the sloughing off and symbolic destruction of Skrebensky and the society he represents is only a manifestation of that deeper change.

The nature and purpose of the ritual scenes in the second half of The Rainbow and of Ursula's participation in them must be understood within such a framework. The rhythmic patterns both within each scene and throughout them as a whole, uniting them, are heavily dependent upon the manner in which each component in the various pairs of dualities I have emphasized—passivity and activity, interiority and exteriority, and destructiveness and creativity—simultaneously contrasts with and reinforces its complement. In these scenes' collective insight, producing Ursula's rebirth out of the destructive void of modern life, lies the consummation of Lawrence's vision.

II

Each of the five major ritual scenes in which Ursula participates fulfills a separate and important function in her construction of identity. These five scenes are Ursula's original moon dance with Skrebensky at the autumn wedding of Fred Brangwen; her first meeting with Skrebensky upon his return from Africa on Easter six years later, occurring in the "fecund darkness"; their midsummer sunrise lovemaking by the sea at Dorothy Russell's; Ursula's last encounter with Skrebensky in late summer by the sea and under the moon—an encounter in which she destroys him emotionally; and her final climactic experience in the woods with a group of horses one October afternoon. I have noted the times of the year because, although these rituals take place over a period of six years, they form a full cycle of seasons beginning just as harvest time has ended and finishing at the return of October. Only winter, the season of death, is omitted. Moreover, without the last scene with Skrebensky which repeats the temporal setting of the first moon scene, the four other scenes form a cyclical pattern related to the time of day. The first scene starts at dusk and continues as the moon rises; the second occurs in the unrelenting darkness of night; the third, starting at night, reaches its climax with the coming of dawn; and the last scene starts in the late afternoon and ends at dusk. These patterns of daily and seasonal cycles parallel the cycle of identity formation which Ursula undergoes in these five rituals, thus suggesting the natural harmony between man and nature, inner and outer rhythms. Such rhythms are reflected as well in the fluctuation
between passivity and activity, internal and external experience, destruction and rebirth which characterize individual pairs of these ritual scenes.

The first scene coupled with an earlier short description of Ursula’s first kiss with Skrebensky forms an introduction to the ritual cycle, occurring six years before the initiation of that cycle proper, at a time when Ursula is still not ready to profit from the ritual experience. The two passages together depict two central capabilities which she must develop in order to realize herself: first, a positive passivity or receptivity, contrasting to her superficial “Christian” passivity of self-negation, which will open her to her deeper instinctual self, and, second, arising out of that awareness, an aggressive and assured activism increasingly differentiated from her initial feverish activity. Both scenes also demonstrate her fears of both these positive aspects of self—fears which underlie her inability to change immediately. Lawrence writes of the initial kiss:

She was afraid . . . . She kept still, helpless. Then his mouth drew near, pressing open her mouth, a hot drenching surge rose within her . . . . she let him come farther, his lips came and surging, surging, soft, oh soft, yet oh, like the powerful surge of water, irresistible, till with a little blind cry, she broke away. (pp. 297-298)

The passage describes the evocation of inner rhythms (“a . . . surge rose within her”) through passive surrender; yet, it shows Ursula’s fearful identification of such passivity with helplessness and her resultant panic.

The ritual dance of the major passage begins by showing Ursula’s continued attempt to combat this fear and her choice of a false activism of the will to mask the fear—an aggressiveness which in turn she is afraid of seeing and accepting as part of herself. She desires “to let go” (p. 315), but her letting go is immediately associated by her only with activity and escape from the reality of being human: “She wanted to let go. She wanted to reach and be amongst the flashing stars, she wanted to race with her feet and be beyond the confines of this earth”; and her dance with Skrebensky is a dance of resistant wills; neither participant is able to merge temporarily and creatively with the other any more than with the denied aspect of self: “It was his will and her will . . . two wills locked in one motion, yet never fusing, never yielding one to the other” (p. 316).

With the second phase of the ritual, initiated by the moon’s appearance, Ursula temporarily allows herself passivity but that passivity, like the activity that preceded it, is a false one of human
negation. It is achieved only by ignoring Skrebensky and the masculine principle he embodies and "offering herself" instead to "the full moon" (p. 317). Although, as becomes increasingly clear, that moon is a symbolic corollary to her own potential identity as a woman, as yet she recognizes it only as something outside herself which implicitly confirms her own incompleteness: "She wanted the moon to fill in to her, she wanted more, more communion with the moon, consummation" (p. 317). The language here clearly suggests a symbolic sexual union of sorts as well, but one that significantly replaces the male element with a female one, perhaps foreshadowing Ursula's liaison with Winifred Inger. In the moon she finds an appropriate external correlative of herself and her needs, and she temporarily assumes the powerful qualities she has previously ascribed to the moon: "She was cold and hard and compact of brilliance as the moon itself, and beyond him as the moonlight was beyond him" (p. 318). Using the moonlight as if it were "a steel blade" (p. 319), she is now able to become the active agent of the moon. Both Skrebensky and the other party-goers, designated as "dross" and "loadstones" (p. 317), must be destroyed so that she can continue her pursuit of her "cold liberty" (p. 317), a double-edged term which suggests a clear ambivalence toward the type of "liberty" Ursula seeks. Pursued at the expense of denying that part of her humanity and indeed womanhood as it is in part defined through contrast with the masculine, such freedom is limited, even illusory, like the cold light of the moon.

The aspect of identity which the scene emphasizes is that of separateness—the desire to delineate clearly one's boundaries to prevent intrusion by a foreign element. Yet, while that quality is both an inevitability and a virtue in Lawrence's understanding of identity, thus contrasting with the romantic desire for total merger, Ursula's desire for absolute separation from any "other" is a distortion of that principle. Despite Daiches's suggestion that the moon symbolism is vague, its symbolic meaning seems clearly carried within the scene and in accord with such concerns. The qualities which are ascribed to it are those which declare its separateness—"cold," "hard," and "compact"—and indicate its ability to destroy elements which might try to touch it—"salt," "corrosive," "steel blade," and "cold fire." Not only does it suggest individual identity and freedom (as in "cold liberty") but also clear limitation as in the moon's emphatic coldness; its light and "fire" are borrowed from the sun and provide no warmth. Lawrence's later description of the moon in Fantasia of the Unconscious suggests the same lunar attributes:

The moon [is] the planet of women. The moon is the centre of our terrestrial individuality . . . . She is the
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declaration of our existence in separateness . . . . that cold,
proud white fire of furious, almost malignant apartness.17

If Lawrence thus means to suggest that Ursula is asserting her
separateness as a woman—an assertion which will lead in its extreme to
her ill-advised liaison with Winifred—then she has yet to learn that,
while Skrebensky himself is peripheral to her identity, the male
principle which he embodies must be recognized and accepted as a part
of her own full identity. As we shall see, this recognition will form
the core of her last stage of identity formation in the novel in her
interaction with the horses in the forest, preparing her to meet and
partially identify with Birkin in Women in Love. Ursula’s
overinsistence on establishing her identity at this early stage only
through an absolute relationship with Skrebensky, whether adoration or
total repudiation, and not through simultaneous correspondence and
contrast, demonstrates the inchoateness of her sense of identity.

The fluctuations in the scene reflect not only the natural ritualistic
rhythms, but also this deeper sense of uncertainty about who she is,
resulting in a constant attempt to escape herself and her fear that she is
either nothing or something evil. Despite their superficial opposition
to one another, her allegiance to the moon, her temporary submission
to Skrebensky, and her desire to destroy him all reflect this underlying
escapist and self-negating aim. Even the strength she borrows from the
moon intimidates her. Uncomfortable with something not yet truly her
own and afraid of the amoral implications of her aggressiveness, her
fears once again possess her: “She was afraid of what she was” (p.
319). However, the weakness which her mask of passivity reflects also
is unsatisfactory to her, and unable to repress her deeper need of
defending herself, she returns to a more effective activism and proceeds
to “annihilate” Skrebensky. Yet, she is still unable to reconcile this
assertiveness with her naive definition of herself, and upon her
recovering her “daytime consciousness,” remorse returns and she
attempts to “deny . . . with all her might” this aggressiveness: “She
was good, she was loving” (p. 321). In order to perpetuate this fiction,
she momentarily adopts the pose of “his adoring slave” (p. 321),
hoping to destroy what now seems the greater threat—an awareness of
who she is.

Ursula’s reunion with Skrebensky upon his return from Africa six
years later sharply contrasts with this preliminary ritual. She responds
after all her years of empty activity by accepting a primarily passive
role, one quite different, however, from her earlier role as an “adoring
slave.” She shows a willingness, even desire, to open herself up to
Skrebensky—particularly to the male, the “other,” element in him
which earlier she had evaded in her union with the female moon, and
although she is passive, it is an active and positive passivity which she herself chooses.

Earlier in the day she has begun to accept the generic in both herself and Skrebensky—his male body and her own womanhood:

She represented before him all the grace and flower of humanity. She was no mere Ursula Brangwen. She was Woman, she was the whole of Woman in the human order. All-containing, universal, how should she be limited to individuality? (p. 444)

Now, in contrast to the earlier scene in which the light of the moon accentuated differences and encouraged individuation, the “profound” and “fecund” darkness in which they kiss masks their individuality and encourages their union. Skrebensky seems to bring with him the aura of primitive Africa which makes possible an atavistic union with their primitive, archetypal past as well, and it is thus through him and not merely through the female moon that she finds her larger nature. In place of two resistant wills and two clearly-demarcated roles, this time her will is receptive, their similarities are emphasized (“darkness cleaving to darkness”) and there is a true merging:

He seemed like the living darkness upon her . . . . She was all dark, will-less, having only the receptive will. He kissed her, with his soft, enveloping kisses, and she responded to them completely, her mind, her soul gone out. Darkness cleaving to darkness, she hung close to him, pressed herself into the soft flow of his kiss, pressed herself down, down to the source and core of his kiss, herself covered and enveloped in the warm, fecund flow of his kiss . . . . so they were one stream, one dark fecundity . . . .
So they stood in the utter, dark kiss, that triumphed over them both, subjected them, knitted them into one fecund nucleus of the fluid darkness.
It was bliss. (pp. 446-447)

Lawrence’s language creates a precise contrast with the previous kiss; the words “warm,” “soft,” and “dark” contrast with the earlier “cold,” “hard,” and “light” and suggest an overcoming of distinctions and individuality rather than an accentuation of them. Ursula is now unafraid and does not feel the need to hold onto her sense of individual boundaries. Skrebensky does not dominate her; rather both are “subjected” to the all-encompassing power of nature to which Ursula actively gives herself, enhancing rather than sacrificing a positive sense
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of identity. Later, returning to London, she notices this same sensualism beneath the fastidious facades of all the people on the tram, "dark with the same homogeneous desire" (p. 448), thus impressing on her mind the fact of the common base of all people's sense of self that she herself has just experienced.

For Lawrence, however, such sensualism is itself limited and, in fact, can prove ultimately unproductive, even stagnating, unless subsumed within a larger process. The kiss, after all, is only foreplay, and for all its vitality, by itself in its inducement of a momentary loss of self, it is a type of death, as the utter darkness suggests. Although Skrebensky performs well in this sensual capacity, he is incapable of moving beyond it, and Ursula is right to love him only for his male animality. He immediately demonstrates his limitations by simplistically translating the ritual experience into absolute social terms ("I suppose we ought to get married" [p. 452]), when the union that has occurred is pre-social and partial. His statement reflects the age's confusion of a superficial social morality with a conscience of the spirit. Although Ursula has begun to realize the difference, the knowledge and strength she must gain in order to escape Skrebensky and the insidious social ties he represents are a central concern of the final three ritual scenes; for although he himself is weak, he has the values of an entire age behind him, and her battles with him are not merely personal but political as well. One only has to think of Lawrence, like Ursula, summoning all his strength in an endless search for a location free from the false gods of his age.

The contribution of this ritualistic experience to Ursula's sense of her self is indicated after the consummation of the kiss several days later. She begins to learn not to define herself in relationship to "the other," but in her own right:

Her soul was sure and indifferent of the opinion of the world of artificial light . . . Her everyday self was just the same. She merely had another, stronger self that knew the darkness.

This curious separate strength, that existed in darkness and pride of night, never forsook her. She had never been more herself. It could not occur to her that anybody, not even . . . Skrebensky, should have anything at all to do with her permanent self . . . .

The world is not strong—she was strong. The world existed only in a secondary sense: —she existed supremely. (p. 452)

The next ritual scene, serving as a belated consummation of the kiss, immediately reflects changes in Ursula. Her passivity in the
preceding scene and the sense of her generic self she has discovered have prepared her for a commanding activeness different from her aggressiveness of years earlier which arose out of insecurity. Here she is sure of herself and truly in control as the assured rhythms of Lawrence’s prose make clear: “She took off her clothes, and made him take off his . . . . He served her” (p. 464). Anton has become incidental, he, rather than she, the slave; now it is directly with nature that she wishes to unite:

She wished she could become a strong mound smooth under the sky, bosom and limbs bared to all winds and clouds and bursts of sunshine . . . . She took him . . . but her eyes were open looking at the stars, it was as if the stars were lying with her and entering the unfathomable darkness of her womb, fathoming her at last. It was not him. (pp. 463-464)

Her passivity occurs only in relationship to nature, not, as with the kiss, in relationship to Skrebensky, and unlike her passivity in the first ritual scene, it now arises out of a sense of self rather than from its absence. Her relationship with the sky is also different from her relationship to the moon in that first scene. She measures herself against the sky, using it as a foil, rather than denying herself by replacing herself with it as she did with the moon. There the moon “fill[s] . . . her . . . in” (p. 317); here it enters her in order to “fathom” her. She, not it, is the center.

While the ritual thus contrasts with the initial ritual under the moon, it complements and helps crown the intermediary ritual of the kiss, as the movement from darkness towards light between the two scenes reflects. While the kiss as a preliminary step occurs in spring, the consummation appropriately occurs in midsummer. The climax of both scenes immediately follows Ursula’s union with sea and sky. Out of the death-like, sensual darkness of the kiss and the pre-dawn starlit night of the sea experience arises a more spiritual dawn, and in accordance with Lawrence’s dualism, these two aspects of body and spirit are contiguous; the early-morning birth of Ursula’s incipient identity grows out of the earlier dark sensualism, and rather than strictly opposing it as a more traditional vision of creative spirit might have it, the dawn is sexual too, orgasmically climaxing the sequence:

The light grew stronger, gushing up against the dark sapphire of the transparent night . . . . A flush of rose, and then yellow . . . the whole quivering and poising momentarily over the fountain on the sky’s rim.
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The rose hovered and quivered, burned, fused to flame, to a transient red, while the yellow urged out in great waves, thrown from the ever-increasing fountain, great waves of yellow flinging into the sky, scattering its spray over the darkness.

The sun was coming . . . .
A cock crew . . . . Everything was newly washed into being, in a flood of new, golden creation. (p. 465)

This strongly positive climax to the ritual sequence marks the attainment of a significant plateau for Ursula—the establishment of a primary sense of identity. Turning away from the superficial allure of the outer world as represented primarily by Skrebensky, she has slowly reestablished contact with her deepest self. Yet, although she has turned her back on him, having outgrown her need for his person, she has still to actively root out his strong and insidious presence within her, and the final two ritual scenes are dedicated to this end—the destruction of, first, his person and, then, the more abstract reflection of him in the society at large. Ursula’s successive levels of involvement with Skrebensky are, therefore, first, a fear and attempted avoidance of him in the face of his assertion of maleness that threatens to nullify her weak identity; second, a gradual accommodation with, appreciation of, and finally, controlled use of him through which she finds she can begin to experience her own selfhood; third, a sloughing off and then active destruction of him.

The next ritual thus continues the rhythmic fluctuation of the ritual series; not only does Ursula’s earlier emphasis on internal matters temporarily yield to external concerns, but her passivity gives way to renewed aggressiveness and creation yields to destructiveness. Just as the extinction of self in darkness leads to a subsequent rebirth at dawn in union with the external world of Nature, Ursula’s external “murder” of Skrebensky in this scene will lead in the final ritual to an internal rebirth in which the external world temporarily ceases to matter.

Although the scene outwardly resembles the introductory ritual scene of six years ago—both violent attacks on Skrebensky in the moonlight—there are subtle but important differences between the two acts that mirror Ursula’s growth and the greater force and effectiveness that that growth gives the second attack. Her greater wholeness is suggested in the nature imagery continued from the preceding ritual. The moon does not stand alone, as it did in the introductory ritual, but is joined by the complementary waves of the ocean, suggesting a harmony between earth and sky through the mediating sea. While Anton attempts to hide in his element of darkness, “to be buried” (p. 479), Ursula seeks to be close to both the waves and the
moonlight, thus uniting the complementary elements of nature developed separately in the two previous scenes. Unlike her guilt in the original moon scene caused by seeing herself too clearly, she now desires clarity of vision, and although her second attack on Skrebensky is far more aggressive, it is not followed by a period of remorse and denial. She accepts the asocial, non-Christian side of herself as an inevitable and necessary part of human nature.

Most important, whereas her earlier attack on Skrebensky was almost completely motivated by a reaction to his actions and will, now she is the determining agent. It is not really even the person of Skrebensky that provokes the attack; the precipitating event seems to be her awareness of her continued vulnerability to society in general: "She was not used to these homogeneous crowds. She was afraid. She felt different from the rest of them, with their hard, easy, shallow intimacy" (p. 476). However, importantly her fear here is not of a society she regards as stronger or superior to herself, but rather one to be feared because of its deficiencies. Skrebensky shows himself to be one of the "others" who constitute society, deriving his strength from it: "He could take his part very well with the rest . . . . He was sure of himself" (p. 476). Ursula's negative sense of the homogeneity of the crowd contrasts with her earlier sense of oneness with its universal aspects and demonstrates that her concerns now are other ones. Having established her generic identity, she feels that she must distance herself from the corrupting aspect of her society's particular character. Thus, while her feelings here smack of paranoia and the viciousness of her attack on Skrebensky may seem unwarranted and out of proportion to its immediate target, the attack is symbolic as well. Skrebensky's weakness is also the age's deceptive and insidious strength, and while both he and it are internally weak, their defeat—prefiguring the later actual desperate political struggles in Italy and Germany that concerned Lawrence—is no mean achievement. In Ursula's renewed awareness of her vulnerability to the evils of the social environment, Lawrence suggests the twofold nature of man's identity—his inability to live in isolation from society, the inevitable intermixture of internal and external realities, and the necessity, therefore, of actively attacking and eliminating external threats even as one seeks to withdraw from them and becomes increasingly sure of one's separation from them.

The final ritual scene in the novel—Ursula's confrontation with the horses—is the deepest and most efficacious plumbing of self. Skrebensky's actual person and the external societal world he represents having been eliminated in the previous ritual, this final ritual is a recognition of the ultimately internal nature of all battles. The ritual embodies not only the destruction of Ursula's fear of the false and inimical elements of male society internalized within herself, but also
her discovery and acceptance of the archetypal male element within herself, allowing her to more nearly be a world unto herself.

Ursula confronts death and dissolution most directly in this last ritual: through her loss of child, the apparent physical danger to herself ("the moment of extinction" [p. 488]), and her highly paranoid state of mind. Through this intensified state, the boundary between dream and reality temporarily disintegrates, but her temporary loss of control and psychological dislocation does not signify lack of growth, only the requisite ritualistic immersion in the unconscious necessary for an initiate’s full reconstitution of identity. Only at this late stage is Ursula paradoxically strong enough to be weakened so. The subsequent rebirth is consequently her fullest. By collapsing the distinction between external and internal worlds, real and imagined, Lawrence suggests the falsity of such absolute distinctions. The reality both of the child supposedly within Ursula and of the horses without remains ambiguous. And Ursula finds that the elimination of Skrebensky’s physical presence is not the most difficult aspect of his eradication.

The crisis is precipitated by Ursula’s fear of pregnancy. The pregnancy, in a sense, represents the reemergence of Skrebensky internally as an insidious part of herself. Because of Ursula’s initial acceptance of societal mores, which dictate that a woman be married before she bears a child, the child-to-be represents for her Skrebensky’s continued possession of her. Her experience with the horses also reflects her sense of vulnerability as passive chattel as embodied in her fear both of rape (by the symbolic male society of “the horse-group” [p. 489]) and of entrapment (wherever she runs, the horses seem to block her escape). Thus, although various critics insist that this experience is not connected with Ursula’s former attachment to Skrebensky, the horses, like the child, represent the reemergence of that essential part of Skrebensky which both attracts and threatens Ursula—his essential maleness. He has earlier been clearly connected in her mind with horses. She notes his “horsey” (pp. 306 and 307) appearance when they first meet, and like the later embodiment of such maleness in Women in Love, Gerald Crich, he is a fine horseman—a role in which his fine physical appearance is particularly emphasized. Moreover, Ursula’s interaction with the horses is bracketed by double mention of her pregnancy as a tie with Skrebensky, and the ritual thus effectively rids her of that final tie with a now primarily symbolic Skrebensky.

However, although Ursula’s escape from both the horses and her pregnancy suggests her victory over the internal manifestations of an oppressive male world, this victory is accomplished not merely through the symbolic destruction of such oppressive elements, but through the acceptance of the male archetype within herself as well; for, according to Lawrence in his Study of Thomas Hardy, the male element is not
simply external in relationship to a woman but also an internal element, integral to her identity. In her interpretation of the scene, Ann McLaughlin also argues for Ursula’s partial identification with the horses as a part of herself, and George Ford points out the ambivalence of Ursula’s experience with the horses, emphasizing the positive as well as the negative aspects and supporting his contention by citing Lawrence’s discussion of the archetypal horse dream in *Fantasia of the Unconscious* where Lawrence explicitly identifies the horse as a symbol of maleness and argues that we both fear and admire the horses of our dreams.

Ursula comes to the woods “for shelter” (p. 486) from the world of men, and yet it is here she immediately finds the essence of that male world, even before she meets the horses, in the very element that would shelter her—the trees which suddenly become threateningly phallic. A tree ultimately does offer her protection; she climbs one to escape the horses, and it is the fall from it which seems to abort the baby. But the tree alone does not thus “save” Ursula; she uses it to save herself, uniting its strength with a strength of her own: she “seized” the tree just as earlier she “took” Skrebensky: “Her hands were as hard as steel. She knew she was strong” (p. 489). Similarly, she is not “saved” by the death of the baby. Earlier in the scene, she has already decided that the child need not tie her to Skrebensky; it can be hers alone. She thus completes her recognition that she no longer needs the male Skrebensky at her side to give her a sense of completion, but at the same time, unlike her sister, Gudrun, she has become capable of accepting the authentic male element as an enriching complement to her own essential femaleness when it is presented to her in *Women in Love* in the person of Rupert Birkin.

Ursula’s growth does not end with this last ritual. But the novel’s end does mark her attainment of an essential plateau in her quest for identity and self-reliance, one where the radical divisions which have beset her are overcome. While she is fundamentally an adolescent for most of the novel, the Ursula who emerges in *Women in Love* is a woman able to lead as well as follow. The contrast in the nature of the rituals in which she takes part in the two novels reflects this change; for while the rituals in *The Rainbow* mainly facilitate her confused withdrawal into herself in order to find and establish that self, those in *Women in Love* reverse the process of withdrawal and encourage Ursula’s gradual unfolding and reaching out toward others—both her sister, Gudrun, and her lover, Birkin—to become a social being again, even if the “society” she joins consists in the end of only two people. Her rituals in *The Rainbow*, therefore, are not the primarily anti-social or destructive acts they may seem, any more than the Biblical flood is.
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Concurrent with the destruction of aspects of self, lover, and child is preparation for future growth. Ursula's social retreat is merely a retreat from the false society that Lawrence thought modern England to be, and the rituals provide the sustaining link between the lost agrarian society of the original Brangwens and Ursula's later meaningful union with Birkin.

NOTES


3 Daiches, p. 165.


6 Goldberg, p. 125.


9 Kettle, 2: 131.


13 D. H. Lawrence, The Rainbow (New York, 1961), p. 458. All subsequent page references to The Rainbow will be given parenthetically in the body of the text.
For a more detailed description of this process, see: Julius Moynihan, "Ritual Scenes in The Rainbow" in "The Rainbow" and "Women in Love": A Casebook, pp. 142-143, extracted from his The Deed of Life (Princeton, 1963). Moynihan lists Lydia’s experience as one of only five rituals in the entire novel. I cannot account for his limited selection.

This same transitional relationship between successive generations during the advent of industrialism is also dramatized by the Crich family in Women in Love between Gerald’s imperious father, hollow within but still deriving a firmness and authority from the memory of an organic community, and the more self-conscious and ultimately self-destructive Gerald, whose only base of power is a mechanical one.

Leavis, p. 148.


For instance, George Ford writes, "It is obviously an error to associate the lover with these animals merely because he is male" (Ford, p. 159). Keith Sagar argues that Ursula recognizes in the horses "the triumphant, flaming, overweening heart of the intrinsic male" which "was not in Skrebensky to be recognized" (Sagar, p. 65).


Ford, p. 159.

Lawrence, Fantasia of the Unconscious, p. 251.
JOYCE, WITTGENSTEIN, AND THE PROBLEM OF REPRESENTATION; OR WHY JOYCE WROTE FINNEGANS WAKE

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“Signatures of all things,” says Stephen Dedalus in the opening lines of the Proteus section of Ulysses, “I am here to read ... coloured signs. Limits of the diaphane ... in bodies.”¹ As Stephen walks along Sandymount strand, having begun his exile from Mulligan’s tower, he contemplates the central problem for himself as an artist: the relationship between things and signs, between worldly objects and their signatures in language. How, Stephen asks, can things mean? The world, despite its protean appearance, must have a static reality behind it. Just as colored signs (“snotgreen, bluesilver, rust”) are the surface qualities of real bodies (presumably sea, sky, and the beach on which Stephen walks), so must artistic expression be the signature for a universal reality. One of the central concerns in Joyce’s work is the shaping of things, as empirical objects, into the signatures of artistic expression through language, how one can represent the other.

As a parallel way of approaching this theoretical question in Joyce’s work, I also intend to examine Ludwig Wittgenstein’s Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus.² I wish to suggest that Wittgenstein and Joyce explore the same theoretical issues concerning language and the possibility of representation. The Tractatus “is not concerned with the meaning of individual signs per se, but rather with how relationships are stated to hold between objects in the empirical world through the use of signs.”³ The problem facing Wittgenstein and Joyce—that of representation—is precisely the same. I am not suggesting that Wittgenstein and Joyce are part of any one-to-one relationship of cause-and-effect influence (despite the fact that the Tractatus and Ulysses were both published in 1921), but rather that an analysis of the Tractatus can help historicize the theoretical strategies in Joyce’s work.

Wittgenstein’s Tractatus is broken into seven sections, each composed of a series of carefully constructed axioms which build one upon another. Often the assertions of one section alter or reinterpret those which came before them (Wittgenstein himself compared the process to a series of ladders which are to be thrown away once one has climbed them). The Tractatus begins with the assertion that “The world is everything that is the case” (1.0), and that it divides into “facts” which are non-linguistic. Wittgenstein then turns to the “pictures we
make for ourselves” of the facts—propositions or sentences—and explores the semantic relationship between facts and propositions. Wittgenstein holds that meaning is possible only if the proposition is a picture of the facts—a literal model. (This was suggested to him, so the story goes, by dolls and toy cars used to reconstruct an automobile accident in a courtroom.) The elements of a proposition, then, have the same logical form as do facts: the logical form of representation. Just as toy cars and dolls represent the situation of an accident, to understand the logical form of a proposition is to understand the logical form of the world: “there must be something identical in a picture and what it depicts, to enable one to be a picture of the other at all” (2.161). In order to verify propositions, then, one must look to the world (rather than, say, a dictionary) because propositions, if true, are pictures of the facts of the world.

Once Wittgenstein demonstrates the representational relationship between propositions and facts, he raises the ante and begins to seriously question whether language can transmit such inquiries. Even though language can represent the world, it cannot make sense of the world, for “a picture cannot, however, depict its representational form: it displays it” (2.172). In other words, the relationship between language and the world cannot be put into words, just as the relationship between an artist and his painting is not directly displayed in the painting itself. Values ad ethics, therefore, cannot be expressed, for “in it [the world] no value exists—and if it did exist, it would have no value” (6.41). To make sense of the world one would have to climb outside the world, which for Wittgenstein is illogical and therefore impossible. He adds that “Here it can be seen that solipsism, when its implications are followed out strictly, coincides with pure realism,” and philosophical investigations, because they try to be ethical and outside the world, are senseless. Wittgenstein then concludes the Tractatus by applying this dictum to his own work: “What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence” (7.0). Wittgenstein thereafter abandoned philosophical investigations completely for nine years, and published but one essay until his death thirty years later.

So to return to Joyce, the problems facing Stephen Dedalus in the opening of Ulysses are the same problems facing Wittgenstein in the opening arguments of the Tractatus: the relationship between language and the world. The young Dedalus in Portrait struggles through a series of crises which involve his own private, artistic relationship between himself as artist and his world: first his family, then his church, and finally his country and the question of Irish nationalism. These three spheres revolve around young Dedalus in a series of hierarchical circles of language, for it is language and its power to represent things through signs that continually obsess Stephen and attract him to the rhetoric of
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the pulpit and the political platform. Even as a grammar school student
at Clongowes, Stephen tries to articulate the relationship to his world
through language as he writes in the flyleaf of his geography book:

Stephen Dedalus
Class of Elements
Clongowes Wood College
Sallins
County Kildare
Ireland
Europe
The World
The Universe (Portrait, p. 14)

Beyond the universe is God, whose relationship to the young schoolboy
is also linguistic:

God was God’s name just as his name was Stephen. Dieu
was the French for God and that was God’s name too; and
when anyone prayed to God and said Dieu then God knew at
once that it was a French person praying. But though there
were different names for God in all the different languages
in the world and God understood what all the people who
prayed said in the different languages still God remained
always the same and God’s real name was God. (Portrait,
p. 16)

Now aside from the humorous naïveté of Stephen’s schoolboy logic,
the essence of is question contains a key Joycean idea: the power of
words o name and make distinctions. In order to understand his world,
to place values on it, Stephen must posit a God outside his world to
give the hierarchy meaning. Words can represent logically and
truthfully the world because language and reality share the same form:
God knows his names among the languages and words are his form.
Stephen in a sense doesn’t struggle with God—he struggles with signs,
names, the instruments of God if you like. But despite the struggle,
notice that Stephen never questions the relationship between signs and
things, only the relationship between signs themselves. The
representational quality of language is still possible; words can still
make sense of the world.

Furthermore, as Stephen matures and faces the oratory of the clergy
in Book III of Portrait, it is again the representational power of
language which haunts him. Feeling the pull of the sermons, the
shame of his sins and his need for confession, Stephen again confronts
the nature of signs and their relationship to things. Stephen’s struggle
with the church is a struggle against rhetorical manipulation and the power of language, for the point of the chapter is not so much that Stephen "sins," but rather it focuses on the power of the church in making Stephen submissive to its orthodoxy, an orthodoxy of words. Returning from the chapel after a sermon on Hell, for example, Stephen cries:

Every word for him! It was true, God was almighty. God would call him now . . . He had died . . .—Hell! Hell! Hell! Hell! (Portrait, p. 125)

It is the cadence of the words that terrifies; Stephen's torment lies in signs, not things.

Stephen's predicament is similar to a series of propositions from Wittgenstein's Tractatus:

Objects make up the substance of the world, That is why they cannot be composite (2.021).
If the world had no substance, then whether a proposition had sense would depend upon whether another proposition was true (2.0211).
In that case we could not sketch out any picture of the world (true or false) (2.0211).
It is obvious that an imagined world, however different it may be from the real one, must have something—a form—in common with it (2.022).
What a picture, of whatever form, must have in common with reality, in order to depict it—correctly or incorrectly—in any way at all, is logical form, i.e. the form of reality (2.18).

Wittgenstein at this point in the Tractatus shares the same views as young Dedalus: pictures of the world (in Stephen's case God and Hell) share the same logical form as the world itself. Stephen's torment lies in his choice of pictures which represent the world, with signs not things. And strongly implied in Stephen's awareness of his sin is the a priori notion that words can logically and truthfully represent the world.

Conversely, if words can imprison Stephen through their representation of the world, they can also set him free: confess and say it with words. Confession is his release:

Blinded by his tears and by the light of God's mercifulness he bent his head and heard the grave words of absolution spoken and saw the priest's hand raised above him in forgiveness . . .
JOYCE AND WITTGENSTEIN

He had confessed and God had pardoned him. His soul was made fair and holy once more, holy and happy (Portrait, p. 143).

So in Book V of Portrait, when Stephen spells out his aesthetic theory, it comes as no surprise that the artist, "like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, indifferent, paring his fingernails" (Portrait, p. 215). Like the God on the flyleaf of his geography book, Stephen’s artist steps outside the world to make sense of it; and like the concentric circles on that same flyleaf, Stephen constructs a hierarchy of meaning which moves from objects to the stasis of essential beauty. Beauty, Stephen tells Lynch, is an aesthetic universal, independent of specific objects:

Though the same object may not seem beautiful to all people, all people who admire beautiful objects find in them certain relations which satisfy and coincide with the stages themselves of aesthetic apprehension (Portrait, p. 209).

So Stephen’s aesthetics depend upon the representational quality of language—objects, after all, have to depict beautiful forms before he can extract their essence—and also upon the ability of language to construct hierarchies, to make distinctions and value judgments between signs and propositions (drama is the highest form of art, and so on). And the omniscient position of the writer is a God’s-eye-view of creation. To make judgments about propositions and their relationship to things, in Wittgenstein’s view, is an impossibility because such statements are outside the world, extra-logical, and therefore senseless. Hierarchies are not possible because:

All propositions are of equal value (6.4).
The sense of the world must lie outside the world (6.41).
And so it is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics. Propositions can express nothing that is higher (6.42).
It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words.
Ethics is transcendental.
(Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same) (6.421).

Stephen’s art is therefore bound to fail because he is asking language to do things of which it is not capable.

Another thing Stephen fails to understand (especially in the Proteus section, quoted above) is that language is not a mere transparent series of labels which represent the world. What language and propositions...
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have in common is their logical form, according to Wittgenstein, but language is no sheer "diaphane" of the world as Stephen says in Proteus. It is more complex than that:

Language disguises thought. So much so, that from the outward form of the clothing it is impossible to infer the form of the thought beneath it, because the outward form of the clothing is not designed to reveal the form of the body, but for entirely different purposes (4.002).

At first sight a proposition—one set on the printed page, for example—does not seem to be a picture of the reality with which it is concerned. But no more does musical notation at first sight seem to be a picture of music, nor our phonetic notation (the alphabet) to be a picture of our speech.

And yet these sign-languages prove to be pictures, even in the ordinary sense, of what they represent (4.011).

So as Ulysses opens we find Stephen in the same aesthetic quagmire as in Portrait: he cannot reconcile the things of his culture to his art, and he fails to recognize that hierarchies of meaning are arbitrary and senseless constructions of artificial order.

In broad terms, the artistic aesthetic which Joyce assigns to Stephen is the artistic aesthetic of the traditional novel, for the traditional novel depends upon the construct of the authorial voice, the voyeuristic persona outside the fictional worlds, making distinctions, placing values upon things and viewpoints, judging his characters. For what is a plot, after all, other than a series of "author-ized" value judgments concerning the significance of fictional events? A narrative line reflects the choices made by the author, the distinctions and value judgments placed upon things from outside the world of the book. For to posit a particular "point of view," or to develop a defined "character" through the subtle use of carefully chosen detail, is to create a false objectivity, an illusion of truth, an example of Wittgenstein's senselessness.

Hugh Kenner, in his book Joyce's Voices, reads Ulysses as a conflict between two narrative voices which correspond to the Homeric voices of muse and poet, one inner and one outer:

These two narrators command different vocabularies and proceed according to different cannons. At the outset their command is evenly matched, and the first three Bloom episodes, culminating in "Hades," exhibit an economical weaving of inner and outer, the brisk notation of Bloom's
But after "Hades," Kenner says, something happens. These two voices—the voice of lyrical subjectivity and the voice of neutral objectivity—begin to conflict, each prone to its own excesses. The objective, outer voice which was responsible for the headlines of "Aeolus" also controls "Sirens," and the subjective, inner voice shows its excessive stylistic power in "Oxen of the Sun," giving birth to disembodied speech. These two voices are the catechistic questioner and answerer in "Ithaca," and "Penelope" illustrates the triumph of the lyrical, subjective voice—objectivity, the explicator's fiction, is dead.

Kenner's reading of Ulysses is very close to what Wittgenstein means when he says that:

The limits of my language mean the limits of my world (5.6).
We cannot think what we cannot think; so what we cannot think we cannot say either (5.61).
The remark provides the key to the problem, how much truth there is in solipsism (5.62).

We have already seen that to go beyond the limits of the world is to attempt the objectivity of God's eye, and this is as impossible for Stephen as it is for Wittgenstein. But not for Joyce.

It is with the "objective" style of the "Ithaca" section of Ulysses that Joyce explodes the notion of representation. The long encyclopedic catalogues of detail which puzzle so many readers show us that Stephen's aesthetics mean nothing. The protean quality of the visible reveals nothing behind it, just as lists of objects reveal nothing about what they are lists of. Frank Budgen writes that "Ithaca" is "the coldest episode in an unemotional book. Everything is conveyed in the same tone and tempo as if of equal importance. It is for the reader to assign human values." But this is not possible even for Budgen. The only way he can interpret "Ithaca" is to fall back on the Homeric parallels and compare Bloom to the heroic Odysseus disposing of his suitors: "Bloom's victory in "Ithaca" is to all appearances complete" (Budgen, p. 262). Victory? Hero? Budgen, like so many other critics of Joyce, cannot resist the temptation to offer interpretations where there are none.

The point of "Ithaca" is that Budgen's "human values," like Stephen's aesthetics, are senseless. Consider, for example, one of the catalogues in "Ithaca," the contents of Bloom's secret, locked drawer:
Robert McNutt

What did the first drawer unlocked contain?
A Vere Foster’s handwriting copybook, property of Milly (Millicent) Bloom, certain pages of which bore diagram drawings marked Palpi, which showed a large globular head with five hairs erect, 2 eyes in profile, the trunk in full front wit 3 large buttons, 1 triangular foot: 2 fading photographs of Queen Alexandra of England and of Maude Branscombe, actress and professional beauty: a Yuletide card, bearing on it a pictorial representation of a parasitic plant, the legend Mizpah, the date Xmas 1892, the names of the senders, from Mr and Mrs M. Comerford, the versicle: May this Yuletide bring to the, Joy and peace and welcome glee: a butt of red partly liquified sealing wax, obtained from the stores department of Messrs Hely’s Ltd., 89, 90, and 91 Dame Street: a box containing the remainder of a gross of gilt ‘J’ pennibs, obtained from the same firm; an old sandglass which rolled containing sand which rolled . . . (Ulysses, pp. 720-721).

Here is the trivia and clutter of Bloom’s life, and they add nothing to our understanding of Bloom. Who are the Comerfords? In his Notes for Joyce, Don Gifford identifies “Mr. and Mrs. M. Comerford—lived at Neptune View, 11 Leslie Avenue, Dalkey,” according to Thom’s Dublin Post Office Directory, 1886.6 Who is Maude Branscombe? Again Gifford tells us that she was “an actress with an extraordinary reputation for beauty” who sold 28,000 photographs of herself in 1885 (Gifford, p. 325). Now the careful reader also knows that Bloom, in “Nausicaa,” 350 pages earlier, lists Maude Branscombe in a series of Irish actresses as he masturbates while watching Gerty MacDowell, so are we to make a connection? Does Bloom masturbate wit the photograph as well? Or did he just happen to keep one of those 28,000 photographs? Is Bloom “at it again” on the Christmas card too?

Perhaps, perhaps not. And this is precisely my point: these catalogues leave us unable to sort through the details to find the patterns of meaning, for there are none. The hierarchies of meaning are gone. Budgen is half right: everything in “Ithaca” is of equal importance, but there are no “human values” to assign them. And to be sure we don’t miss the point, Joyce has Bloom give us the final nonsensical catalogue as “Ithaca” closes: “Sinbad the Sailor and Tinbad the Tailor and Jinbad the Jailer . . .” and so on to “Xinbad the Phthailer” (Ulysses, p. 737). The catalogues themselves degenerate, like an engine running on its last drops of gasoline, racing faster and faster until it exhausts itself, finally falling silent. The end of “Ithaca” was the last writing Joyce did before starting on the Wake, and in the chronology of the actual production of Ulysses, the book ends not with
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Molly’s “yes” but rather with the big black Roc’s egg at the close of “Ithaca.” (“Penelope,” you may remember, was finished before “Ithaca” so the book could be reviewed.)

So as a coda to my discussion I come round at last to my subtitle: why, in theoretical terms, I think Joyce wrote Finnegans Wake. In 1921, the year of publication of both Ulysses and the Tractatus, Wittgenstein packed his bags and headed for the secluded Austrian countryside to teach fourth grade for six years, and Joyce began work on the Wake. The Wake, in short, with its babble of undifferentiated voices, is Joyce’s alternative to Wittgenstein’s silence. A world without distinctions in which all propositions are equal and therefore useless was unbearable for Wittgenstein; Joyce embraced it with comic celebration. Louis O. Mink, a philosopher as well as a Wake scholar, writes:

Because Finnegans Wake is not about anything but itself, it is, I think, the most consummately nihilistic work in any literature. By “nihilism,” I do not mean merely an extreme degree of skepticism, rebellion, or destructiveness, but rather the complete absence of the capacity to order the world by a scale of relative values, by any hierarchy of relative importance...

In the world of Finnegans Wake... everything is of equal value with everything else.7

It’s true. Take, for example, the “Anna Livia Plurabelle” episode from the Wake, which nearly everyone considers to be the most intelligible chapter, largely because Joyce himself made a recording of it. ALP, in her role as the primary female persona of the Wake, is, through various allusions, identified with Hero, Petrarch’s Laura, Leda, Molly Bloom, all the whores in the world, “poor las animas” (her initials reversed), anima—any Ma. There is no distinction; all these roles are laid side by side, one after the other, with no historical or mythic differentiation. The pleasure of reading the Wake, as anyone who has tried it knows, is unraveling the puns and the allusions—but putting the individual pieces into a coherent, “author-ized” whole is impossible.

Consider the hundreds of puns on river names which run through the “Anna Livia Plurabelle” chapter. They are marvelous to spot and work out, but they add nothing “deeper” to the meaning. If you happen to know, for example, that Lough Neagh is the largest lake in the United Kingdom (which I didn’t—I read it in a crib on the Wake), then the line “how long was he [HCE] kept under loch and neagh” (Wake, p. 196.20) is more fun. How long was HCE under, presumably, lock and key (for one is never sure), for his crime of voyeurism or
exhibitionism, and how long was he under ALP, whose associations seem to be rivers? Neither reading is primary—they both coexist side by side.

Or if you happen to know that the Tombigbee is a river in Alabama (I do—I was born there. Joyce read this one in a crib on Alabama.), then among the list of presents for ALP’s children the line “and a nightmarching hare for Techertim Tombigby” (Wake, p. 210.15) appears to make a little more sense. ALP, being associated with water, gives birth to other rivers. But I still have no idea what a rabbit walking in darkness has to be with Alabama, even though I spotted the pun.

Either way, whether you spot the puns or not, it makes no difference. The allusions and puns are self-contained, and they fit no larger scheme of reference; they exist independently from their context. In philosophical terms, Wittgenstein agrees: “There is no compulsion making one thing happen because another has happened” (6.37). Things and events can exist independently one from another without a hierarchical system of values to relate them. “Hierarchies are and must be independent of reality” (5.5561), writes Wittgenstein, and the method of Finnegans Wake bears this out. The Wake is, according to Wittgenstein’s program, a book of perfect realism.

NOTES


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AGRARIAN ANGST: KATHERINE ANNE PORTER’S
THE OLD ORDER

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Recent studies reassessing Katherine Anne Porter’s life and work have focused on aspects long neglected in the relatively small but impressive body of criticism. Jan Nordby Gretlund’s analysis, for example, clarifies various misconceptions about Porter’s relationship to the South; yet Gretlund’s study, like others before his, fails once again to consider one of her most abiding traits: her agrarianism. In effect, commentary has taken the easy way out either by assuming no connection between Porter and the Nashville group or by neglecting the centrality of agrarian thought in many of her finest stories. Such neglect has resulted both in serious misreading of some of her fiction and in perpetuating the notion that Porter is not, finally, a “southern” writer. The Nashville Agrarians have certainly had their share of easy assessment; so has Porter. Even the reappraisal undertaken here risks being jejune since almost everyone has apparently decided that any Southerner writing since 1930 was probably influenced by Agrarian thought. Nevertheless, the case for Porter’s agrarianism has not been carefully made, especially in her collection, The Old Order.

The history of the Agrarians has been well-told and needs little recapitulation here, and Porter’s fiction has also been canonized until she has almost become one of our major writers. But the untold story linking her to the Agrarians resides in some themes both share. The Agrarians’ views, of course, are most fully stated in I’ll Take My Stand, and Porter’s in a well-spring of Old South memories, the short stories known as The Old Order. This collection includes six pieces grouped under the heading, “The Old Order,” including her most famous short story, “The Grave.” Also in the volume is that intriguing piece, “The Jilting of Granny Weatherall,” and the novelette, “Old Mortality.” The opening group and closing piece are Miranda stories, semi-autobiographical accounts using a protagonist whose life closely resembles Porter’s own. Having been interviewed frequently about her early life, Porter draws the parallels between herself and Miranda most succinctly in her essay, “Portrait: Old South.”

As noted above, critics have generally called Porter a Southerner, though this label has caused some problems for critics since much of her fiction seems unlike William Faulkner’s, Carson McCullers’, or William Styron’s. Elmo Howell, for instance, has difficulty justifying
her Southern ways because "...her Southernness is incidental if not extraneous to her purpose. One almost feels...that she achieves her end not because of it but in spite of her Southern background."7 But Porter is Southern "in her basic view of experience," and "she comes closest to an obvious identification with the main body of Southern letters in the concreteness of her fiction..."8 Howell concludes that as a Southern writer, Porter "is an anomaly, reaching out for implication, beyond the homey regional scene where after all she felt most at home."9 Similarly, John Bradbury comes directly to the point in placing Porter outside the influences of the Nashville group. He says "...she sharply rejects the conservative agrarian ideology...."10 In so far as *The Old Order* may be taken as representative of Porter's Southernness, one can show that both critics are mistaken.

Porter's biographical connections with the Agrarians are nonexistent in any strictly formal sense. She apparently never commented publicly on reading the essays written by them, though she could hardly escape knowing the essays. After all, she was a close friend of Caroline Gordon and Allen Tate for over forty years; and Warren first "discovered" her in an important essay which brought her to the attention of others. Furthermore, despite her wide travels abroad, she lived for several years in Texas, in Baton Rouge and New Orleans, Louisiana. It is not ultimately important to know absolutely whether or not Porter read *I'll Take My Stand*. We do know, on the other hand, she had read the meaning of her Southern heritage. About it, she says:

I'm a Southerner by tradition and inheritance, and I have very profound feeling for the South. And, of course, I belong to the guilt-ridden white-pillar crowd myself, but it just didn't rub off on me. Maybe I'm just not Jewish enough, or Puritan enough, to feel that the sins of the fathers are visited on the third and four generations.11

In this confession lies the heart of Porter's ambivalence with which she deals in *The Old Order*. She is at once a part of the Old South and the new, and her sympathies blend with those of the Agrarians. The Agrarians have frequently been over-simplified, and at the risk also of falling into that trap, I attempt no summary of each essay here, nor is the intention here to reduce their complex attitudes to easy generalizations. Excellent studies have been made by Alex Karanikas and John L. Stewart.12 However, the larger categories into which Agrarian thought may safely be analyzed are these: economics, traditions, aesthetics, religion, and myth. Compositely, these areas manifest the Agrarians' basic premise: that an encroaching
industrialization would displace Southern traditions, traceable to every aspect of its life, both public and private.

Prefaced by a Statement of Principles, *I'll Take My Stand* was a collection of twelve essays, including those by its most famous unreconstructed defenders, John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren. Beginning earlier as the Fugitives, whose main concern had been the revitalization of Southern letters, these four and others defended the South against change and asserted that the Old Order was more desirable to the new.

In this cursory overview, details of essays have been neglected, though parallels between individual tenets and Porter’s stories will be in evidence later. Three general areas between the stories and Agrarian thought may be fruitfully compared: Southern tradition (order), the family, and myth.

The strongest thrust of agrarianism is that the Old Order should be preserved. Obviously, there was no single Southern tradition, but some ideas are clear. The Agrarians said in their preface:

> The amenities of life...suffer under the curse of a strictly business or industrial civilization. They consist in such practices as manners, conversation, hospitality, sympathy, family life, romantic love—in the social exchanges which reveal and develop sensibility in human affairs. If religion and the arts are founded on right relations of man-to-nature, these are founded on right relations of man-to-man.¹³

Implied here is that the family as an institution was the core of the Old Order; the idea is pervasive in Agrarian thinking and in Porter’s stories. There is Grandmother, the source of order, now aged and living in town; but each spring she returns to the country literally to restore order to the plantation. Her homecoming is not “to the houses but to the black, rich soft land and the human beings living on it” (5). The Agrarians’ sense of spirit (“man to nature and man to man”) is captured in everything she does with her grandchildren and the Negroes living there. The Agrarians feared the South would lose its linguistic identity,¹⁴ and Porter’s style seems bent on preserving it. Her narrator says “…Mister Miller didn’t even take sugar in his own cawfy…” and “Bookser was acting like she was deaf ever since” (7). The ritual and language coalesce in the nostalgic scene within the household. Here, the spring cleaning uncovers a great horde of literature upon which both Ransom and Davidson felt the culture of the Old South rested: the big secretaries display “shabby old sets of Dickens, Scott, Thackeray, Dr. Johnson’s dictionary, the volumes of Pope and Milton and Dante and Shakespeare…” (7). A compelling aspect of Grannie’s annual
spring journey is her mere presence, for she represents the stability and order of the Old South. Everyone loves her, the narrator says, because "she was the only reality to them in a world that seemed otherwise without fixed authority or refuge..." (8).

Next to Grannie as the source of the Old Order is old Nannie. Together the women offer an obvious contrast to the new, and the grandchildren "had arrived at the awkward age when Grandmother's quaint old-fashioned ways caused them acute discomfort" (12). Porter's poignant narration, then, depicts Grandmother and Nannie standing solidly for the old against the new: "They talked about the past....They would agree that nothing remained of life as they had known it, the world was changing swiftly..." (13). Little wonder that Ransom, Tate, and Warren as Agrarians were enthusiastic about Porter's ficton since Ransom's essay described the "unreconstructed Southerner" as one who "persists in regard for a certain terrain...a certain inherited way of living....He is like some quaint local character of eccentric but fixed principles...." Old Nannie's role is portrayed by both Porter and Warren alike. According to Warren, "The rural life provides the most satisfactory relationship of the two races which can be found at present, or which can be clearly imagined if all aspects of the situation are, without prejudice, taken into account." Nannie..."had no idea at all as to her place in the world. It had been assigned to her before birth, and for her daily rule she obeyed all her life the authority nearest to her" (14). The conversations of the two matriarchs forcefully align them with the Old Order and suggest Porter's sensitivity toward the Old South and the new: "They talked about religion, the slack ways the world was going nowadays, the decay of behavior, and about the younger children" (15). Like the Agrarians, the grannies have a fixed attitude toward all of life: "They had received education which furnished them an assured habit of mind about all important appearances of life, and especially about the rearing of young" (16).

Set against their fixed principles in the order of things is the new order, typified by the new daughter-in-law, who is a "tall, handsome, firm-looking young woman, with a direct way of speaking, walking, talking....The Grandmother was annoyed deeply at seeing how self-possessed the bride had been....But she was "too modern, something like the 'new' woman who was beginning to run wild, asking for the vote, leaving her house and going out in the world to earn her own living...." (22). Ironically, years later, Miranda, the person in "Old Mortality," discovers her cousin Eva has done exactly the same thing as a "new woman" and is a family outcast. Doubtless, Eva was one of those children who "went about their own affairs, scattering out and seeming to lose all that sense of family unity so precious to the Grandmother" (32). One feels that Porter's loving portrait of her own
grandmother in "Portrait: Old South" is evidence that this is no ironic praise of the matriarchs as the source for the Old Order.

Porter’s affinities with Agrarian thought can be demonstrated in numerous details such as these. But her most vital relationship to them through these Miranda stories is the shared ambivalence. Perceptive readers of I’ll Take My Stand see a realistic hesitancy on the part of almost every contributor to the volume to attribute an absoluteness or infallibility to the Old South. Even Mr. Davidson admitted the book “was intended to be a book of principles and ideas...for Americans in general, a philosophy of Southern life rather than a detailed programme.”17 John Stewart, analyzing the literature that flourished after the movement, puts the matter more exactly:

Actually the writers of the Southern Renaissance inherited two kinds of South, two kinds of regional past. For a long time—well into the manhood of most of them—many people thought there had been only one Old South. But when the historians began to look at it, they found that this Old South was mostly a legend, that there actually had been many Old Souths. Recognition of the two kinds, the legendary and the actual, and of the great diversity of the latter was one of the unavoidable and definitive moments in the artistic maturing of these writers.18

In this complex dichotomy toward the Old and the new, Porter and the Agrarians share their most profound similarities. Repeatedly, the essays denounce the encroachment of industrialism, the claims of a positivistic science, and the ballyhoo of the chambers of commerce throughout the South. The new seemed bad; the old seemed good. From this angst, some literary historians have argued, was implanted the embryo for the birth of modern Southern letters, the Southern Renaissance to which Stewart refers. Miranda does feel at home in the old world, despite one critic who has her questioning its myths when she is only seven years old.19 Eventually, she leaves home, marries early, and discovers her mortality. In “Old Mortality,” then, a sequel to “The Old Order,” Porter explores Miranda’s deepening rejection of the rituals and myths of her childhood. Yet Miranda has not found happiness in the new either. In more than a matter of speaking, she has swapped order for mortality.

Readers of the story know it as a continuation into later life of Porter’s portrait of the artist as a young woman. It is indeed replete with ironic portraits of the Old South, the home of Miranda. But most of all the novella challenges two ideas: that the old was essentially bad and that the new is necessarily good. The Agrarians in later years...
would agree. Years after he had written “Remarks on the Southern Religion,” Allen Tate also wrote “Ode to the Confederate Dead.” The former is his Agrarian metaphor deriding a society partially committed to a religious ethic (the New South); the latter an agonizing poem depicting a modern Southerner with commitments to both the old and the new. Miranda is drawn to both her Aunt Amy and cousin Eva. The two worlds are crystallized in Eva, who “belonged to their everyday world of dull lessons to be learned...” and Amy, who “belonged to their world of poetry” (115). Eva is the “new” woman, feared by Granny and earlier admired by Miranda. Now she knows that neither world is hers. In watching the procession of cousins coming home for Uncle Gabriel’s funeral,

Miranda found herself deliberately watching a long procession of living corpses, festering women stepping gaily toward the charnel house...and thought quite coldly, 'of course it was not like that. This is more true than what I was told before, it's every bit as romantic'...(174).

In this context Porter’s often-quoted statement is voiced by Miranda, who in the midst of her angst gasps, “Ah, the family...the whole hideous institution should be wiped from the face of the earth. It is the root of all human wrongs...” (174). If, as some readers urge, Porter is rejecting the family here, she is rejecting the new and the old, not merely the old. Rather, one feels, she sees more clearly than ever that her own myth, religion, and traditions must guide her life. Like Tate’s Southerner who stands at the cemetery gate, Miranda wonders with which world she belongs: “It is I who have no place,” thought Miranda. “Where are my own people and my own time” (179)? Through the Fugitives and the Agrarians emerged the Southern Renaissance. Though Warren first saw the Negro in the briar patch, he later boldly asks, “Who speaks for the Negro?” And Ransom proclaimed he was reconstructed but unregenerate, yet his traveler finds no knowledge in the old mansion. Tate’s weary sojourner, Aeneas in Washington, seeks a home both in the old and the new; while Mr. Davidson’s modern citizen feels alien watching the fire on Belmont street.

In all these allegiances to both the Old and the New South, the Agrarians and Katherine Anne Porter demonstrate again the force that drives the artist in every age. The Agrarians felt for the longest time—Davidson until he died—that they might have been right. Porter has lived through the same agony of will and spirit. Miranda humbly concludes at the end of “Old Mortality”:
Earl J. Wilcox

What is the truth, she asked herself as intently as if the question had never been asked, the truth, even about the smallest, the least important of all the things I must find out? And where shall I begin to look for it? Her mind closed stubbornly against remembering, not on the past but the legend of the past, other people’s memory of the past, at which she had spent her life peering in wonder like a child....Ah, but there is my own life yet to come yet, she thought, my own life now and beyond. I don’t want any promises, I won’t have false hopes, I won’t be romantic about myself. I can’t live in their world any longer....Let them tell their stories to each other. Let them go on explaining how things happened. I don’t care. At least I can know the truth about what happens to me, she assured herself, making a promise to herself, in her...ignorance (182).

Some readers have found this ending unsatisfactory for a Southern writer because Miranda “must be saved by having her turn from provincial interest in traditional values to the more fashionable concern with isolation and identity.”20 Such a reading misses the impact of Miranda’s self-evaluation. Rather, Porter shows her strongest alliance to Southern writers here. In Miranda’s ignorance Porter gives her a richness and complexity which make her a genuine human being. This above all the Agrarians and Katherine Anne Porter sought for their world.

NOTES


AGRARIAN ANGST: THE OLD ORDER

4 "I'll Take My Stand, The South and the Agrarian Tradition by Twelve Southerners" (New York, 1930).

5 The Old Order (New York, 1944). Quotations from the stories will be from this text.


7 "Katherine Anne Porter as A Southern Writer," South Carolina Review, 4 No. 1 (December 1971), 5.

8 Ibid., p. 6.

9 Ibid.


11 Collected Essays, p. 8.

12 Cf. Note 1, above.

13 "I'll Take My Stand," p. xv.

14 See for example, Donald Davidson's "A Mirror for Artists," (pp. 28-60) and Henry Blue Kline's "William Remington: A Study in Individualism" (pp. 302-327).


18 Stewart, p. 96.


20 Howell, p. 8.
RHYME, METER, AND CLOSURE IN PHILIP LARKIN’S “AN ARUNDEL TOMB”

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In his 1965 preface to *The North Ship*, Philip Larkin names three major poets who influenced his “undergraduate” and “post-Oxford” work: W. H. Auden, Dylan Thomas, and W. B. Yeats. He goes on to describe Yeats as the most potent, and potentially destructive, of these influences: “I spent the next three years trying to write like Yeats, not because I liked his personality or understood his ideas but out of infatuation with his music (to use the word I think Vernon [Watkins] used). In fairness to myself it must be admitted that it is a particularly potent music, pervasive as garlic, and has ruined many a better talent.”¹ At a time when many young poets were resisting this “dangerous” music, fearful of losing poetic sense in mere sound, one challenge was to find new approaches to the use of rhyme and meter. Clearly Auden, as Larkin describes it, one of the earliest influences on him, had suggested one alternative: rhyme used as a precision tool to achieve ironic effects, rhyme and meter working in conjunction to create crispness and clarity of sound, rather than, according to the fears of the time, furthering sloppy emotion. Yet, as Larkin hints, unwary imitation of such a dominant figure as Auden could also be dangerous to a beginning poet.

Through his experiments in imitation, some of which are recorded in *The North Ship*, Larkin developed a handling of the technical problems of rhyme and meter that was essentially his own. In the mature work, for instance the poems in *The Whitsun Weddings*, the persona’s often conversational and meditative tone gains assurance from the restraining counterpoint of rhyme and meter.

If this does not at first sound particularly unusual, a sense of Larkin’s distinctiveness may emerge through a brief comparison with the work of Auden and the American contemporary, Robert Lowell, poets who also struggle with the restraints of traditional forms. If Auden’s use of surprising rhymes is often, in its sheer modernity and sharp ironies, strikingly dramatic, Larkin’s preference is for its undramatic use. In such a poem as “Faith Healing,” the handling is so subtle that we can almost read the whole poem through without being aware of its rhymes. Lowell, in such early poems as “The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket,” frequently does battle with the formal order of rhyme and meter, through his violent juxtapositions, breaking out of its expected boundaries of possibility. In contrast, Larkin, in “An
Arundel Tomb,” almost insidiously diminishes the importance of rhyme and measure, using both with great skill to undermine them. With an impression of quiet ease and in language that is highly “readable,” he subverts conventional or traditional expectations about how rhyme will function. Perhaps it may be said that Larkin learned from his early interpretations and imitations of Yeats what not to do with rhyme and meter.

Since much of my paper will deal with the emotional effects, in a particular historical context, of one poet’s manipulation of formal properties, it is necessarily somewhat speculative. I do not wish to suggest that all the word-to-word formal choices in these poems were deliberately made with a conscious sense of all their possible emotional effects. Rather, the formal choices resulted from a consistent attitude about how language might be used in the rendering of a particular increasingly more insistent view of the world.

A brief look at Poem XVII and “The Dancer” from The North Ship can show us part of what Larkin learned from his early experiments with “Yeatsian” verse. The mournful lyric, Poem XVII, is not, of course, representative of Yeats’ actual work. Larkin himself stresses that he never knew Yeats’ last poems during the period of imitation. Rather, Poem XVII is a young poet’s interpretation of the Yeatsian musical tradition. Certain skills have been mastered. Rhyme and meter here work appropriately to achieve calculated and consistent effects. For instance, take the romantic opening of the poem:

To write one song, I said,
As sad as the sad wind
That walks around my bed,
Having one simple fall
As a candle-flame swells, and is thinned,
As a curtain stirs by the wall
—— For this I must visit the dead.2

Note that the first four lines are each made up of three iambic feet, creating a regularity of sound that builds or accumulates to a pitch of intensity. This intensity, or heightened emotion, is achieved, I believe, in the fifth and sixth lines, which have the effect of “breaking out” of the rhythm into energetic irregularity. The metrical effects, then, seem pretty clearly to echo the emotional direction, with a longer line, and some departure from the “regular” cadence signalling heightened feeling.

In the poem’s second and final stanza, the visited “dead” undergo a species of transformation into a living force. The cemetery “stones” now “shine like gold” as morning approaches:
Elizabeth Gargano-Blair

That stones would shine like gold
Above each sodden grave,
This, I had not foretold,
Nor the birds’ clamour, nor
The image morning gave
Of more and ever more,
As some vast seven-piled wave,
Mane-flinging, manifold,
Streams at an endless shore.

Looking at the whole stanza, we can see a phenomenon that is perhaps not surprising in a poem with such short lines: many of the important or key words in the poem occur at the end of the line, and so gain an added emphasis from being rhyme-words. Such rhyme-words as “gold,” “grave,” “foretold,” “wave,” and “shore” are easily the most important in their respective lines, as far as content goes, and nearly all are nouns which carry a high degree of force in the poem as a whole. (The one exception to this pattern is the placement of the conjunction “nor” in the end of line position. Although its use here is consciously “poetic” in a way that the later poems repudiate, its placement foreshadows a technique that becomes more frequent in the later work).

As we move to the ending, we can see that the image of morning as a gathering wave is leading up to what might be regarded as a poetic “big finish.” Keeping to the framework of the poem’s iambic trimeter, the last two lines nevertheless heavily accent the first syllable in each line. This emphasis on both the first and last syllables, echoed in two such short lines, creates a dramatic tug-of-war, a straining, I believe, between the “shore” and the “wave,” which “Mane-flinging, manifold,/ Streams at an endless shore.” The rhyme-words again are probably the most emotionally charged in the line. Clearly, then, both rhyme and meter are being manipulated here to create what is designed to be a powerful ending for the poem.

In general, we can make roughly accurate statements about the poem’s use of formal properties. A succession of metrical lines builds to a heightened emotional pitch. A departure from, or variation of, the meter is associated with energy. Rhyme-words often occupy a privileged position of emotional power. The final line strives for dramatic effects.

“The Dancer,” another poem from this period, also shows an ending wreathed round with dramatic effects. This poem is probably both an imitation of and a conscious departure from Yeats’s “Rose” poems, with echoes of the famous conclusion of “Among School Children.” The argument of the poem suggests, I think, a more pessimistic variation on a traditional Yeatsian theme. The “dancing” which creates the world may be illusory, for “the world weaved” by the
PHILIP LARKIN'S “AN ARUNDEL TOMB”

“dancer's feet” is flawed, “incomplete.” “Wholeness” and pattern are probably illusions, but we must nevertheless believe in them. If the dancer were to “admit” the flaws of her work

Then would the moon go raving,
The moon, the anchorless
Moon go swerving
Down at the earth for a catastrophic kiss.

(The North Ship, “The Dancer,” p. 27)

Here we see again effects noticed before—the energy of the longer irregular line, and the power of the rhyme-word as the line's climax—combined to create a dramatic conclusion for the poem.

In the mature poems of The Whitsun Weddings, Larkin uses what he learned of the effects of rhyme and meter in the service of a different aesthetic, furthering a view of the world that is more truly his own. Poem XVII and “The Dancer” revealed, first, a gilding of the “dead” world, with gravestones transformed into “gold,” and second, a concession of the need for the “illusion” of the dancer's “weaving.” In contrast, the poems in The Whitsun Weddings stubbornly refuse to sacrifice a grim, often harsh, honesty for the fanciful pleasures of illusion. Renouncing the “dangerous” music of “Yeatsian” poetry, their rhythms are closer to those of speech than to those of song.

Larkin, of course, continues to use rhyme and meter to enrich the meaning of individual lines. He continues to explore the emotional possibilities of rhyme and meter. Yet his aesthetic choices are now frequently the opposite of those in the early poems. In “An Arundel Tomb,” “Dockery and Son,” and “Mr. Bleaney,” we can see the consequences of some of these new choices.

In “An Arundel Tomb,” a meditation, almost conversational in tone, on a medieval tomb effigy, we can identify three new poetic techniques at work: 1) the introduction, more and more frequently, of weak words, i.e., prepositions and conjunctions, into the end of line position, 2) in keeping with this, a deliberate undermining of final phrases and final lines, both in individual stanzas and the poem as a whole, and 3) the use of metrical variation to diminish rather than to heighten emotional power.

Thus, scanning the poem, we find such rhyme-words as “until,” “still,” “and,” “in,” “away,” “of” and “into.” The effect of ending a line with such words is, of course, to speed our eyes to the beginning of the following line, so that we hardly notice the rhyme at all, missing its potential “music.” Yet such choices also result in other and more subtle effects. The second stanza, describing the stone figures of the “earl” and
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the “countess,” as they lie together on their tomb, joined in death, exemplifies the use of these weak rhyme-words:

Such plainness of the pre-baroque
Hardly involves the eye, until
It meets his left-hand gauntlet, still
Clasped empty in the other; and
One sees, with a sharp tender shock,
His hand withdrawn, holding her hand. 3

Here, three of the six rhyme-words are weak line-endings that undermine the emotional and musical effect of rhyme; thus, they weaken not only their own force as rhymes, but the potential of the rhymed pair of which they are a part.

It might be argued that these weak rhyme-words, coming as they do in succession in lines two, three, and four of the stanza, help to “hollow out” the stanza, making us sense the austere “plainness of the pre-baroque” sculptural style, which “hardly involves the eye.” “Until” and “still,” especially, function as words that preserve and prolong this moment of disengaged waiting, before we encounter the “sharp tender shock” of the one really important sculptural detail: “his hand . . . holding her hand.” It is notable that the emotional effect of “baroque”/“shock”—potentially a strong rhymed pair because of their dominance in their respective lines—is undermined by their being slant rhymes that we hardly hear at all.

In connection with the third point mentioned above—the use of metrical variation to diminish rather than to increase emotional power—note the unusual quality of line four:

Clasped empty in the other; and

With the exception of the first accented syllable, the line is a fairly regular example of iambic tetrameter. For instance, “in” is stronger than the second syllable of “empty,” “and” is stronger than the second syllable of “other,” and so on. Yet actually, all the syllables are so weak that the total effect is that of lack of accent. No doubt, this also suits the position of the line as the blank moment just before the “tender shock” that follows.

Perhaps it is necessary to repeat here that the formal decisions just described need not be regarded as the explication of a fully conscious process on the part of the poet. Rather, my analysis seeks to document the somewhat intangible results of a new set of aesthetic commitments, in contrast to those embodied in the two poems from The North Ship. Larkin’s earlier “Yeatsian” world view would probably not have
permitted the production of a line such as that just discussed in the
second stanza, in which meter "undermines" itself.

As noted before, the second stanza closes on the relatively dramatic
note of the clasped stone "hands." Yet this dramatic quality is hastily
diminished in the following stanza, when the persona asserts that this
arresting sculptural detail was just a "commissioned grace," a
conventional touch that "friends would see."

More often, in contrast to the close of the second stanza, lines and
stanzas end on an emotional "downbeat"—clearly a point of difference
from such a work as Poem XVII in The North Ship. Thus, the first
stanza closes with "that faint hint of the absurd—/ The little dogs under
their feet." Similarly, the third stanza executes a clever turn at the end,
by undermining the sculpture as a work of art in its role of preserving a
past moment. We are reminded by the persona that the intimate detail
of the clasped hands has been merely "Thrown off in helping to
prolong/ The Latin names around the base." To preserve or "prolong" a
name is, of course, to preserve the memory of a particular person. But
"Latin names around the base" become mere words, forgotten, perhaps
unreadable inscriptions, and the line ends on an almost trivial note.

The following stanzas continue both to exemplify and to
undermine a formal structure, with their use of slant-rhymes,
unconventional line-breaks, and end-words such as "in," "of," and
"into." The poem's final line is an affirmation that could be, in another
context, tremendously strong. But by the time it appears, it has been
hedged round by doubts, so that it has, not the effect of a clarion call,
but of a whisper. In fact, the final stanza is a masterful staggered
movement of affirmation and disclaimer, with positive words like
"transfigured," "fidelity," and "final blazon" effectually negated, paired
with such expressions as "untruth," "hardly meant," and "almost-
instinct almost true":

Time has transfigured them into
Untruth. The stone fidelity
They hardly meant has come to be
Their final blazon, and to prove
Our almost-instinct almost true:
What will survive of us is love.

This apparently simple, yet incredibly rich, poem suggests the
limitations, not only of art, but of the values of fidelity, preservation,
and love, according to which we try to live. Mirroring so perfectly in
its own simplicity of language that "plainness of the pre-baroque"
which it depicts, it would seem to be not only a poetic embodiment of
stylistic austerity, but a manifesto in favor of it, if Larkin's world
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permitted manifestoes of any sort. Compared to Poem XVII, this second visit to the "dead," nearly twenty years later, is hedged round with ironies and doubts. The impulse towards affirmation is still present, but now an almost reluctant honesty forbids any false or tricky strategies in order to achieve it.

A more extensive study of Larkin's use of meter would include an examination of such even more "conversational" poems as "Dockery and Son," and "Mr. Bleaney," where Larkin, like many of the poets of his generation, strives to fit the cadences of iambic meter to the rhythms of speech. In "Dockery and Son," a regular iambic pentameter embodies a quiet succession of random thoughts. The following central line, in perfect pentameter, but subtly manipulating its pauses to work against the meter, is a striking example:

... well, it just shows
How much... How little... Yawning, I suppose
I fell asleep...

(The Whitsun Weddings, "Dockery and Son," p. 37)

In "Mr. Bleaney," which raises the question that "how we live measures our own nature," a rich use of poetic measure yields numerous effects. Metrical regularity underlines the unchanging regularity of Mr. Bleaney's habits, in such lines as "He kept on plugging at the four aways—" or "Christmas at his sister's house in Stoke." Yet metrical variation and unexpected pauses within the line can also be manipulated to diminish certainty or emotional assertions, creating the shiver of doubt present in the last line of the final stanza, ending on a dying fall:

But if he stood and watched the frigid wind...
Telling himself that this was home...
And shivered, without shaking off the dread

That how we live measures our own nature,
And at his age having no more to show
Than one hired box should make him pretty sure
He warranted no better, I don't know.

(The Whitsun Weddings, "Mr. Bleaney," p. 10)

In the world of Larkin's poems, leisure is often less than exciting; work, a necessary tedium; marriage, frequently a record of disappointments; and producing children, sometimes a form of diminishment. In this world, where the conventions still operate, but without much success, weakened rhyme, meter undermining itself, and
endings that lack traditional closure become highly appropriate poetic devices, agents of a quiet subversion of certainties.

NOTES


2*The North Ship*, p. 29. Page numbers for poems from this book will be cited parenthetically in the text.

TYRANNY AND ANGUISH: THE TWO SIDES OF FATHERHOOD IN THE FATHER-DAUGHTER SHORT STORIES OF JOYCE CAROL OATES

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Several critics have suggested that, notwithstanding her fame as a novelist, Joyce Carol Oates does much of her best work in short stories.\(^1\) And in that genre, as in her novels, one of her most powerful themes is that of highly charged parent-child relationships, often so burdened with guilt or suppressed defiance that they erupt into violence. While parent-child relationships are common copy for fiction, Oates does have an unusual predilection for the father-daughter theme. Critic Anne Mickelson claims that Oates “is one of the first American authors to write of women arrested in what psycho-analytic theory calls the pre-genital state” because of father fixation.\(^2\) Claiming that the “odor of incest hangs over Oates’s work,” Mickelson judges that, in her preoccupation with this theme, Oates “has enslaved her imagination to her personal devils” (29, 32).

Mickelson’s harsh judgment may be debatable, but Oates’s preoccupation is not. Oates has written at least ten short stories focused squarely on the father-daughter theme.\(^3\) I propose to study this group of stories for several reasons. First, the study attempts to define the recurring patterns in the father-daughter relationship, and to show how Oates manipulates these patterns artistically within particular stories. Critics have long noticed the presence of the tyrannical or domineering father in Oates’s novels; when they consider this conflict in short stories, however, they often do so in brief statements which can have a dismissive quality: once the oedipal struggle is mentioned, there seems little else to say.\(^4\) The story is reduced to the cliché of psychological archetype while its artistic qualities—its technique, subtlety, and use of literary tradition—go unnoticed. The first part of this article, then, deals with the “dominant-father” stories, seeking both to point out the oedipal struggle in several and to analyze in detail the art of one example (“Demons”).

Another problem with the attention to the domineering parent in the father-daughter stories is that not all the fathers are domineering. In fact, another figure frequently occurs, whom I call the “suffering father.” This figure typically must endure the irrational behavior of a mentally disturbed daughter who may test everything from his patience and love to his finances. While critics sometimes mention these stories, they
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have yet to notice this character type. The second part of the article, therefore, treats the “suffering-father” stories, giving detailed attention to “Stray Children.” These two groups of stories represent two sides of the same issue: the daughter’s passage to independence, which, in Oates’s work, is rarely smooth. In the “dominant-father” stories the father in some way blocks the passage; in the “suffering-father” group, the daughter is mentally incapable of making the passage.

The final goal of this article is simply to widen the discussion of Oates’s stories. Both pieces singled out for analysis have been relatively unnoticed up to now. Moreover, anyone familiar with Oates criticism recognizes that currently a few stories capture disproportionate attention. (For example, “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” has provoked at least ten studies in books and articles and has recently given rise to a movie entitled Smooth Talk.) By identifying father-daughter patterns informing a substantial number of stories, and by analyzing two little-noticed pieces in detail, the article attempts to suggest the range, consistency, and depth of Oates’s short-story art.

I

In all of the “dominant-father” stories Oates employs the daughter’s perspective. The relationship with the father is often subtly oedipal and fraught with emotions which inhibit or even preclude the daughter’s relationships with other men. As a result, each of these stories raises the question of the daughter’s liberation in some form—either from the father himself or from some restrictive circumstance he brings into focus.

In most of these stories, the father’s death or the fact of his aging helps to precipitate the crisis in his daughter’s life which offers her liberation. In “Assault” and “The Heavy Sorrow of the Body,” the daughter returns to the run-down house of a dead or dying father, in each case after an absence of fifteen years. Both of these protagonists have difficulty with passionate experience. Charlotte (in “Assault”) must come to terms with the memory of her violent rape; and Nina (in “The Heavy Sorrow”) must deal with “the violence of her love for men and the violence of her fear of them” (The Wheel of Love 333). The very fact that both of these thirty-year-old women experience a crisis at the death of a father whom they have not seen in years suggests the power of the oedipal pull. The father’s death undermines a subtle support, or removes a deeply-held assumption, and so forces a revision of their lives.

Both women have mystical experiences in connection with their fathers’ deaths: Charlotte stays up one spooky night in her father’s lonely house and faces down the possibility of his return; Nina washes
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her father’s dying body and comes to a sense of her mortality. Each achieves “liberation” of sorts. But it is a gray version of liberation. At the end of these stories we do not know for sure that either Charlotte or Nina will fully reclaim passionate experience. Still, each is ready for a new life.

There is no liberation in “By the River,” where the father manipulates the life of his daughter Helen at several turns and finally murders her for deviating from his plans. But even here, the daughter vaguely recognizes a crucial transition when she notices a few minutes before her death that her father has become old and is no longer the heroic man of her memories (Marriages and Infidelities 141). In part, Helen brings about her own destruction by her indolent refusal to outgrow her father and to take command of her own life.

In each of these stories the father is near the end of his life and the daughter near the end of her youth. She has reached the decision point: she must achieve independence or suffer living (or even literal) death. That is why violence and death so frequently haunt the “dominant-father” stories. In the balance await the joys and uncertainties of liberation or the appalling waste of an unlived life. The challenge of writing such stories is to use the oedipal archetype subtly so that it informs the story without reducing it to cliché. In both “Assault” and “The Heavy Sorrow of the Body” the father is dead and his influence diluted, so that the conflict is played out entirely in the daughter’s mind. “By the River” appears at first glance to be a testimony to the father’s oedipal rage, but, from his monologue near the end of the story, we discover that the real villain of the piece is not a tyrannical father so much as the tyrannical poverty that shapes his life. In each story Oates leavens the oedipal influence with other issues.

Of considerable interest, therefore, is Oates’s handling of “Demons,” a story about a woman who transfers her loyalty from her tyrannical father to her new-found lover after a violent confrontation. At first it appears to be a purely oedipal drama. Eileen, the protagonist, an unmarried woman in her late twenties, lives with her invalid mother, her moronic sister, an irascible dog, and her coldly domineering father. She meets her future lover when he accidentally kills the dog with his car; thereafter, he courts her in only two other meetings. After the second of these, he accompanies her home where he is attacked by her father, whom he kills with one punch. Before so much as summoning a doctor for the old man, he and Eileen make love on the drawing room sofa.

Eileen’s father represents the worst of the patriarchal tradition. Because of him, the mother has relegated herself to an invalid’s existence. His daughter Marcey, Eileen’s older sister with the intelligence of a nine-year-old, apparently contents herself to be her
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parents’ servant. Even the irascible dog, we are told, is an extension of its master, having the same gray, balding appearance. Beneath the docility of these subservient creatures, however, seethes both a hatred of the old man and a desire to escape from him. The dog constantly jerks at the leash, attempting to get away; and Marcey—in a burst of fury never specifically explained—suddenly goes after her father with a butcher knife and is subsequently committed to a mental hospital.

The story poses the question of whether Eileen herself will become one of her father’s creatures. Here Oates goes beyond the simplicities of the oedipal archetype and examines Eileen’s own ambivalence about her freedom. She despises her father’s dog, but weeps when it is killed; she recognizes Marcey’s subservient status, but envies it as well, and is at first gratified to fill the servant’s role when Marcey is committed; she longs for her lover when in the house, but, once out with him, she repeatedly insists that their love is doomed, that her father will never allow it, and even that she loves her parents too much to leave them. For all of the drama of the confrontation between father and lover, the most serious obstacles to Eileen’s success are those she meets and conquers within herself. In this internal debate her lover is just as important as he is when he meets the father. Oates makes the lover almost an alter ego who helps her discover her “masculine” side. When out walking with him, “She felt that she was half a man in this conversation, half the man she walked with and half herself” (243). Later, when she presents objections to continuing their relationship, she does so in the apparent hope that he will refute or ignore them. At the confrontation with her father, “She felt the strength of her body flow over into [the lover’s], lose itself in his” (252). She thereby manages to resist her father’s imperious commands.

The “psychology” of this story will not exactly please feminists because Eileen gains freedom from her father at the cost of dependence upon another man. Still, the lover is not a completely exterior force. She has a desire for freedom which he recognizes and to which he responds, which strengthens her desire, which further encourages him to act, etc. Her “rescue” is partly self determination; it grows out of the give and take of their relationship, sort as it is.

Eileen’s grief at her father’s death is about the same as it is at the dog’s (a brief cry on either occasion). Oates treats this scene comically and includes the cinematic touch of the lover lighting a cigarette and saying, “He was a pretty old man, you know. He lived a good life” (253). Of course, an unspoken corollary of her father’s dominance is Eileen’s sexual avoidance of other men; it is therefore appropriate that, before her father’s corpse is even cold, she confirms his overthrow by making love to his killer on the drawing room sofa, amid the odor of
"dust and caution" (254). This scene, shocking by any conventional standard, confers upon the drama the clarity of psychological archetype.

The obvious (if complex) Freudian drama of "Demons" would still be rather trite except that Oates develops other layers of meaning within it. For example, the father's tyranny is not just Freudian; it is Orwellian as well. The story takes place in a decaying big-city neighborhood which the old man keeps under preternatural surveillance. We read in the opening paragraph that both the old man and his dog "heard everything, heard whispers not meant for their ears and words not spoken aloud, heard even the echoes of words that should have faded away" (232). This capacity amounts to something like thought control. Throughout the story the lovers must take into account the father's omniscience: he somehow knows every detail of fires and vandalism that happen in the neighborhood (242); Eileen assumes that he knows of her conversations with her lover though they occur well away from the house (244); she assumes that he always watches her from the window and that his spotlight, which illuminates the yard after dark, keeps the lover at bay (248). The sterility of Eileen's life extends to the neighborhood as well because her father uses all legal means to keep out renters who might bring children (234-235). When the lover offers to call the police after hitting the dog, Eileen replies that her father "doesn't approve of police in this neighborhood. ... Except the private police. I don't know where they are. They're somewhere..." (236). Eavesdropping, spotlights, "private" police—all these belong to a neighborhood version of Big Brother.

In this world the lovers are rebels. The man, a renter, first meets Eileen in the presence of a scrawled obscenity (an "underground" celebration of sex). Later they meet like fugitives on a rainy day in a park resembling a jungle and emerge "damp and criminal" (251). In about the middle of the story, there is a miniature trial in which the father interrogates Eileen about the dog, although by then he well knows what has happened. It is a Kafkaesque scene in every way. Not only does it feature the self-abasement of the child before the father, but, like trials in Kafka, it is a staged affair in which the prosecutor hurls unanswerable questions and the guilt of the accused is a forgone conclusion. The final confrontation between lover and father features a sartorial image of political and generational struggle in the 1960s: the young man in the beige pull-over, white pants, and canvas shoes clobbers the old man in the gray vested suit. When Eileen and her man make love at the end of the story, then, they are celebrating the fall not only of the domineering father but also of the more general idea of centralized authority.

There is still another strain of this story not completely explained by either the Freudian or Orwellian drama. As the title "Demons"
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suggests, the piece shares a good deal in common with myth or fairy tale. The father's powers of surveillance are not the product of technology but of his preternatural character. He is a "demon"—inexplicably and immutably evil—rather than a fictional character in the conventional sense. It is hard, for example, to imagine him having a real past or arriving at his current personality through any process of development. He just is. With such an evil character at its center, the story is rather like an Arthurian quest romance in which a chivalrous knight overcomes a series of obstacles, storms the castle, and releases the fair damsel from the power of his blackguardly counterpart. Here, of course, the lover kills a subsidiary demon (the dog), penetrates the surveillance, and falls his opponent in single combat.

There is yet another feature which gives the story a fairy-tale-like movement. "Demons" tells the tale of a woman who makes wishes that eventually come true, a fairly common motif in folklore. In this sense, Eileen controls the main events. She wishes for the death of the dog (233), and the dog dies; she says to her lover, "my sister Marcey should go away" (244)—and in the next scene Marcey goes berserk and is carried off to a mental hospital; toward the end she wishes that her lover would brave the terrors of her father's opposition, and he shortly does. With this record for her wishes, her final statement, ending the story—"Oh, let her die!"—bodes ill for her mother, at whom it is directed (255). The features of the quest romance and the wish motif give the plot of "Demons" the almost ritualistic character of a fairy tale.

One reviewer complains that "Demons" arrives at a "wholly unconvincing conclusion" because Eileen undergoes "an entirely arbitrary initiation into selfhood." But this is true only if we judge the story by strictly naturalistic standards. The greatness of "Demons" lies in the successful integration of its many narrative patterns. The Freudian drama and the fairy-tale patterns appeal powerfully to readers but in very different ways. In "Demons" Oates combines them. She then gives these archetypal patterns a modern cast with the contemporary setting and the concern with central authority. With so many disparate parts, one might fairly expect the story to have implausible passages and disorienting shifts, but this is not so. While the story has some unrealistic elements, once accepted in its own terms, it is quite plausible and smooth. Oates makes excellent use of different literary traditions to present a classic problem in modern form.

II

In the "dominant-father" stories, the perspective, as mentioned before, is always the daughter's; the father, or even men in general, may qualify as "the enemy" from whom the protagonist seeks liberation.
But Oates herself denies writing specifically "feminist literature" because she sympathizes equally with male and female characters. The "suffering-father" stories generously illustrate this sympathy. They adopt the father's perspective and dramatize the difficulties of fatherhood in the face of a mentally disturbed daughter whose condition offers little hope of improvement. Although the father has done nothing specific to induce his daughter's state (which can range from autism to drug addiction), he feels responsible for it and suffers bewilderment and anguish as a result.

While the "dominant-father" stories frequently invoke archetype and run the risk of cliché, the "suffering-father" stories slope toward pathos. The challenge of presenting these blighted father-daughter pairs is to show what is precious in their relationship without descending into sentimentality. Oates does this most successfully when she uses the story for a wider comment, as she does in "Stray Children," the best work in this group.

In this story Charles Benedict, a Detroit city planner in a "semipublic" position, has his conventional, bureaucratic life disrupted by the sudden appearance of his illegitimate daughter. Unknown to him until now, she is the result of his first sexual experience, some twenty-six years before. She suddenly accosts him on the street, claiming to know him; she later approaches his son, visits his house, and waits outside his office—all with the implied threat that she will blackmail him with their relationship. He does in fact give her large sums of money. By the end of the story, however, he feels a good deal of love for her as well, notwithstanding his horror both at what she is and at how she chooses to live.

Oates's characterization of the protagonist at the beginning accounts for much of the story's later power. Charles Benedict seems relatively happy, but is vaguely dissatisfied with his life. Originally, he and his wife seemed like an ordinary couple, but then "Charles discovered, around his thirty-fifth year, that he was not an ordinary man after all." He starts to rise in the ranks of the city bureaucracy; he moves several times to different offices (he now has an office at the edge of downtown in the city-county building); and he discovers that his circle of acquaintances—he no longer has any real friends—changes as his promotions demand. He loves his wife but feels that she is somehow "out of focus" for him, and he thinks of her as a big sister (283); he loves his four sons but has trouble believing that they are his sons (282). Apparently he feels quite distant from the more passionate times that produced them. As a city planner, he enjoys imagining the perfect city but realizes that the real city, present and future, bears little resemblance to his vision. The requirements of his work, then, have
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disengaged him from the palpable realities of family, friends, and environment.

His illegitimate daughter, Elizabeth June Smith, is his messenger from reality. Upon first meeting her on a crowded street, he puts her off in practiced bureaucratic fashion, retreating with a smile until he can slip into a crowd of passers-by. She does manage to talk to him in his office, however, and the scene reveals a tension between them built into their very speaking styles. Charles speaks in qualified, hesitant, often unfinished sentences. In the office scene, his daughter (speaking first) overwhelms him with her racier diction and powerful emphasis:

"Jesus, you must have money! What is your wife like, huh? Some lady from around here?"
"I . . . I don't know what to . . ."
"Did you ever tell her about me?"
"I didn't know about you. I still don't . . . . I'm still not . . . ."
"My name is Elizabeth June Smith," the girl said angrily, "and you better not forget it! And you better not hand me any crap! Don't look at me like that, I can talk as loud as I want to! This goddam fancy office doesn't cut any ice with me." (287)

Apart from the girl’s contempt for both the style and amenities of his bureaucratic existence, her very tone confronts Charles with the vitality that has drained out of him in recent years. His daughter also challenges him in other ways. Although he gives her a great deal of money, she rather perversely chooses to live in a run-down section of town populated by young panhandlers and drug users operating outside the law. In going to visit her, Charles must pass through this district and see firsthand the ugly buildings and the apathetic people, the “stray children” that his city planning never will take into account. As he begins to see his daughter’s tragedy and the institutional failures that underlie it, his concept of paternal duty grows into love. For her part, the daughter turns out to have serious mental troubles. Her cowboy-like swagger in the first scene degenerates as she uses drugs and becomes ill until, in the final scene, her talk ricochets wildly between paranoia, contempt, and (when Charles gives her money) extravagant gratitude. The story ends as Charles is panhandled outside his daughter’s apartment, and, although he has refused an earlier panhandler, he gives this time “until he had nothing left to give” (301).

The story is rather Chekhovian in its effect and typical of the “suffering-father” stories. At the end plenty is left up in the air concerning both the destiny of the daughter and her relationship with her newly-found father, but the story isn’t designed to resolve these
matters. Rather, it demonstrates the effect upon Charles. He experiences in a personal way for the first time pity for those whom the family structure neglects and the city government ignores. He pities them, feels responsible for them, and knows he cannot help them. Even as he hands coins over to the panhandler, he realizes that the city’s future “must obliterate theirs” (301). The story offers no solutions for either the personal or social problems it raises. It offers only the moral education of Charles Benedict.

The other “suffering-father” stories—“Wednesday’s Child,” “Daisy,” and “Funland”—are equally without solution. In “Daisy,” the father is a poet in Europe who cares for a brilliant but mentally ill daughter in a rather incestuous relationship. The story opens with the father singing his daughter a parody of the love song “A Bicycle Built for Two.” He courts her like a lover; he gives her rings (normally a symbol of marital fidelity); he worries whenever she mentions her dead mother whom he considers something of a rival. Yet the unhealthiness of the relationship is redeemed by its tenderness and by the lack of any humane alternative. (Previous experience makes it clear that committing the daughter to an institution would be brutal.) At the story’s climax, the father recognizes that the daughter, influenced by thoughts of her dead mother, narrowly avoids opting for suicide. The story ends later that day as they walk on the cliffs together overlooking the sea. The final image of the father and daughter at the edge of the precipice expresses the reality of all the “suffering-father” stories. The current crisis passes, but the larger problem remains and disaster is never far. The father can only muddle through and be as humane as possible amid the difficulty.

It is not hard to see why the two different kinds of father-daughter stories achieve different effects. In the “dominant-father” stories, the daughter is usually of age, and, for better or worse, capable of acting in her own behalf. The result is a roughly equal conflict. In the “suffering-father” stories, on the other hand, the daughter, if not actually a child, is in some ways childlike and dependent. As a result, these pieces aspire chiefly to a finely pitched pathos as the reader can only sympathize with the characters caught in the crushing weight of circumstance.

Joyce Carol Oates examines the father-daughter theme more than almost any other writer in American literature thus far. In doing so, perhaps she is exorcising her “personal devils,” as Anne Mickelson charges; if so, it would not be the first time that good fiction has emerged from an author’s obsessions. Whatever the truth of Mickelson’s charge, we can be grateful for the quality and versatility that Oates adds to our literature’s discussion of this theme.
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NOTES


3These stories are: “Demons,” “The Assailant,” and “The Heavy Sorrow of the Body” from The Wheel of Love (New York, 1970); “By the River,” “Stray Children,” and “Wednesday’s Child” from Marriages and Infidelities (New York, 1972); “Assault” from The Goddess and Other Women (New York, 1974); “Daisy” from Night-Side (New York, 1977); and “The Witness” and “Funland” from Last Days (New York, 1984). Other stories where the father-daughter theme is significant (though less emphasized) include: “How I Contemplated the World from the Detroit House of Correction and Began My Life Over Again” from The Wheel of Love; “Concerning the Case of Bobby T.” from The Goddess and Other Women; and “Bloodstains” from Night-Side.

4See, for example, Joanne Creighton’s brief characterization of “Demons” and “The Assailant” in Joyce Carol Oates (Boston, 1979), p. 115.


6All references in the discussion of “Demons” are to The Wheel of Love (New York, 1970).


10All page references in the discussion of “Stray Children” are to Marriages and Infidelities (New York, 1972), and specifically here to p. 283.
CONFINEMENT AND ESCAPE IN JOHN CHEEVER'S
BULLET PARK

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In attempting to define what John Cheever's Bullet Park is
"about," many critics have interpreted the novel as an allegory about the
forces of good and evil.¹ For several reasons, however, no single
unified reading of Bullet Park from this allegorical perspective has
emerged. First, Cheever's main characters—Paul Hammer, Eliot
Nailles, and Eliot's son, Tony—do not function as unqualified figures
of good and evil; the latter two, especially, display both admirable and
unadmirable traits. Second, the seemingly disjointed structure of the
book resists an allegorical reading, as does the frequent operation of
chance throughout the plot. Third, Cheever's treatment of his setting,
like that of his characters, is also highly ambivalent; as its title
suggests, Bullet Park carries both good and bad news about the suburbs.
In short, these qualities make it difficult to read Bullet Park as an
allegory about the forces of good and evil, for they circumvent one of
the typical hallmarks of allegory: namely, a consistent correspondence
between the literal and the abstract.

This note offers an alternative reading of Bullet Park, based on the
premise that the novel is not primarily an allegory about good and evil
but, instead, a dramatization of the problems associated with solipsism,
confinement, and escape. In particular, this analysis will demonstrate
that Hammer, Nailles, and Tony are initially confined by their
individual brands of solipsism and that they manage to escape from this
confinement with various degrees of success as the novel progresses. In
addition to providing insight into the major characters, the perspective
of confinement and escape also clarifies Cheever's ambivalent treatment
of the suburban setting and suggests thematic similarities between
Bullet Park and other of Cheever's works. Support for this view comes
not only from the text itself but also from a 1977 interview in which
Cheever discussed his use of suburbia as a metaphor:

All my work deals with confinement in one shape or
another, and the struggle toward freedom. Do I mean
freedom? Only as a metaphor for...a sense of
boundlessness, the possibility of rejoicing. I've used three
symbols for confinement in my books [including] the
world of affluent suburbia....²
As the narrator suggests early on in *Bullet Park*, the setting "seems in some way to be at the heart of the matter." Specifically, each character's response to the suburban setting provides an index to the degree and nature of his self-confinement.

Much of Paul Hammer's story presents the case history of a spiritual disease: his "café," "a form of despair," "the classical bête noire," whose effects he can ease only by living in yellow rooms (p. 174). Despite the twisted complexity of his psychosis, Hammer pursues his quest for the perfect yellow room with a remarkably singleminded consistency. Hammer's move to Bullet Park and his subsequent decision to kill Tony Nailles seem, at first, largely unmotivated and determined by chance, but there is a method to his madness that becomes clearer when one recalls a few other solipsistic characters from Cheever's short fiction. Like Neddy Merrill ("The Swimmer"), Charlie Mallory ("The Geometry of Love"), Blake ("The Five-Forty-Eight"), and Lawton ("The Sorrows of Gin"), Hammer ultimately remains imprisoned by his attempts to impose his narrow vision on himself and on others. His fatal flaw lies not so much in the destructiveness of his vision as in his solipsism: he misinterprets chance as fate and pursues it like a monomaniac. Recalling Hawthorne, Cheever creates in Hammer a man who, like Chillingworth in *The Scarlet Letter*, embodies a deadly combination of rationalism and spiritual myopia. Ironically, although the major symptom of Hammer's malaise is its uncontrollability, he remains confined by his fanatic need for order and control and his desire to "awaken the world" (p. 245). Only superficially is Hammer a prince of anarchy and evil. In reality, he is too weighted down by his own spiritual illness to act upon and release those destructive forces.

Tony Nailles provides an interesting complement to Hammer. If his would-be assassin is trapped by cynicism, Tony is trapped, at least initially, by a different form of solipsism: namely, his extreme idealism. By retreating to his bed for 22 days straight, Tony attempts to escape from suburbia simply by refusing to live in the world. But his unnamed illness can be cured neither by this denial of reality nor by the empiricism embodied in the three doctors who come, like secular magi, to his bedside. Tony is redeemed only by the "place cheers" and "love cheers" of his mentor, the Swami Rutuola, which enable him to return to the physical world and at the same time to transcend it through his imagination. When one recalls protagonists such as Moses Wapshot ("The Death of Justina") and Johnny Hake ("The Housebreaker of Shady Hill"), it becomes clear that Cheever's most successful characters are those who, like the Swami and his disciple Tony, manage to integrate the spiritual and the mundane. The Swami Rutuola's unassuming way of life especially reflects this balance, as does his
physical appearance: "The face was slender and one of the eyes was injured and cast....This eye, immovable, was raised to heaven in a permanent attitude of religious hysteria. The other eye was lively, bright and communicative" (p. 130). Even his name suggests the rituals by which he invokes both the worldly and the mystical.

Eliot Nailles's response to suburbia provides more subtle clues to his shortcomings. His fairly straightforward acceptance of suburban life (p. 66) is deceptively appealing because it is comfortably grounded in normality. His judgment, however, limited as it is to observable facts, falls short of being a coherent vision. As he himself admits, he's just "never understood," just "doesn't get," the less obvious nuances beneath the surface of suburban life. If Hammer suggests a character like Chillingworth, Eliot suggests a character like Dimmesdale, one whose solipsism takes the form of a refusal to see his own and others' guilt.

It is this denial of evil which confines Eliot Nailles and which he must overcome. And, significantly, this need is stated in terms of a spiritual landscape:

Nailles thought of pain and suffering as a principality, lying somewhere beyond the legitimate borders of western Europe. The government would be feudal and the country mountainous but it would never lie on his itinerary and would be unknown to his travel agent. (p. 50)

The connection between Nailles's environment and his lack of awareness of evil is also suggested in the following passage:

Nailles felt, like some child on a hill, that purpose and order underlay the roofs, trees, river and streets that composed the landscape. There was some obvious purpose in his loving Nellie and the light of morning but what was the purpose, the message, the lesson to be learned from his stricken son? (p. 60)

As these passages indicate, Nailles is confined by his nostalgic view of life, which delimits both his emotions and his expression of them.

Nailles's inability to find a middle ground between losing control of his emotions and suppressing them is illustrated by several exchanges between him and others. At several points he lashes out violently: he throws his family's television set out on the sidewalk (pp. 75-76); has an "extremely shabby scene" with his wife, provoked by another man's suspicions about his own spouse (p. 112); and nearly cracks Tony's skull with a golf club when the boy speaks disparagingly about his father's job (p. 118). Yet, Nailles curtails his emotions during equally crucial situations when they would be an asset. Picking
up Tony from the police station after an incident at school, "his first impulse was to embrace the young man but he restrained himself" (p. 87). Likewise, he says nothing when Hammer suggests that Nailles kill his beloved, aging dog. Most seriously, while Nailles does love his family immensely, that love expresses itself as statically as his "picture postcard" vision of pain, "like some limitless discharge of a clear amber fluid that would surround them, like the contents of an aspic" (p. 25). Cheever's central message concerns the need for this love to be tested:

Conscientious men live like citizens of some rainy border country, familiar with a dozen national anthems, their passports fat with visas, but they will be incapable of love and allegiance until they break the law. (p. 235)

*Bullet Park*’s final line adds a disturbing dimension to Eliot Nailles’s story: “Tony went back to school on Monday and Nailles—drugged—went off to work and everything was wonderful, wonderful, wonderful as it had been” (p. 245). Were it not for this jarring note, *Bullet Park* might leave the reader with a sense of affirmation as simple and strong as Cheever’s description of the novel:

I kept thinking of William Tell: that this was a man who loved his son and was able to protect him or, as a matter of fact, save him. And I wanted to describe a love that could be implemented, that existed in other than dramatic terms.

Nailles’s continued addiction to tranquilizers suggests, however, that he does not completely break free of his confinement. In this sense, one is reminded of characters like Francis Weed ("The Country Husband") and the narrator of "A Vision of the World," characters who overcome dehumanizing elements in the suburban environment but who still remain dependent on relatively fragile protective devices.

But one must grant Nailles this: when he rescues Tony, he does translate his idealism into an act of love and will. He breaks through the "clear amber fluid" and, along with Tony, is reborn into the world of the rain that drenches them as they leave Christ’s Church. If Nailles triumphs, then it is not because he sustains his illusions; it is because he sets them aside long enough to demonstrate his love. In light of the violent yet fragile world that Cheever’s suburbanites occupy, such an achievement is no minor one. As Cheever puts it, the essence of *Bullet Park* "is simply Nailles’s love for Tony. Anything else is all in the nature of a variation."
Kathryn Riley

To summarize, a reading of *Bullet Park* from the perspective of Cheever’s concern with solipsism, confinement, and escape clarifies several points about the novel’s setting, structure, and theme. Suburbia is an eminently appropriate setting for a writer who wants to evoke an environment endowed with both desirable and undesirable qualities. Like men looking through different sides of the same prism, Hammer, Tony, and Eliot all pursue self-deceptive illusions in their attempts to escape certain inescapable features of their complex suburban world: Hammer by ignoring its positive qualities, Tony by withdrawing from it, and Eliot by ignoring its flaws. This multiplicity is reinforced by the novel’s structure: the work is not “broken-backed,” as Benjamin DeMott argues, but is instead fragmented according to the angle of vision, or side of the prism, that the narrator is showing us. In all three characters, Cheever dramatizes the inevitable need to temper idealism—a potential form of escape—with realism, the inherent confinement of living in the world. As in much of his other fiction, he suggests that man’s capacity to sustain a personal vision is at once his most dangerous and his most promising quality, a source of potential confinement or liberation, depending on the nature of that vision and the use to which it is put.

NOTES


4Hardly any commentator on *Bullet Park* has failed to point out the irony in this sentence. One reviewer also aligns it with King Lear’s litany of “nevers” (“The Portable Abyss,” *Time*, 25 April 1969, p. 109).


6Lehmann-Haupt, p. 44.
BULLET PARK

MONTRESOR'S UNDERLYING MOTIVE: RESAMPLING "THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO"

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The most crucial problem in Poe’s “Cask of Amontillado” is probably that of Montresor’s motive for immuring Fortunato. In an earlier article treating this subject—proceeding from the belief that the usual historical and religious reasons suggested by critics were inadequate—I argued that Poe develops intricate parallels between the two men in order to demonstrate the psychological process of transference: “Montresor unconsciously projects himself into Fortunato. Montresor’s revenge, then, is not a ritual of sacrifice, but of scapegoating.” My theory was that Montresor was motivated by a desire to exorcise his despised dilettantish self.¹

In retrospect, I still agree with this general interpretation, but the ascribed motive no longer seems sufficient to explain either the radical act of murder or the unusual method chosen. I wish to amend my earlier effort by suggesting a more comprehensive motive for Montresor’s actions.

Recent literary criticism has broken through the barriers of social taboo to explore new ground. Although both Poe and his characters have been psychoanalyzed, one important area of psychology has been ignored. An investigation of Montresor’s sexual nature, in fact, suggests an explanation for his homicidal act, its methodology, and its attendant guilt. Specifically, Poe’s protagonist may be a latent homosexual whose maltreatment of Fortunato arises from his attempt to cope with his own sexual identity.

Although Poe reflects the nineteenth-century reticence in dealing with homosexuality, he nonetheless offers several hints about his character’s sexual preference. Proceeding from the stereotype of Montresor as an artistic and dilettantish aristocrat, Poe foils his protagonist with Fortunato. Although extraordinary parallels exist between the two men (enumerated in my earlier article), one distinction stands out: Fortunato is married. The importance of this detail is emphasized by Montresor’s admission of his family’s decline: “The Montresors . . . were a great and numerous [italics mine] family.”² Later, he reveals that, to empty his house, he had only to trick his servants. One conclusion seems clear—that Montresor has no family living with him. Since he does reside in his ancestral “home,” it is logical to assume that he, like Roderick Usher, is the last of his
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formerly "numerous" line. Poe thus sets up an interesting mystery: given the aristocratic obligation to continue the lineage, why hasn’t Montresor done so? Might his sexual preference preclude the production of progeny?

Another suggestion of Montresor’s homosexuality involves his actions toward Fortunato. Initially Montresor describes his friend’s physique—"He had on a tight-fitting parti-striped dress"—a detail that excites Montresor into emphasizing subsequent physical contact: "I thought I should never have done wringing his hand." During their fatal journey, Montresor, caught up in the action, notes how twice his friend takes his arm and how he himself "made bold to seize Fortunato by an arm above the elbow" as well as how again "offering him my arm . . . He leaned upon it heavily." The descent into the dark recesses of the vaults culminates in a revelation of the dark side of homosexuality, the sado-masochistic act of immurement. Here Montresor not only notes that he fettered his antagonist, but also describes with relish every detail of the act.

Montresor further betrays his physical preoccupation through the use of sexual—especially phallic—images. As the story opens, Montresor immediately notices Fortunato’s "conical cap"—a sexual pun? Then, Montresor conducts his friend "through several suites of rooms to the archway that led into the vaults." They descend "a long winding staircase" until they stand "together upon the damp ground of the catacombs." Drawing a bottle of Medoc "from a long row of its fellows that lay upon the mould," Montresor knocks off its neck and hands it to Fortunato, suggesting the oral nature of his own phallic (un)consciousness. Poe even uses the Montresor family crest, a "serpent rampant whose fangs are imbedded in the heel," to reflect his narrator’s preoccupation. Montresor breaks open another wine bottle (which Fortunato immediately downs), then produces from "beneath the folds of my roquelaire a trowel." Passing through "a range of low arches," they finally arrive at the sado-masochistic chamber, where "colossal supports" hold up the roof. Upon chaining his antagonist, Montresor says, "Unsheathing my rapier, I began to grope with it about the recess." Later Montresor repeats this homoerotic symbolism: "I thrust a torch through the remaining aperture and let it fall within." The abundant sexual images, specifically designed to describe a covert encounter with another man, hint strongly Montresor’s homosexual nature.

As my earlier article showed, the immurement of Fortunato is an objective correlative for Montresor’s act of repression. Unable to deal with his homosexuality and noting the surface parallels between himself and Fortunato, Montresor makes his fellow aristocrat into his scapegoat. As he progressively isolates Fortunato with chains and then
a wall, Montresor is unconsciously transferring his homosexuality to something he will no longer have to face. Nearly finished with his ritual, Montresor hears Fortunato issue a "succession of loud and shrill screams," to which, in the manner of Robin of Hawthorne's "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," he replies in an unconscious attempt at cathartic exorcism: "I re-echoed, I aided, I surpassed them in volume and strength."

That Montresor's attempted repression is unsuccessful shows throughout his confession. Describing his crime some fifty years later in such lurid detail and seemingly without a shred of remorse suggests that the crime is less important than some more deep-seated guilt. The murder, then, is not at the heart of Montresor's deathbed confession; it is a symptom of a larger problem, much like the narrator's alcoholism in "The Black Cat." Montresor's guilt is two-fold: as a devout Catholic, he agonizes over a sexual identity deemed "unnatural" by the church; and as an aristocrat, he laments his inability to go forth and multiply. Ironically, on his deathbed Poe's narrator can no more outwardly admit to his sexual proclivity than he could have a half century earlier. Like a patient on a psychologist's couch, he reveals the truth only through veiled images and suggestions. Poe, then, seems to have anticipated Freud's assertion (in connection with the Schreber case) that a significant element in paranoid psychopathology is the projection onto others of homosexuality unacceptable to the patient.3

So, it may be that Montresor's motive for immurement is personal and/or family honor, perversity, or religious revenge. But, is it not possible also that Poe, who dealt with so many psychological problems, could have provided like his contemporary Melville an insight into the nature of homosexuality?

NOTES

1 "Retapping Poe's 'Cask of Amontillado'," Poes, 8 (1975), 10-12.


PARODY OF HEMINGWAY IN RAYMOND CHANDLER’S *FAREWELL, MY LOVELY*

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For Raymond Chandler, Ernest Hemingway was a standard-bearer of modern fiction and a must in any library; he had seen “it all” and could serve as a literary touchstone. The praise prevails, early and late, despite Chandler’s irritation with Hemingway’s damnable “self-imitation.” This mixture of admiration and irreverence toward “the old war horse” underscores Chandler’s early parody of Hemingway’s repetitive style:

Hank went into the bathroom to brush his teeth.

“The hell with it,” he said. “She shouldn’t have done it.”

It was a good bathroom. It was small and the green enamel was peeling off the walls. But the hell with that, as Napoleon said when they told him Josephine was waiting without. The bathroom had a wide window through which Hank looked at the pines and the larches. They dripped with a faint rain. They looked smooth and comfortable.

“The hell with it,” Hank said. “She shouldn’t have done it.”

Later, Chandler reveals a similar attitude by having Marlowe dub a tough talking cop “Hemingway” in two passages of *Farewell, My Lovely.* The dubbing signals, I believe, a complex parody involving several of Hemingway’s stories, aspects of character and incident, and a common symbolic device—all held together by a single theme.

In the dubbing incident Marlowe hangs Hemingway’s name on a Bay City cop who employs repetitious banter:

“He wants his gun,” he told him. He looked at me again.

“And what would you want your gun for, pally?”

“I want to shoot an Indian.”

“Oh, you want to shoot an Indian, pally.”

“Yeah—just one Indian, pop.”

He looked at the one with the mustache again. “This guy is very tough,” he told him. “He wants to shoot an Indian.”

(*FML*, 134)
Indians, of course, abound in Hemingway’s Michigan stories. Moreover, the cop’s bullying and his bullying language suggest several sources in Hemingway’s work, most particularly the hit men of “The Killers.” After the dubbing, “‘Listen, Hemingway, don’t repeat everything I say,’ I said” (FML, 134), Marlowe repeats the name several times, irritating the cop to ask, “‘Who is this Hemingway person at all?’” (FML, 138). Marlowe’s answer, “‘A guy that keeps saying the same thing over and over until you begin to believe it must be good’” (FML, 138), is an explicit statement of the criticism in Chandler’s earlier parody of Hemingway. As a result of this encounter, Marlowe ends up in a drying-out hospital where, like Nick Adams at Hirsch’s rooming-house, he sees a huge man reclining on a bed and waiting, not for hit men, but for a lead to his Velma, who will prove to be deadly enough.

The scene with the cops suggests even more important connections between Chandler’s novel and a second Hemingway story, “The Snows of Kilimanjaro.” Harry, Hemingway’s main character, has succumbed to a woman’s wealth and is dying far from the scenes he had intended to write about. The Bay City cops are similarly out of place—in L. A., outside their jurisdiction. Like Harry, they might at one time have been good at what they did; but now their professional corruption matches his gangrene. When Marlowe returns from a drugged delirium in the drying-out hospital to call upon the Bay City Police Department, he manages to commandeer “Hemingway” by mentioning his client, Mrs. Grayle, a rich, lovely, and corrupting woman. In the subsequent scene, “Hemingway” shows that, like Harry in “Snows,” he has conscience enough to be bothered by what happens to him and other cops, telling Marlowe regretfully, “‘Listen, pally,...You got me on a string, but it could break. Cops don’t go crooked for money. Not always, not even often. They get caught in the system’” (FML, 196). Marlowe ends up almost approving of the cop’s tough candor, just as many readers have ended up feeling better about Harry after his silent soul-searching and his increasing gentleness toward the woman who still supports him.

Then, too, Marlowe himself bears some resemblance to Harry. For the greater part of “Snows” Harry is dying from gangrene (the result of an inadequately treated cut), demanding liquor (which the woman warns him about, encouraging him to eat instead of drinking), and quarreling with her. When Marlowe escapes from the drying-out hospital where he had been nearly killed by a needle, he stumbles to the apartment of Anne Riordan. She feeds him, limits his drinks, encourages him to stay—not minding that it’s a place where he’s not expected to be—and quarrels with him because he won’t.
Perhaps the most important connection between Chandler’s novel and “Snows” is the use of a common symbolic device to stress the similar and similarly reiterated theme. Hemingway’s treatment of a creature being where it isn’t expected to be has its positive incorporation in the leopard of the epigraph; heroic and mystifying in its drive and ability to ascend close to “19710 feet” (“Snows,” 52), the beast contrasts Harry’s negative condition. Though the ending of “Snows” suggests that Harry is about to join the leopard and, thus, be where he isn’t expected to be, it is the leopard that hovers over the whole story as its most compelling detail.

A feature of the hard-boiled detective novel as developed by Chandler’s mentor, Dashiell Hammett, is the thematically-widening inner parable, exemplified by the Flitcraft episode in The Maltese Falcon and the grisly tale of cannibalism in The Thin Man. Chandler’s own version of the device emphatically develops the theme I have been treating and secures the link between “Snows” and its parody. In the place of the leopard, Chandler employs a comic substitute. A “shiny black bug” has turned up in Detective Randall’s office, and that office is eighteen floors above the ground. Marlowe watches it bumble around, trapping itself in corners; it’s surely out of place. All the while, a theorizing Randall warns Marlowe that his presence in this murder case is an invasion of a territory where a private eye shouldn’t be. Marlowe flabbergasts the cop by seizing the bug and exclaiming, “‘Look...This room is eighteen floors above the ground. And this little bug climbs up here just to make a friend. Me. My lucky piece’” (FML, 184). When Marlowe leaves Randall’s office, he carries the bug with him to the place where it belongs—down and outside, behind a bush in a flower bed—and gets back to work on the case.

This emblematic insect that had gotten where it wasn’t expected to be comically parodies the key symbol of “Snows,” the enigmatic leopard; but Chandler reverses the patterns of “Snows”: bug and man live on, and man works on. The man has touched his lucky piece, and luck will continue to come his way, most helpfully in the form of Red Norgaard, a good ex-cop who gets Marlowe on board a ship where he is definitely not expected to be, but where he starts things rolling toward the climactic conclusion of the book. For Harry, luck had run out—his rich woman thought so, at any rate—and for quite a few other Hemingway heroes, too, which helps to explain why you might feel you’ve heard the “same thing over and over until you begin to believe it must be good”—or decide to laugh at it in the admiring corrective of parody.
William P. Keen

NOTES

1 Selected Letters of Raymond Chandler, ed. by Frank MacShane (New York, 1981), pp. 12-13, 23, 293, 72, and 227 respectively.


3 Farewell, My Lovely (New York, 1976), pp. 133-138 and 191-200; hereafter cited in the text as FML.


5 Ibid., pp. 52-77; hereafter cited in the text as "Snows."
THE CHIVALRIC NARRATOR OF
"A ROSE FOR EMILY"

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Although the entire story of "A Rose for Emily" is funneled through an un-named first-person narrator, relatively little criticism has centered on the narrator's role in the story. In passing, both Austin McGiffert Wright and Brooks and Warren note that the narrator is not an objective viewer, but a subjective embodiment of communal feelings toward Miss Emily.1 In the first extensive treatment of the narrator as an individual, Ruth Sullivan so concentrates on a psychoanalytic dissection of the teller's infantile voyeurism that she neglects a larger behavioral pattern.2 Joseph Garrison, while stressing that the narrator is the story's focal point, finds that "we do not get the impression that the narrator has any abiding interest in Miss Emily" and concludes that the story is an artistic allegory on the impossibility of presenting objective truth.3 A close reading suggests, to the contrary, that William Faulkner has made the narrator integral to the tale, a character so interested in Miss Emily that the key to the story is how the harsh facts of her life are rendered. More precisely, the narrator possesses a dual vision of his subject that produces an ironic portrait of her as well as a surprising self-portrait.

That Faulkner wished to emphasize his narrator as character more than mere observer is shown by the author's choice of first-person narration, and by the story's forty-eight first-person references. Here is a person who has scrutinized Miss Emily for some seventy years, a person who has been so close to her that he can reproduce the sights and sounds as well as the dialogue about her for this lengthy period.4 Furthermore, he has sought out things about her life of which even she was not aware—e.g. that the Baptist minister's wife sent for her cousins, Judge Stevens's comments about her "smell," and the break-in to her home after her death. For some reason he has taken it upon himself to be her personal biographer.

Since the reader can know nothing about Miss Emily except as it is filtered through the narrator's perception of her, the reader is forced to scrutinize the narration for clues to the teller's coloring of the tale even before evaluating Miss Emily. Such an investigation reveals that the narrator, ever conscious of how the chivalric ideals of Southerners clash with the gruesome realities of Miss Emily's affair (poisoning/necrophilia), tells a mock romance de la rose.
It is important to note that the narrator’s initial comments concerning the aftermath of Miss Emily’s death—the funeral and burial—are derogatory. Miss Emily is depersonalized as a “fallen monument” and a mere object of curiosity. The Grierson house, emblematic of Miss Emily, is “an eyesore among eyesores” with “its stubborn and coquettish decay” jutting “above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps.” And she like other “august names of that neighborhood” now lies “among the ranked and anonymous graves” of Civil War soldiers. Obviously the narrator feels a sense of social inferiority to her, yet a triumph in her ultimate and permanent decline: in death “the high and mighty Griersons” are no better than “the gross teeming world” of which he himself is a member. Remember, he never speaks of himself in the singular, preferring to take refuge in the common plural.

Conversely, when the narrator describes Miss Emily’s early life, he is certainly not what Scherting calls “a naive raconteur.” Instead, he adopts the traditional chivalric perspective on her. He becomes the medieval troubadour whose ballad is “A Rose for Emily.” Like the balladeers, he focuses his story on a noble woman—“a real lady”—who is both desirous and distant from him. As the poets of yore idolized the lady, so too the narrator looks up at his lady in her castle—“a big squarish frame house that had once been white with cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies”—and describes her in quasi-religious, courtly love similes. As if surrounded by a spiritual aura, Miss Emily appears in the traditional window, “the light behind her, and her upright torso motionless as that of an idol.” Later, he limns her purity: “We had long thought of them [Miss Emily and her father] as a tableau. Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background....” After the lord of the manor, her father, dies, the lady suffers an illness, but then appears “with a vague resemblance to those angels in colored church windows.” His last vision of her alive underscores the image: “Now and then we would see her in one of the downstairs windows...like the carved torso of an idol in a niche.” His use of the window image is so frequent as to suggest a conscious use of the courtly convention.

Another major chivalric convention is that the lady must have a sensuous, illicit, difficult, and secret relationship. Appropriately, the portion of her life Faulkner’s poet-lover chooses as his matter is her affair. Homer Barron’s very name suggests a feudal rank, that he is an errant knight whose quest for adventure and conquest has brought him south. The narrator describes Barron’s appearance as that of a romantic hero: he was “a big, dark, ready man, with a big voice and eyes lighter than his face.” Furthermore, Barron is consistently pictured traveling like a knight with a “matched team of bays” and his lance-like whip. That the affair is both sensuous and illicit is implied not only by the
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town's whispers, but also by the narrator's remark "she was fallen." Despite the gossip of the townspeople, Miss Emily carries on the majority of her tryst behind the closed doors of her mansion. The secrecy of their clandestine rendezvous is underscored by the narrator's admission that, the first time Barron leaves, "We were a little disappointed that there was not a public blowing-off" and that, the last time he is seen alive, he disappears into the Grierson's "at the kitchen door at dusk one evening." The affair certainly encounters difficulty. A Baptist minister, his wife, and two cousins from Alabama try to intercede, and the lovers must endure a two-week separation.

Like the courtly love poets, Faulkner's narrator is obsessed with his subject's eyes. When she encounters difficulty with the reluctant druggist, the teller notes her "cold, haughty black eyes" and says, "Miss Emily just stared at him, her head tilted back in order to look him eye for eye, until he looked away and went and got the arsenic and wrapped it." Sitting in her window, she is "looking or not looking at us." And when the aldermen come to see her about the taxes, the narrator describes the gateway to the soul: "Her eyes, lost in the fatty ridges of her face, looked like two small pieces of coal pressed into a lump of dough as they moved from one face to another while the visitors stated their errand." Interestingly, this conceit is undermined not only by the description of her face as dough, but also by the portrait of the rest of her physique: "Her skeleton was small and spare; perhaps that was why what would have been merely plumpness in another was obesity in her. She looked bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of pallid hue." The grotesque simile suggests an other-than-courtly attitude.

How can this dual vision be reconciled? The key lies in the nature of the narrator's elusive relationship to Miss Emily, the reason he has chosen to chronicle her life. Of primary importance is the narrator's adaptation of the chivalric mode, especially his choice of his own role. While he is apparently describing only the love affair between Miss Emily and her "knight," he has also cast himself in the role of the other lover in the courtly tradition—the poet. And like the old troubadours, Faulkner's tale-teller is in love with his subject and has been for all these years. This love is also suggested by his criticism of some of the mourners, "the very old men—some in their brushed Confederate uniforms," for thinking they courted her when they came from an even older generation. In fact, as he is close to her age, it is quite possible that the narrator himself was suitor of Miss Emily, one of "the young men her father had driven away" because they were not "quite good enough for Miss Emily."

This sense of social inferiority, which is emphasized by his commenting that everyone "believed that the Griersons held themselves
Hal Blythe

a little too high for what they really were” and Miss Emily “demanded more than ever the recognition of her dignity as the last Grierson,” is compounded by jealousy toward his rival, Homer Barron, and his frustration that Miss Emily, too good for the local beaus, chose a Northern “day laborer” whose cigar-chewing, loud talking, and cussing of “niggers” points out he is no gentleman. The narrator’s irony, then, is obvious: he inflates a homicidal old maid to the role of the lady and a crude carpetbagger to that of knight-errant.

Why the narrator tells his tale, a critical question virtually ignored, becomes apparent. The teller, being in love with Miss Emily, feels betrayed when she chooses a commoner no better than himself. To rationalize that the lady was mad—he makes reference to the possibility of her insanity four times—is not enough. He must tell the tale to justify his failure to obtain the object of his love and thus to exact a measure of revenge on her. Henceforth people who hear his story will remember Miss Emily not as a beautiful Southern belle, but as worse. Fittingly, the reader’s final impression of Miss Emily comes from the narrator’s ironic use of a chivalric convention. The “long strand of iron-gray hair” resting on the pillow is not the traditional token of a lover’s endless fidelity, but a symbol of Miss Emily’s human depravity.

Thus, Faulkner’s tale-teller presents us with his own tableaux. In the foreground looms Miss Emily mocked by the chivalric frame into which she is placed, but lurking ever so subtly in the background is the frustrated, jealous, and vengeful artist himself. Indeed, the narrator’s story is his rose for Emily, but it is an ironic gift filled with poisoned thorns.

NOTES


3“Bought Flowers’ in ‘A Rose for Emily’,” SSF, 16 (1979), 341-344.

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5 My text is Collected Stories of William Faulkner (New York, 1950), pp. 119-130.

6 Scherting, p. 397.
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Though Simpson’s book adduces many opinions about the emerging American language from minor writers (especially from the first decades of the nineteenth century), he articulates his primary argument around the differing and distinctive views on language of three authors: Noah Webster, James Fenimore Cooper, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Webster promoted his version of an American language to embody his Federalist proclivities for set standards of established best usage. The dramatized tensions of Cooper’s fiction turn, at least in part, on the novelist’s acute and sensitive awareness of the social context of the speech of his characters, whose dialect usages he labored to register accurately—in opposition to Webster’s purging of such forms. In further contrast, Emerson and the Transcendentalists conceived an idealized American language, harmonious and integrated under a universal selfhood purified of the social tensions Cooper sought to portray.

Though some specifics of Webster’s program changed in the course of his long career, his goal remained to shape an American language purified from the corruption of eighteenth-century British commerce, politics, and theater. Dialect usages preserved varying and illicit forms, and exacerbated difficulties of pronouncing written forms; such usages ought to be shunned as sub-standard. To make the written language available to all, spelling should always conform to pronunciation, no matter the historical provenance of the form. Thus in the name of standardizing a pure American tongue, Webster advocated his well-known spelling reforms: terminal “or” instead of “our,” “center” instead of “centre,” and the deletion of silent forms like terminal “e” and the “k” on “ick” forms. (Other intended “reforms” like the suppression of the silent “gh” in “ough” of course never took). In tracing Webster’s views and controversies, Simpson usefully foregrounds the never-distant political program: Webster sought to formulate an American language congruent with his view of the usages of pure Anglo-Saxon, anti-Whiggish yeomen, the presumed natural supporters of Webster’s own Federalism.

Simpson recognizes the seriousness of Cooper’s concern for language, both as a novelist and as a political thinker. Cooper parted company with the New England Webster not only over specific usages (Cooper always relished dialect, for instance), but also over the uniformitarian political program lurking in Webster’s writings. Like Webster, Cooper advocated an American English which rejected a fawning dependence on British taste and whim (see his Notions of the Americans and the successive introductions to The Spy). Simpson
writes with sympathetic insight of Cooper’s career-long quest to dramatize the “struggle and conflict within the social contract” (p. 251). By taking Cooper seriously as a writer, he illuminates Cooper’s sometimes cluttered but always determined effort to forge a social and political philosophy which grasped and contained the observed diversity of American democracy. Simpson is equally useful in explaining the context for Natty Bumppo’s vocabulary, and in rehearsing Cooper’s sources and intentions for other non-standard speakers, especially his Indians.

In the implications of Transcendentalist thought for the American language, Simpson sees a diminution of the richness of tongues Cooper observed and imagined. Where Cooper saw tense conflict, Emerson and his followers saw a uniform language mirroring a harmonious society:

Transcendentalism...is founded on the paradigm of the universal selfhood, the exemplary ego that subsumes (as it offers to represent) all other egos into its normative modality. It dissolves also any observed or theorized tension between man and nature, now brought into harmony under the benign gaze of an omnipresent God. As such, Transcendentalism avoids or obscures the very questions that Cooper’s fictions have been argued to project and analyze—questions about the differences and tensions between the various elements in the social contract (which may be so wide as to be tragically unsolvable), and about the widening gap between the increasing needs of the human community and the integrity of unspoiled nature. (pp. 230-231)

Simpson wisely urges us not to accept uncritically the assumptions made from Matthesien’s American Renaissance through Ziff’s Literary Democracy that a true American language and literature originates with Emerson. Simpson reminds us that we still too often fail to weigh Cooper’s contributions to establishing an independent American culture along side the program of the Transcendentalists.

The Politics of American English is a valuable overview of recent work on the formation of the national language. The close readings of Cooper’s fiction, with the resulting density of detail on his disposition of language, is especially rewarding. (As an editor of the SUNY edition of The Pioneers, I found his twenty pages devoted to the first of the Leather Stocking Tales first-rate critical use of textual research.) Indeed, Simpson’s enthusiasm for setting Cooper up against the Transcendentalists leads to his only obtuse point: arguing that words for Natty Bumppo (unlike Emerson) are arbitrary counters created as social conveniences, and thus always descriptive, never imaginative.
Simpson apparently forgets the flights of poetry of the young Natty in The Deerslayer, to which some readers (like D. H. Lawrence) have responded with ardor.

Reading Simpson is a joy. His theses are clearly stated, and extensive historical research effortlessly marshalled. The political issues he examined are skillfully woven into the fabric of the argument. And Simpson’s own prose style is a triumph: a matrix of British academic prose spiked with the energy of American locutions and idioms—American English at its best.

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Two thousand nine hundred and fifty-two pages of Poe. What a lot of Poe for only $55.00—less than two cents a page. These two handsome volumes in the Library of America series do indeed rival the famous Pléiade editions of French classical authors in heft and feel, in typeface and binding (complete with maroon ribbon bookmark), not to mention quality of editing.

Both volumes have been edited with care and intelligence, with the convenience of the reader obviously in mind. For example, Quinn includes the illustrations to the four “plate articles”: “Some Account of Stonehenge, the Giant’s Dance,” “The Island of the Fay,” “Morning on the Wissahiccon,” and “Byron and Miss Chaworth,” thereby making a lot more sense out of these pieces by providing the context.

For his splendid Essays and Reviews volume Thompson has used the original source for almost all of them. He includes over 125 out of the nearly 1000 pieces that Poe printed (and reprinted) during his lifetime in one volume that easily fits into the hand. What a pleasure not to have to refer so often to those seventeen little volumes of the 1902 Harrison edition, with its inconvenient index. This is a real boon to all but the most specialized scholar, and a revelation to the General Reader for whom presumably the entire series is being published. These 1500 pages of essays, reviews, marginalia, etc. on a variety of subjects, may at last convince her or him that Poe was not just a writer of spooky stories. Here is the whole of Poe before us at last in a readable and (considering the price of books these days) affordable form.
The Essays and Reviews are conveniently arranged under six separate subsections: Theory of Poetry, Reviews of British and Continental Authors, Reviews of American Authors and American Literature, Magazines and Criticism, The Literary and Social Scene, and Articles and Marginalia. The reviews are arranged alphabetically by author, thus making it easy to locate them without consulting the very useful index. Readers interested in dates of publication will find the name of the periodical and date of publication at the end of each selection. And Thompson provides another useful aid in his note on the texts: a chronological short-title catalog containing the original publication data of the texts he reprints in this edition.

Quinn’s edition of Poetry and Tales includes The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym (reprinted from the first edition), “The Unparalleled Adventures of One Hans Pfall,” “The Journal of Julius Rodman,” and Eureka, using Roland W. Nelson’s 1975 dissertation edition as text. Poe’s Preface to Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque and his description of “The Folio Club” are both found at the beginning of the Tales section. It was a good idea to print these in this volume, although their placement together here may be slightly misleading to the casual reader.

Poetry and Tales preserves the spellings, punctuation, capitalization, and wording of the original texts. Quinn sets forth his procedure as follows: “Although typographical errors have been corrected, errors for which Poe was presumably responsible have not....The reader may be advised that [errors in foreign words and phrases] are not misprints but rather accurate transcriptions of what Poe, for whatever reason, let stand uncorrected.” The notes to this volume include translations of foreign phrases, explanations of terms, and other useful information, but they do not presume to supply critical interpretations.

In all but one case Quinn reprints the last-revised versions in which Poe’s own editorial hand can be discerned. He deliberately rejected Poe’s revised text of “The Island of the Fay” in favor of the earliest one because Poe later omitted allusions to the plate. When Quinn does not use the original source he reprints texts from the Mabbot or Stovall editions, as, for example, in those cases where they had access to the Lorimer Graham copy of The Raven and Other Poems. In view of this it seems likely that these volumes will be widely used by students and scholars as well as by General Reader.

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In his excellent essay in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, G. R. Thompson reminds us of the modern tendency to pigeonhole Poe’s personality and his work into various dualities: i.e., the Romantic poet versus the ratiocinative theorist, the superficial Gothic writer versus the keen observer of abnormal behavior. Essentially, in analyzing his place amid the American canon we have ironically mimicked Poe’s tendency to present all phenomena as a series of conflicting and ultimately untenable dichotomies. Granted, a few talented critics have occasionally shunned the easier intellectual path and traveled along interpretatively daedal roads of pluralistic perspectives, but we the wayward majority have contented ourselves with the simplicity of bifurcation. I am confident that those students of Poe who peruse *The Poe Log* will discover that such analytical approaches are overly reductive. This masterful presentation of the diurnal world of Poe offers us a perspective free from a biographer’s mandate to interpret. Consequently, rather than the reordering of evidence to fit a theory, Thomas and Jackson painstakingly chronicle only the verifiable, permitting us to witness the complex interplay of circumstance and event surrounding each literary effort and biographical incident.

For instance, of late I have casually tried to correlate the relationship between events in Poe’s life and the vicissitudes of his cosmological philosophy. In particular, I had entertained a simplistic explanation for the odd serenity that underlies the nihilism in *Eureka*. I suspected that Poe’s lengthy reconciliation to his wife’s death contributed to his blissful belief in a universe destined for nothingness. Certainly Poe had previously explored in his writing pessimistic theories, but he never imbued them with such sublime depths as he did in *Eureka*.

I do not dismiss the impact of Virginia Poe’s death upon the treatise, but I have revised my perception after going through *The Poe Log*. Events in early 1847 offered encouragement to Poe’s artistic conceit. On one hand, he found a receptive audience abroad (particularly in France), and that newly earned reputation was duly reported in American periodicals. On the other, his libel suit against the *New York Mirror* for printing a scathing attack on him (by Thomas Dunn English) ended in his favor, which he probably saw as vindication of his literary prowess in the “Literati” sketches. Also, during those months Poe believed that his proposed literary journal *The Stylus* would finally be launched, promising him the unrestricted forum he sought throughout his career. Together these events motivated him to
accept the import of his past writings and to laud their philosophical consequence. Via the guidance of *The Poe Log*, moreover, I could extend my once limited perspective. The editors detail how Poe complied to a request to recite *Eureka* in late October 1848. On 5 November, responding emotionally to frustrating circumstances in his complex relationship with two women, Poe unsuccessfully attempted suicide by swallowing laudanum. Could his recent reacquaintance with his own sublime resignation in *Eureka* have calmed his thanatophobia sufficiently to permit contemplation of such an act? I suspect that most first perusals of *The Poe Log* will tempt readers toward similar speculations. Its artful format, terse explicitness and editorial restraint do inspire critical imagination. Granted, there are probably omissions that will prompt Poe scholars to reach into the closets of memory, but I do not foresee the sort of supplements that were needed for *The Melville Log*.

My only quarrel with *The Poe Log* is that on occasion it fails fully to realize its ultimate purpose. Like myself, other students of Poe will initially devour the volume page by page. The intermittent narrative format used by Thomas and Jackson does facilitate reading the text as if it were a standard biography. After that first encounter, though, the scholar will treat it as an indispensible reference to confirm or explore new avenues and related side paths about a literary hunch. Then, some editorial decisions (I suspect financially motivated) will detract from the quality of the volume. For example, rather than deal with their policies explicitly in a preface, the editors at times bury them in notes within the text itself: i.e., the silent corrections of misspellings in excerpts of printed matter and in the use of the name Allan. Also, I would prefer an exhaustive reference system. Thomas and Jackson do provide valid reasons for their slightly limited index. It will suffice for most purposes, yet one may feel frustrated when searching for some biographical curio. The text would probably note the incident or name, but the index may not provide ready reference to it. Such flaws are insignificant, however, given the resplendent care devoted to each fact. I expect that ten years from now *The Poe Log* will have had an impact on scholarship commensurate with the influence Mabbott's *Collected Works* has had during this decade.

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Relatively little critical attention has been paid to Poe's use of landscape in spite of the fact that it has been noticed by many scholars and that Poe himself seems to go out of his way to draw our attention to it. One significant exception to this neglect is Kent Ljungquist, who now presents the fruits of his investigations in this revealing book, some of it new, some of it reworked from earlier essays, such as his interesting and original study of romantic titanism in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*.

After a useful survey in his opening chapter of Poe's awareness of and use of landscape in his tales, poems, and criticism, Ljungquist begins with a study of *The Journal of Julius Rodman* and ends with a study of "Ligeia" as a "fictional 'landscape of the mind'." Ljungquist avoids the obvious approach by postponing his discussion of the first landscape pieces that might come to mind until later in the book, placing them in the context of his overall view of the differences between sublimity and pictorialism. Thus, he places "The Island of the Fay," "The Domain of Arnhem," and "Landor's Cottage" in the context of Poe's skeptical attitude toward the value of the unbridled imagination.

Of the sublime in Poe Ljungquist writes: "For Schiller and Kant, and I think for Poe, the sublime connects tangentially with natural infinitude; it more closely suggests an ideal, supersensible realm. For the experience of the old sailor in "A Descent Into the Maelström" does not so much consist in a delight in positive pleasure but in a sense of admiration and respect." Ljungquist reads the tale neither as an outright rejection of rationality nor as a celebration of man's ratiocinative power, but as representing "man's enlarged, strained faculties coming to grips with nature's grandeur and horror and finally achieving a conception of the ideal, super-sensible sublime."

After "A Descent" Poe turned from the sublime to more restrained and subdued landscape techniques. This tale, Ljungquist says, "marks his triumph in the sublime mode but also the liquidation of its aesthetic possibilities." "Mellonta Tauta"—in which Poe recasts serious elements from *Pym* into a satirical mode—shows Poe's further disenchantment with the sublime.

Poe's later treatments of the sublime and his comments upon it in his criticism show an eventual weariness with the subject. Ljungquist supposes, correctly I think, that "his disillusionment with this aesthetic mode may have been hastened by his antipathy to certain cultural assumptions prominent at the time." It had become outmoded by the
1840s [Thomas Cole's "Essay on American Scenery" (1836) had summed up the prevailing national views on the sublime], and Poe did not want to use it to support views of national or cultural superiority. So when he did use the sublime he chose locales that were distinctly non-American, as in "Hans Pfaall," "MS. Found in a Bottle," and "A Descent Into the Maelström."

Poe was thus led in the 1840s to move away from vastness and grandeur to an aesthetic of the picturesque that used more circumscribed settings. Ljungquist surveys Poe's use of this term in his criticism, particularly in "Autography," a source seldom used by Poe critics, and in "The Fall of the House of Usher," which he says is Poe's most comprehensive exercise in the picturesque mode. Of Poe's "Autography" Ljungquist writes that Poe's comments on the writing style of contemporary authors "remain meaningful generalizations on the picturesque because of his tacit equation between the effect of an author's handwriting and his pictorial creativity." Poe noted, for example, that the hand of N. P. Willis compared with that of Fitz-Greene Halleck had "the same grace, with more of the picturesque, and consequently, more force."

But the picturesque is associated with a number of qualities, including vigorous selection of details, the use of variation and contrast rather than the uniformity demanded by the sublime; the interplay of light and shadow; verisimilitude; and "character," a term that indicated a union of a place and personality, setting and psychology. These qualities, Ljungquist says, are nowhere better illustrated than in "The Fall of the House of Usher," where we find such examples as the framing of the landscape features of Usher's domain, the attraction of the narrator's attention by a series of vigorous details, the gradual unfolding of the scene by a succession of visual effects, the intensification or moderation of light and shadow: all picturesque elements that provoke the reader's curiosity about Usher's tortured psyche amidst a precariously balanced, if disintegrating, setting.

Like some other critics, notably Richard Wilbur and, more recently, Joan Dayan, Ljungquist is unwilling to take Poe's descriptive landscape pieces at face value, but sees them instead as examples of "picturesque disorder": deceptive dream-lands that mirror his own distrust of an ironical distance from the notion of a "fairyland" created by a dreaming narrator. Wilbur has already observed the parodic elements in the early poem "Fairy-Land"; Ljungquist goes a step further to connect this poem with Poe's negative attitude toward the subject in the review of Joseph Rodman Drake's The Culprit Fay and in the sketch, "The Island of the Fay," with what he views as parodies of certain attitudes and literary conventions found in Romantic nature poetry. This is perhaps Ljungquist's most interesting chapter, since...
here he deals with those Poe items that are most closely associated with landscape and offers some new ideas about them. His discussion of "Landor's Cottage," for example, goes beyond source study to look at Poe's themes from the vantage point of the sublime and the picturesque.

This is a book filled with new insights into individual tales and poems by Poe, shaped by a theory of the sublime and the picturesque in landscape painting and writing (but unfortunately marred by numerous typographical errors). The book is primarily useful, I think, for its comments on various individual works by Poe (including a new reading of "Ligeia" in the context of landscape), but it also provides a solid theoretical background for them.

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As I read Fisher's collection of essays, *Poe and Our Times*, I was repeatedly reminded of that afternoon in June 1982, when, standing at the head of a line at the Endicott Bookstore on Manhattan's Upper West Side, watching Isaac Bashevis Singer autograph my copy of *The Collected Stories*, I'd asked this great and honored man if he had ever been influenced by Edgar Allan Poe. The influence of Poe is, after all, the focus of Fisher's book; it furnishes, as Fisher states, the "single major theme" of the fourteen essays included. Indeed, the contributors to *Poe and Our Times* consider Poe's influence on poets and critics, playwrights, fiction writers, and scholars.

Relying upon Paul Valéry's notebooks and correspondence, Lois Vines reveals Poe's influence on the poet, and assesses the relationship between Poe's "The Philosophy of Composition" and Valéry's life-long study of the creative process. With care and cogency, Laura Jehn Menides treats the varied evaluations of Poe by William Carlos Williams and T. S. Eliot. Discussing Charles Baudelaire's fascination with Poe, and his creation of the romantic French Poe, Roger Forclaz considers, too, Claude Richard's challenge of this legend. Furthermore, the persistence of the legendary Poe in the American theater and the difficulty of dramatizing the "'man behind the legend'" are ably delineated by John E. Reilly.

Comparing thematically Poe's influential detective stories with his enduring "unsolved mysteries," Bruce I. Weiner contends that the latter
are "more compelling because more akin to our experience of mystery in the world." Considering Edith Wharton's short story "The Duchess at Prayer," Eleanor Dwight reveals the influence of Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado" on both language and details of plot and setting. Kent Ljungquist persuasively argues that Poe's "Eleonora" influenced language and imagery in F. Scott Fitzgerald's This Side of Paradise, and that Poe's "To Helen" shaped such elements in Fitzgerald's Tender Is the Night.


Finally, D. M. McKeithan and Henry W. Wells elaborate upon the lives of two great scholars, Killis Campbell and Thomas Ollive Mabbott—men who were vitally influenced by Poe, and who, in turn, vitally influenced our understanding of him.

Clearly, as this fine volume attests, a variety of important writers have been vitally influenced by Poe. Yet perhaps, I wondered, as I finished Fisher's book, casting back to that afternoon in the Endicott Bookstore, the word "influenced" may be, in some cases, too weak. I vividly remember that in response to my inquiry as to whether Poe had influenced him, Isaac Bashevis Singer had paused from inscribing my book, turned up to me with gleeful eyes and grin, and declared, emphatically, "Not 'influenced'—'inspired'!"

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Joan Dayan's *Fables of Mind*, as suggested by the subtitle, is an inquiry in the philosophic sense—an exploration of Poe's views regarding the human mind and the dilemma of knowing and knowability as the mind interacts with the facts of the material universe. Dayan
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contends that Poe's tales "are complicated critiques of the law of identity and contradiction, the law of cause and effect, and of any abstract notion of body and soul" (p. 3). The key word in these critiques is "convertibility," the means by which "the facts of matter can be turned into suppositions of mind" (p. 9). Such convertibility leads to the "ruling idea" of Poe's fiction—"the reduction, pulverization, and materialization of the very idea of having an idea" (p. 198). Dayan goes on to suggest that Poe's philosophic skepticism about knowing is revealed not only in the twists and turns of his plots, but also in the very language he employs in delineating those plots, a language "that keeps us wondering in the variable realm of the either/or" (p. 7).

Dayan begins with Eureka, where the universe according to Poe is a physical demonstration, through the forces of attraction and repulsion, of convertibility. Dayan herself accomplishes a necessary bit of convertibility in this chapter, revealing that the hoaxes and jests are part of the grand design Poe had in mind: "Simply stated, Poe refuses to choose between spirit and matter, or prophecy and jest; a mixture of both will give the truest and most poetical 'view' of the universe" (p. 36). Even Poe's language, in its uncertainty, is used to demonstrate the principle involved: "Poe believes in the limitations of our mind, and he proves this belief by luring us with concord and giving us chaos" (p. 27). Hence in Eureka we encounter "a diction composed of two warring strains (distinctness and abstraction), coerced into reciprocity" (p. 46) in order to "prove anything not provable (the paradoxical labor of Poe's best tales)...." (p. 52). The end result is that in Eureka "we confront simulations of cosmic consolidation and fragmentation through a language alternately condensed and digressive. In this difficult dynamic, the status of 'truth' is itself questioned" (p. 78).

From Eureka Dayan shifts to the landscape pieces, "The Domain of Arnheim" and "Landor's Cottage," both dealing with the mad attempt to convert the material world into a representation of the creator's mind. The tales of women—"Berenice," "Morella," and "Ligeia"—"demonstrate how profoundly Poe felt the need to annihilate a sure notion of identity and contradiction....Here, Poe wants to push his reader to the point where seeming opposites—what is and is not, man and woman—can be converted into and dismantled or replaced by each other" (p. 134). Finally, Dayan deals with the nature of life and death as set forth in "A Dream," "A Decided Loss" ("Loss of Breath"), "The Bargain Lost" ("Bon-Bon"), and "Eleonora." Here, "Poe proves, by his ambivalent or ambiguous writing...that questions of identity are not so much philosophic as linguistic difficulties. And even questions of life
and death, body and soul are no more than a wrangling with words” (p. 201).

Dayan’s is a tough-minded book, requiring of the reader the same careful attention she has applied to Poe. Although at times assertive rather than demonstrative, opaque rather than clear, it nonetheless rewards the diligent reader with an insightful explication of the intricacies of Poe’s thought and art. Several books about Poe have appeared recently; Dayan’s is one of the more important.

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Hawthorneans who cut their literary teeth on the formalism of New Criticism have persistently looked askance on psychoanalytic interpretations of Hawthorne’s works. Biographically oriented readings have likewise been suspect. Gloria Erlich’s authoritative and illuminating book should compel such purists to reconsider their position. With a thorough knowledge of Hawthorne’s fiction at her disposal, Erlich combines psychological theory and a close reading of the Hawthorne-Manning family correspondence to identify a network of family themes that form the substructure of Hawthorne’s writing. Not only does she provide valuable information about a period of Hawthorne’s life that biographers have largely ignored—the childhood years that were dominated by his uncle Robert Manning, but she also gives us new insights into such perplexing and psychologically disturbing stories as “The Wives of the Dead” and “Roger Malvin’s Burial.”

It has taken almost twenty years for the Oedipal conflicts analyzed by Frederick Crews in *The Sins of the Fathers* (1966) to be related to a real-life father surrogate. Erlich convincingly identifies Uncle Robert in the role and documents the ambivalent relationship Hawthorne had with his mother’s brother, the man upon whom he had to rely for guidance and support after his father’s death, but whose authority he nevertheless resented. The form that this latent hostility takes in Hawthorne’s fiction is outlined by Erlich; one motif will immediately be recognized by Hawthorne buffs—“the triangular pattern of a young man, a sexually tempting young woman, and an older man who has a blighting effect on the younger one.” Readers will also encounter an occasional fillip. Who would have credited Uncle Robert’s scientific management of his
SALEM fruit orchards with having contributed to Hawthorne’s aversion to horticultural experimentation? “Rappaccini’s Daughter” thereby acquires another dimension.

The third chapter, “The Inner Circle: Hawthorne’s Women,” details how Hawthorne’s mother and two sisters shaped his concept of women and became models for his fictional creations. Most attention will undoubtedly be paid to Erlich’s startling and original proposal that the image of the “sexually tempting but taboo dark woman” to be found repeatedly in Hawthorne’s fiction has its source in repressed incestuous feelings toward his sister Elizabeth.

Equally novel and provocative in Erlich’s account of how Hawthorne came to write his acknowledged masterpiece, The Scarlet Letter. Her book actually begins in medias res, with Hawthorne at his midlife crisis. Drawing on Daniel Levinson’s and Erik Erikson’s theories about midlife creativity and the adult life cycle, Erlich clarifies the burst of creative activity that marked Hawthorne’s career at the age of forty-five, the year that his mother died and that he lost his custom-house job. Of less general interest is the concluding chapter. Readers may find it as painful to read about Doctor Grimshawe’s Secret as those who have tried to read this chaotic and fragmented unfinished novel have found the work itself. Both pieces should, however, be required reading for those die-hards who disdain the relevance of a psychological approach. Hawthorne’s failure artistically to control the compulsive deep-rooted forces within him in his final writing attempts gives us a clear picture of the obsessive themes that he elsewhere skilfully embodies in some of his best works.

In her preface, Erlich explains what her book is and is not: “It is not a literary biography or a psychobiography or a work of literary criticism, although it has elements of all three. Perhaps we should call it a thematic study of the continuities between Hawthorne’s life and art, the psychological and experiential sources of his fiction.” The book does indeed defy categorization, but we do not have to pigeonhole it to recognize it for what it is—a valuable piece of scholarship and criticism. It has already won its author the prestigious MLA Prize for Independent Scholars, generated a paperback edition, and become a staple reference on the Hawthorne circuit (I noted at least two acknowledgements in papers read at the 1986 Hawthorne Society conference in Maine). Erlich’s study will continue to serve scholars and aficionados alike. She has given us an opportunity to better understand the man and his works.

Lea Newman
North Adams State College


These recent titles enhance the Northwestern-Newberry Melville edition in progress and increase our debts to those who had hands in the making. With *The Confidence-Man*, Volume Ten, the edition is now two-thirds completed. Although every Melvilean eagerly awaits *Moby-Dick* from these hands, the present pair of books ought to stanch for a time those who wait. Useful texts and many extra’s await those who open these books.

A sound rationale for copy-text from the first American edition of *The Confidence-Man* appears in the “textual Note” for that volume. The “Historical Note,” of 102 pages, sets forth background and analytical information. Variants are recorded, notes to manuscript fragments provided, and a facsimile of “Melville’s Indian-Hating Source”—James Hall’s *Sketches of the West* (1835)—included. Altogether, text and apparatus stand as more than merely functional.

*The Piazza Tales* volume divides into four bodies of texts: 1. *The Piazza Tales* proper. 2. uncollected prose (including non-fiction) 3. reconstructed lectures (from Merton Sealts’s *Melville as Lecturer* [1957]) and 4. attributed items. Ascriptions for these last to Melville is based primarily upon internal evidence. Merton Sealts’s “Historical Note” (of nearly 180 pages!) comes to us as one more of the scholarly undertakings by this professor that will long maintain its factual importance and that—unlike so much so-called “scholarship” in these times—is excellent prose as well. Melville the writer of short fiction and of brief non-fictional work is, as has been so often the case, Sealts’s topic. Since he pioneered in promoting this aspect of Melville, and since the short fiction in particular has captured and recaptured attention and analyses from and by many other academics, such an essay comes naturally from his desk. To supplant the customary presentation of Melville’s work in short forms as part of his later years in authorship, a revaluation based on Sealts’s work here will be in order. What the few have known will be accessible to the many, and so another plus for the Melville edition may be tallied. Melville’s acquaintance with the English Romantics, notably Byron and Moore, as
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well as with the Arabian Nights, not surprisingly, are linked with his own ventures into Gothicism. This subject invites further exploration to supplement what has been done. Seals likewise illuminates such matters as Melville and Hawthorne, Poe, or Irving: Melville and the periodical world of his day, Melville and American thought. By others, the textual notes, comments on sources, and the facsimile of Amasa Delano’s account that underlies “Benito Cereno,” evince like breadth and depth in Melville scholarship. Along with Lea Newman’s excellent G. K. Hall overview of the short fiction, this volume serves as a bibliographical guide to Melville’s shorter prose writings.

All in all, the two latest volumes in the Northwestern-Newberry edition supply an embarrassment of riches for the study of Melville. We come away from them with a sense of facts handled well but without pedantry, and we return for additional dips into or lingerings over primary and secondary sections. “Magisterial” is the term undeniable when one has once turned their pages and read with an alert eye. More of this edition is what we ask.

Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV

The University of Mississippi

Barton Levi St. Armand. Emily Dickinson and Her Culture: The Soul’s Society. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. 368 pp. $32.50 (Cloth); 1986, $14.95 (Paper)

No one, I believe, can ever read Emily Dickinson again in quite the same way after reading this splendidly interdisciplinary study. Barton St. Armand, Professor of English at Brown University, uses his wide and special knowledge of mid-nineteenth-century literature, literary theory, art, religion, and popular culture to explicate the poems of Emily Dickinson in terms of the personal, intellectual, generic, and stylistic background out of which they came. Starting with the concept of the portfolio, that usually feminine patchwork quilt-like compilation of highly personal literary sketches and fragments so characteristic of the middle century, he goes on to read Dickinson’s work in relation to her time’s images of death, sentimental fiction and Gothic romance, “image of heaven,” often grotesque folk art, and conventions of portraiture and landscape painting. Though he bases his book in part on his lively acquaintance with a wide range of modern Dickinson scholarship, he has eagerly and understandingly explored many hitherto overlooked or slighted areas of Dickinson’s emotional, intellectual, and artistic background. The results are new and exciting.
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One of the merits of the book is that, like many of the best of Dickinson’s poems, it sticks close to Amherst while stretching out toward Tunis. As his example of a portfolio St. Armand uses the scrapbook of Mary Warner, one of Dickinson’s closest friends. The landscape painting of the era he exemplifies through meticulous examination of the art collection of Emily’s brother Edward Dickinson. He constantly uses Dickinson’s and her circle’s letters and is careful always to document Emily’s nearly certain familiarity with a book before he discusses it in relation to her. Yet, like Thoreau at Walden, by staying very close to Amherst St. Armand travels afar. For, as he convincingly shows, mid-century Amherst was surprisingly literate and outreaching. As well as its enthusiasm for Sigourney, Higginson, and a host of other now disparaged authors, it was profoundly influenced, as might be expected, by Emerson. And from across the Atlantic the voice of Ruskin rang clear. The book is excellent cultural history. It deftly interweaves the specific folk culture and intellectual and religious heritage of the Connecticut River Valley with the larger fabric of the era’s religious, literary, and artistic milieu to present a unified, interlocking, understandable pattern. This was the cloth out of which Emily Dickinson’s poems were made.

But the book does not rest there; it is also first rate criticism. St. Armand’s interpretations of specific Dickinson poems in terms of her time’s portrait and landscape paintings are entirely convincing. His comments on the connotative meaning of colors, particularly in the sunset poems, ring true. He shows how changes in her poetry throughout Dickinson’s career in part parallel the changes in nineteenth-century landscapes. Similarly, his delineation of the often ambiguous and never quite straightforward relationship between Dickinson’s poetry and the Connecticut River Valley’s residual Puritanism is also exceedingly helpful to the understanding and full appreciation of her work. How complex a mixture of religion, sentimental love, and artistic fiction they embody, and how many subtle nineteenth-century allusions and nuances have we hitherto missed! St. Armand moves from subject to subject, never treating them merely for their own sakes but unfailingly employing them in lucid and practical explication of the poetry itself. Nor, having once introduced any subject, does he ever permanently leave it; no chapter ends at its ending but continues a vital presence till the book’s final conclusion. Thus, though in one way refreshingly untheoretical, the book as a whole has a complex and satisfying critical unity.

My only objections to Emily Dickinson and Her Culture are minor. St. Armand too often uses the term “crucifixion” in regard to poems which, though they talk about agony and pain, do not really even metaphorically involve crucifixion itself. He thus weakens and
cheapens a word that he elsewhere needs in its full strength. For instance, in his discussion of the poem “The Lilac is an ancient shrub” (p. 289) he twice on one page uses the term, yet I look at the poem and say, “Where is the cross? Where is Golgotha?” The end of Melville’s Billy Budd unmistakably hints at crucifixion, but here the word is strained too far. The same objection arises to the employment of the word in the discussion of “There’s a certain Slant of Light” (pp. 239-240). The general interpretation of the poem is admirable. But speaks, a “murderous blunt instrument,” scourging, and actual crucifixion do not appear in the poem. The metaphor is again, and this is not the only other place, pushed too hard. Moreover, in the same passage St. Armand is much too clever in his strained pun between “air” and “heir.” There is no evidence to justify his reading. Otherwise his explications are solid, well expressed, and tremendously enlightening. This is a thoroughly good book.

Curtis Dahl
Wheaton College


Jerome Loving’s Emily Dickinson: The Poet on the Second Story, is a provocative book, but rather in the fashion of the irritant that provokes the oyster to produce the pearl. It frustrates as much for what it doesn’t do, and should have done, as for what it actually accomplishes. What it accomplishes is a great deal: most important, it makes one think critically about Dickinson, but whether it will ultimately appear as some strange hybrid furniture design, like an early Victorian couch combining the seriousness of the Empire style with the capriciousness of a Rococo revival, or whether it is truly innovative in its eclecticism, only time will tell.

The first thing that Loving does is to decapitate Dickinson, and consider her as a “disembodied voice,” speaking to us through her poetry like those nineteenth-century Spirit Guides who chose trumpets and tamborines as their instruments of other-worldly articulation. Loving’s Dickinson is decidedly a “rapping spirit” in both senses of the word, antique and modern; she continues to knock at the doors of our twentieth-century perception and consciousness, while she also has a definite story to tell. Dickinson tells this story from the second story of her room in the Dickinson Homestead on Amherst’s Main Street, but unlike the “second story” of a work which Loving constantly
parallels with Dickinson’s narrative, Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, Dickinson’s is a twice-told tale. The subject of Loving’s ghost-busting is, as he tells on page x of his “Preface,” the “mind alone,” but this returns us to an ethereal, bluestocking Emily that we have met too often before in the received tradition of Dickinson scholarship.

Naturally it was an image projected by the poet herself; as Thomas Wentworth Higginson, her chief literary correspondent and later co-editor, observed in a letter to her written on 11 May 1869. “I have the greatest desire to see you, always feeling that perhaps if I could once take by the hand I might be something to you; but then you only enshroud yourself in this fiery mist & I cannot reach you, but only rejoice in the rare sparkles of light.” Higginson’s molten metaphor, suggestive of alchemical transmutation, the fiery furnace of creativity, and the glowing apparitions of the gods, is more on target than Loving’s use of Keats’s “Cold Pastoral” of “Ode on a Grecian Urn.” He insists again that Dickinson’s verse is sculptural, that she “is the poet of the ‘mind alone,’ and not really the poet of the body” (p. 8), while he forgets another category of perception that combines both mind and body, and which really is the *locus classicus* of Dickinson’s work. This is “sensation,” and while Dickinson can be coldly, even icily analytical in her poems, she is always analyzing sensations, and thus is the direct heir of late Romantics like Shelly and Byron and Keats, whose cry was, after all, “O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts.”

We miss the fact that Victorians like Dickinson had the whole range of Romantic styles and concerns, from Wordsworth and Coleridge onward, to choose from; there were a plethora of revival styles available, and while Dickinson does remain peculiar in her choice of American Colonial (hymn meters), she is not unique (Maria Lowell’s poems and Christina Rossetti’s English “Sing-songs” are close parallels). Professedly, Loving is not interested in the “facts” of Dickinson’s life and art, though I think that her poetry demands just such a historicist grounding; indeed, we have the testimony of eyewitnesses that she did not compose her poetry solely on “the second story” of the family mansion, but often in the kitchen itself, in between or even in the midst of the baking of breads and the making of puddings. As her niece remembered, she was fastidious about her culinary etiquette, and would use only a silver spoon to beat with. Isn’t even this seemingly trivial fact relevant to her poetical experimentation, her constant altering and mixing of the basic recipe of her verse? Like the mandarin who would permit no private audience unless he was absolutely fully dressed and fully fit for the occasion, Dickinson would allow no failed meringues or scorched “rye & injun” bread (for which she won a second prize of seventy-five cents at the Amherst Cattle
Show in 1856) to issue from the workshop of her mind. What went into the letters was fully trimmed and finished, and one of her few public appearances in print was seriously adulterated by another hand, much to her strong disgust.

For physical facts, Loving substitutes a mythology of the closing down of American poetic possibilities with the advent of Civil War: “Action was not possible for the American Scholar. Only psychic necrophilia remained for the artist” (p. 28). Since the promised Transcendental Millenium did not arrive, the artist’s solution was purely rhetorical, a “Second Coming of Language” (p. 41). Loving sounds here a bit like the dyspeptic Henry Adams, and his myth of failure makes Dickinson into a kind of American Decadent. While this idea remains suggestive, it has to be tested fully by recontextualizing her poetry in relation to French and English examples. Loving discusses the possible influence of Harriet Prescott Spofford’s extravagant prose, but curiously for a constant reviewer of articles and books on Dickinson in the distinguished academic annual, American Literary Scholarship, he does not mention my own essays on Dickinson and Spofford in the journal Topic (1977) or the hardcover collection The Haunted Dusk (1983), or my discussion in Emily Dickinson and Her Culture (1984) of the influence of Spofford’s revival of the Captivity Narrative.

Spofford’s “Sensation” story “Circumstance” was first published in the Atlantic Monthly for May of 1860. Dickinson herself commented on the impact of this Gothic tale in a little-known letter to her sister-in-law, Susan, and once again it indicates her interiorizing of Sensation Fiction, as in that profound penny-dreadful, “One need not be a Chamber-to be Haunted—” (J 670). Loving’s myth of failure makes for a rather grim Dickinson over-all, and when she tries to be “frolicksome,” as in “A Bird came down the Walk—” (J 328), he disparages her effort as presenting “a rather tidy reality in which the brutality of the food chain is transformed into a kind of Disneyland scenario—life without death, crisis, or real change. If there is any suggestion of danger, it comes when the human narrator offers the bird a crumb” (p. 56). Once again, an historicist acquaintance with the full flood of Romantic bird poetry should alert us that, far from being an intruder, the poet here is a sister-artist who offers the frightened bird an emblematic “crumb of sympathy,” which is enough for it to take wing and regain its true lost paradise, the empyreal heights, where both high fliers are completely “at home.”

There is an intriguing treatment of the motif of windows in Dickinson’s verse beginning on page 58, yet Loving shows no acquaintance with the many Romantic and Victorian paintings that feature this image—an interdisciplinary and contextual approach that
would have enhanced his discussion immeasurably. We too often forget that poets draw on material and visual culture as much as on a purely literary and literate matrix. And when Loving comments that “It may be a measure of the psychological inadequacy of our society a hundred years hence that air conditioning has led to the disappearance of windows in public buildings,” (pp. 2-63), he does not recall that many nineteenth-century workers, like Melville’s Bartleby, stared out their office windows only to confront an actual solid brick wall of anomie and capitalist indifference, while the windows in some factories were painted with opaque colors so that the “operatives” could better keep their minds on their work. Finally, Loving doesn’t seem to recognize in his otherwise incisive analysis of “Who occupies this House?” (J 92), that the “House” in question is the Grave, and that the “door” is the tombstone, another material culture reference, since New England Puritan tombstones themselves were deliberately shaped to represent “the door of death,” with stylized side members, lintels, and carved tympana. The “paste” of “We play at Paste—” may be the gluey stuff of creativity, but it is first of all meaning number seven of the American Heritage Dictionary’s definition of the term, more current in the past than in the present: “A hard, brilliant glass used in making artificial gems.”

More idiosyncratic assumptions and cultural gaffs could be cited, but enough of quibblings, styes, pustules, and irritants. I have taken Loving to task for his a-historicism, presentism, and non-contextualism, but I also must praise him for a pearl of a chapter on the “uroboric” nature of Dickinson’s achievement. Titled “In Medias Res,” this chapter has important things to say about Dickinson’s “unfinished” approach to life, which once again links her with late Romantic artists like the English Turner or the American Ryder, both of whom were fanatically attached to a concept of art as life as process, the latter so much so that he threatened to bury his paintings with him. This idea is quintessentially Romantic; one never finishes anything, since life itself is always an unfilled canvas, until it is turned into a Rothko-like “black on black” square by death’s final retouching. Still, one must recognize that this theory can also be used as an excuse for sloppy work or, as in Dickinson’s case, a lamentable laissez-faire attitude towards one’s own creation. There are other competing theories of art, not so fashionable these days, when Romantic weakness of will merges with Postructuralist indeterminacy of intent, that should have their say, as they have had their wholly admirable proponents and practitioners. It was Yeats who urged all poets, not simply Irish ones, to “learn your trade” and “Sing whatever is well made.” At her best Dickinson accomplished this Neo-classic imperative; the horses in “Because I could not stop for Death” (J 712), whose heads are “toward Eternity,”
are ridden by the same Apollonian demigod speaking through the poet who commanded that these words be cut upon his tomb:

*Cast a cold eye*
*On life, on death.*
*Horsemam, pass by!*

Ultimately, the successes and the faults of Jerome Loving’s *The Poet on the Second Story* are those of the critical genre in which he is writing. It is no accident that part of the book was conceived in Paris, for his study has about it the air of that quintessential French form, the feuilleton—the article which is expert yet casual; personal yet casual; personal yet critical; entertaining yet provocative. The very derivation of the term from the word for “leaf” is signaled in the Keatsian title of Loving’s last chapter, “The Leaf-Fringed Legend of Emily Dickinson,” where he outsentimentalizes the sentimentalists by observing that “Like the beggars on the Left Bank and elsewhere, her poetry is finally a mute protest against the way of the world—against the fact that death is man’s lot and so the subject of his life” (p. 105). If so, then we are all beggars and gamins. I like to think that in spite of her blatant, necessary, and most often creative use of sentimelntality, which links her so indissolubly to her own time and culture, Dickinson was more American and less Frenchified than this, that there is a Yankee toughness, even a subtle cruelty about her which is far more thorny than it is leafy. It is this toughness that I find missing in Loving’s feuilleton, but distance does lend enchantment, and his book more than makes up in charm and piquancy what it may lose in bone and muscle.

Barton Levi St. Armand
Brown University


The sheet of instructions from a journal (a “historical review,” to be sure) begins by stipulating a “clear and concise summary of the contents of the book.” James W. Gargano makes it easy to oblige. His introductions march chronologically through the novels to be covered, pointing up the other major criticism as well as that which he chose to present. Though he lets “early” James include *The Tragic
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*Muse*, he segregates the much smaller section of Reviews and Contemporary Commentary from the Twentieth-Century Essays, which reprint Poirier, James W. Tuttleton, J. A. Ward, William H. Gass, Edel, Howe, and Cargill—almost a Hall of Fame—before ending with a new essay by Adeline R. Tintner.

The "late" novels run from *The Other House* to *The Golden Bowl* though the Introduction goes on to evaluate the final years of James's career. Gargano liked his "early" pattern so well as to carry it through with minor changes. The first section now ends with general essays by Howells and Conrad; the main section now offers a lesser known lineup of our colleagues; a "Note on Selections" is added to explain that Gargano "intended to balance where possible favorable and unfavorable opinion" and to prefer "relatively recent work to work that has been reprinted"; now two first-time essays are used (one of "The Jolly Corner," granted entrance because of its "close thematic relevance to the later novels"). Both volumes round off with a proper-noun index. Ironically, the decision to show balance will furnish some handy invective—especially about *What Maisie Knew, The Awkward Age*, and *The Wings of the Dove*—if a new wave of anti-Jamesians gathers.

That sheets of instructions forbids using "the review as a springboard from which to write an essay on some pet idea." Therefore, the metacritic should not expound some crux of the literary process which Gargano has failed to appreciate and whose existence all previous generations did not even suspect. Bruised by experience, that sheet also forbids "an accounting" of "points of minutiae." Though Gargano needs no charity on the score of precision, "minutiae" would apply in spirit to anybody who quibbles about which essays were chosen from the thousands available.

Of course it would be fair enough to review the contributors instead of their curator. But there are too many for a personalized rating while grouping them into patterns would grow too impersonal, too un-Jamesian. The reader may as well wander around as if in a large museum, enjoying the galleries in no schematic order. I am satisfied to think that Gargano, while alert to the purpose of the encompassing series, aimed for a set of volumes essentially sound to him. Such an approach justifies including two of his own essays.

Louis J. Budd
Duke University

Even scholars specializing in nineteenth-century American literature are not usually acquainted with Arthur Sherburne Hardy, and to those who are he is likely to be a name they have come across in an American diplomatic history book. Stewart reminds us, however, that fame is often fickle, for in his day Hardy was well known in many fields, including several of those of American literature:

A professor of mathematics, a diplomat, and a magazine editor Hardy did not devote his entire energies to imaginative writing. Besides five mathematical or scientific works, he turned out two volumes of poetry, a biography, a collection of letters, miscellaneous speeches, an autobiography, and eight works of fiction...one historical and four realistic novels, a detective novel, and numerous short stories. (p. 5)

Stewart assures us that Hardy shared William Dean Howells’s concept of fiction. “Realism,” he once told a reporter, “makes a storehouse of everyday facts. It includes the puddle filled with mud which is in the middle of the street. But this puddle of mud also contains a reflection of the blue sky.” But like Henry James he was less interested in plot and more concerned with character consciousness. Writing in 1921, Fred Lewis Pattee remarked, “Few have ever brought to fiction a mind more keenly alert and more analytical.” At the time Hardy’s *The Wind of Destiny* (1886) appeared a reviewer in the *Catholic World* commented that “the manner and matter of the novel is charming,” but he lamented that it was “devoted to fate...hopeless philosophy.” (Apparently Hardy was primarily concerned with the effect of fate on human affairs.)

Hardy’s poetry was a reflection of his conviction that his was “more an age of prose than of poetry.” His verse reflects the controversy between traditional poetry and free verse. With his careful attention to poetic diction, however, Hardy comes closer to the traditional mold. Two of his poems “Francesca of Rimini” (1878) and “City of Dreams,” Stewart points out, “are essentially prose narratives in verse, and in their romantic tones they closely resemble the historical novels that were extremely popular at the time.” Despite their prosiness, however, both pieces with their focus on nature and the past resemble closely poets of the English Romantic school. Stewart admits, however, that though Hardy’s verse is not doggerel, it “lacks the originality of his fiction.” But, she insists that Hardy was a
professional craftsman, that in addition to his novels (these, if not extremely popular, were widely read in his day), his stories were published in the leading magazines of the time: The Atlantic Monthly, The Century, The Critic, McClure's and Cosmopolitan, as well as in the avant-garde art magazines, such as The Chap-Book, often compared for its selectivity and impact on writers and readers of serious literature to The Yellow Book.

Stewart believes that despite Hardy’s failure to achieve immortality, he merits some scholarly attention. I agree and that’s what this interesting and illuminating study provides. Surely it makes one want to know even more about Hardy, but since I have read Stewart’s fascinating account of this “Man of American Letters,” I have examined the collections in two American university libraries, neither being the university I represent, and I have found not a single one of Hardy’s books.

Thomas Daniel Young
Gertrude Conway Vanderbilt
Professor of English, Emeritus,
Vanderbilt University


In 1957, John Theobald, a teacher at what was then San Diego State College, wrote to Ezra Pound at St. Elizabeths, asking him to indicate his choices for a high-school poetry textbook that Theobald was compiling. Pound, desperate for correspondents and with a lifelong habit of looking for disciples, responded. This book records their eleven-month correspondence, gathering letters from 26 April 1957 to 19 October 1958—the last year of Pound’s incarceration.

Academic industries, of which the Pound Industry is one of the more active, perpetuate themselves partly by reviving and scrutinizing trivia, and this volume of cryptic jabberings is one of the industry’s less happy products. Pound is one of modern literature’s great letter-writers, typically showing style, wit, verve, insight, and boundless generosity. But the Pound of 1957-58 was not the Pound who wrote those crackling letters to Joyce and Williams in the ‘teens and ’twenties. Craving communication with the outside world at the same time as his sadly fragmented mind has left him only sporadically able to carry it on, Pound in his St. Elizabeths years has intensified his already manic epistolary shorthand into a sometimes inscrutable private code
that leaves Theobald gasping “Can’t really answer your highly charged epistolary telegraphs” (p. 29). Here is a sample passage:

Thank gawd fer foto of fambly with no relations in Tel Aviv
    and possibly none in the State Dept/
Some APO can probably get bks/from library/G.G. supplying those from Cat. Univ. Migne, etc.
Have not seen the Nelson/Swabey unpublished on Ch. of Eng. and Usury.
(pardon if I repeat, cant remember whom I tell what)
GRS Mead/BlavatskiTe (no suspicion of a k) “Echoes from the
Gnosis,” possibly 40 vols/
    Quest Society and Quarterly, Q.S. lectures at least
monthly for part of year/ (p. 32)

A solid proportion of Theobald’s letters consists of requests that Pound translate “this fast allusory shorhand of yrs” (p. 24).

Although their correspondence concerned literary matters only occasionally, Theobald, like most people, had more interest in Pound’s literary opinions than in his economic ones, and courageously he said so: “I wd walk further and pay more for your opinions on what is happening in Lit than for your fulminations on fiscal betrayals” (p. 92). Most surprising among these opinions, even though one is used to hearing Pound mix acerbity and affection in talking of the Possum (“sniping at T. S. E. I have been doing it for years!” [p. 32]), are the constant slights against Eliot. Pound comments on the “atrophy of curiosity on Eliot’s part, and an unwillingness to face specific historic facts” (p. 25)—which probably means that Eliot wouldn’t read Major Douglas. Elsewhere: “Of course Eliot never went on with his Sanskrit or with much of anything ELSE” (p. 27); “I dont think he TRIES to keep his mind closed, I think it just nacherly IS that way” (p. 54). A few comments recall the incisiveness of early Pound, as in the viciously funny summary-cum-parody of Herrick (“300 pages saying: ‘please copulate’ / in kittenish language”) and Blake (“Little Yamm who made thee? Bnhaaaa, Gawd he done it!”) (p. 90). Generally, however, Pound says nothing here, amid all the admittedly well-intentioned book lists and familiar economic and Confucian preachings, that he does not say more clearly and vivaciously elsewhere.

The editors, two distinguished Poundians, try bravely to make a case for the letters’ value and interest by locating in them some of Pound’s characteristic intellectual preoccupations. In doing so, however, they pursue two strategies all too common in Pound studies. First, they hunt for all the ways imaginable in which the least Pound
utterance can be found to gloss the *Cantos*. Second, despite their denial that they are doing so, they find spurious excuses for his anti-Semitism, which they explain as a rhetorical stance, part of Pound’s “habit of calculated offensiveness” (p. 8) in dealing with the public. But even if names and ideas overlap between letters and *Cantos*, the sixty-seven pages of academic apparatus that are provided to flesh out (puff up?) the one hundred and one pages of letters still can’t make the letters *into Cantos*. In fact these letters show, painfully and perhaps all too thoroughly, the narrowest, least attractive, and least interesting part of Pound’s mind. Pound’s jabber is more readable than almost anyone’s, and even lightly sprinkled with brilliance—I think of Eliot’s “sapphires in the mud.” But finally it is still jabber.

Alan Golding

The University of Louisville


The above work consists mainly of the correspondence that passed between Pound and his Japanese friends and acquaintances, particularly Michio Ito (1893-1961), a modern dancer; Tamijuro Kumé (1893-1923), a painter; and Katue Kitasono (1902-1978), an important Modernist poet in Japan and the editor of the avant-garde magazine *VOU*—together with Pound’s contributions to Japanese newspapers, especially the *Japan Times*; an essay by Tami Koumé (sobriquet of Tamijuro Kumé) on his “Spirito-Etheric” art; poems written by the Japanese members of the VOU Club, with Kitasono’s notes; and some notes of James Laughlin, Michael Reck, and Mary de Rachewiltz, Pound’s daughter. Included also are the letters of Mary Fenollosa to Pound. She was the widow of the pioneer American educator and student of East Asian fine arts, Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908), who lived many years in Japan. She chose Pound to be her late husband’s literary executor. All this material is arranged and presented by Kodama with intelligence and clarity.

Hailey, Idaho-born, Philadelphia-bred, Pound settled in London in 1908 to begin his amazing literary career. Already committed to a passionate interest in early European culture, he was relatively ignorant at this time of the great civilizations of China and Japan. No doubt he knew something already of the Japanese *ukiyo-e* school of color-prints—Hiroshige’s snow, mist, and moonlight scenes had influenced the painter Whistler in the 1870s. In 1909 Pound was introduced by
T. E. Hulme and his circle to the Japanese verse forms, the *tanka* and the *haiku* (the latter being erroneously called the *hokku* by Pound, which is a different form). His brief poem “In a Station of the Metro”: “The apparition of these faces in the crowd / Petals on a wet, black bough” (*Personae*, 1909) was undoubtedly influenced by the *haiku* form, although a *haiku* is a three-line and not a two-line poem. Also, prior to his receipt of most of the Fenollosa material, Pound had written some Chinese-inspired poems such as “After Ch’u Yuan” and “Liu Ch’ê.”

By the end of 1913 Pound had received all of the Fenollosa stuff and examined it. It included Fenollosa’s transcriptions of the lessons given him on the *no* drama by the actor Umewaka Minoru; Kiichiro Hirata’s English translations of *no* performances (he had been a pupil of Fenollosa’s); Chinese poems with translations rendered by Fenollosa’s assistants, Kainan Mori, a scholar of Chinese language and literature, and Nagao Ariga, a professor of International Law and a student of literature (he had acted as Fenollosa’s interpreter). Pound’s examination of these materials revealed a whole new world to him. By 1916 Pound had served Fenollosa well in bringing to publication *Certain Noble Plays of Japan* and ‘Noh’; or, Accomplishment, a Study of the Classical Stage of Japan.

Thus, when Pound received his first letter from a Japanese correspondent in 1911—from the poet Yonejiro Noguchi—he had little knowledge of Japan and its culture, whether ancient or modern. But while attempting to put Fenollosa’s *no* plays into effective English, he introduced them to his friend William Butler Yeats. The Irish poet became so enthusiastic about them that he wrote the introduction to the published volume and became occupied with writing abstract plays himself employing dancers, musicians, and masked actors. His efforts were later collected in *Four Plays for Dancers* (1921). One of these plays was *At the Hawk’s Well*, which was first performed on 2 April 1916. Edward Dulac designed and made the costumes and masks. The part of the Hawk was played by Michio Ito. While promoting this play Pound met Michio Ito, Tamijuro Kumé, and Jisoichi Kayano. They proceeded to enlighten him regarding *no*, Zen Buddhism, Japanese customs, and the Japanese language.

From this time forward until a few years before his death in 1972, Pound sought to promote international understanding in his letters to his Japanese friends and acquaintances as well as in his writings published in the *Japan Times*. At the same time, it is clear that his main concern was with learning about and propagating, as Matthew Arnold proposed, “the best that is known and thought in the world”; always he exemplified Arnold’s definition of culture as a “single-minded love of perfection.” Unfortunately, Pound’s correspondence and essays
also reveal his intellectual shortcomings—his mental aberrations and his emotional obsessions: his impractical political naïveté; his admiration for fascist economic reforms; his anti-Hebraism and belief in conspiracies perpetrated by capitalist governments in collusion with Jews and bankers; his misunderstanding of the causes of war; his obsession with monetary and banking practices, causing him to see usury, international loans, and the profits of armament makers as the roots of all evil. But if any of his Japanese correspondents understood him on these matters, they never let on.

But Pound was a great poet and is a major literary figure. He exerted an influence in ways never achieved by Eliot or Yeats. Kodama’s collection is not only highly interesting but also an important contribution to Pound studies.

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Before reading this illuminating biography, I had known vaguely of Harry Kemp as someone who was somehow related to Upton Sinclair. I did not know that he and Sinclair’s wife, Meta, were the “Godwin and Wollstonecraft” of their time and that their love affair became widely regarded, in Scott Fitzgerald’s words, as “the most expensive orgy in history.”

The author of nineteen books—including drama, poetry, and fiction—Kemp was better known in his own day as “The Tramp Poet,” than he was for what he wrote, although Upton Sinclair once referred to him as a “modern Walt Whitman.” Brevda demonstrates, however, that although Kemp’s belief that his “tramp poetry” was somehow “unique and significant” was not completely without foundation, he was not another Walt Whitman. Whitman’s man of the open road poetry is generally a metaphor “for a spiritual state of mind” and intended “to evoke the virtues of the national spirit.” If Whitman, as John Jay Chapman wrote, gives “utterance to the soul of the tramp,” he has little love for his body: “No diseas’d person, no rum drinker, or venereal taint is permitted here,” he wrote, suggesting, as Brevda points out, that “Whitman was not interested in particularizing the actual tramp.” His persona “has more in common with Bunyan’s Christian than he does with the hordes of actual tramps” who were more and more commonplace in the first two decades of this century. Unlike many
other writers of “tramp poetry,” Kemp does not reduce “Whitman’s ideals to a glib, careless, carpe diem, sentimental, wine, women and song . . . afoot with pose and posture, not with vision.” He tries to make Whitman’s symbolic persona real; he attempts to create a poetry of “genuine vagabond mood—without dilettantism.”

Today, if Kemp’s writing is known at all, only the authority in the field remembers more than one or two poems or perhaps Tramping on Life: An Autobiographical Narrative (1922), a best seller in its day. He is remembered not for what he wrote but for how he lived. He has been called the “King of Bohemia,” and as Brevda rightly proclaims, he “was in many respects the quintessential bohemian and one member of the group who, for better or worse, most fully personified the bohemian temperament.” Long after writers like Max Eastman and Floyd Dell had ended their identification with the Village, Kemp was still adhering to its lifestyle. “For Eastman, Dell and the others,” Brevda concludes, “bohemia was a way of youth. For Kemp it was a way of life . . . For both longevity and robustness of the rebel spirit, Harry Kemp . . . seems to be the noblest Bohemian of all.”

Thomas Daniel Young
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His achievements overshadowed since 1950 by a younger townsman from Oxford, Stark Young finally becomes the subject of a book-length study in this “survey” of a “life in the arts.” From Young’s birth in Como, Mississippi, in 1880, to the memorial service for him in New York, attended by such notables as John Gielgud and Franchot Tone in 1963, Pilkington admirably organizes a readable overview of the career, providing useful background, interpretative groundwork, and selected annotated bibliography.

As he presents each phase of a full multifaceted career, Pilkington places Young’s contributions in contexts of American literary history to show this artist’s influence on the development of the American theater of the 1920s, on the Southern historical novel of the thirties, and ultimately on the Southern Renaissance. Turning from the early poetry to translations, drama, and criticism, Stark Young led the amateur theater movement in America with successful productions at The University of Texas; later in New York he directed plays (including
one by Eugene O'Neill) and saw his own work on stage. Pilkington includes brief, informative discussion of the contents and productions of Young's one-acters and of The Queen of Sheba, The Saint, and The Colonnade. Young's drama criticism ultimately proved more influential. Pilkington's clarifying approach to such collections of reviews and essays as The Flower of Drama and Glamour shows how Young developed his theory of the central or "essential idea" of a play on which he said actors, directors, costumers should base each detail of a production.

The treatments of the novels—Heaven Trees, The Torches Flare, River House, and So Red the Rose—provide biographical background and identify prototypes and sources, particularly from among the Stark and McGeeehce clans. Pilkington also highlights passages dealing with Young's general recurring themes, such as the importance of the "continuity" of the family and the "life of the affections," contrasts between Southern provincial and New York cosmopolitan life, conflicts between academic and artistic options, and uses and shortcomings of the Southern agrarian past. The chapter on the Agrarians' invitation to contribute to I'll Take My Stand explains Young's role in that collection and examines the content of Young's essay, "Not in Memoriam, but in Defense."

Pilkington selects and condenses from his extensive research for his award-winning editions of Young's letters (Stark Young: A Life in the Arts, 1974) to make this Twayne volume the place to begin for a basic introduction to Young and his work. Pilkington's forthcoming biography of Young presumably will elaborate on incidents and people only briefly mentioned in this survey—such as Young's relationships with his family and with such famous figures as Robert Frost, Maxwell Perkins, and William Faulkner.

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Steven H. Gale's encyclopedia supplements, but does not replace, Stanley Trachtenberg's American Humorists, 1800-1950 (volumes 11 and 12 in Dictionary of Literary Biography, 1982). Gale not only includes colonial and contemporary humorists outside Trachtenberg's scope but also discusses twice as many writers. His 135 entries are briefer but cover the same kinds of information: biographical material, literary analysis, and a bibliography of primary and selected secondary
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sources. Trachtenberg’s book has numerous photographs and illustrations as well as several essays on the history of American humor. However, Gale’s limits itself strictly to single-author entries, a sensible decision which prevents duplication of general material easily available elsewhere. Yet the Encyclopedia of American Humorists is seriously flawed because it overlooks both popular and influential humorists from the colonial period to the present. Gale’s omissions do not seem to be tied to a battle he might be waging about reinterpreting the canon, but rather suggest insufficient editorial control over his project. As the preface explains, with a few exceptions Gale chose “to include only those writers who are known primarily as humorists.” It goes on to propose a second volume “that will involve ‘serious’ literary artists who use humor effectively.” Thus, Bret Harte and Oliver Wendell Holmes appear because of long-standing scholarly interest in their humor. However, the justification for including such figures as Donald Barthelme, Fred Chappell, and Grace King is obscure, given the prefatory remarks. Their presence is even more puzzling when one notices the absence of significant humorists who will not be appropriate for the projected second volume. Essays on Charles Farrar Browne (Artemus Ward) and George Washington Harris, each of whom is mentioned in entries on more than a dozen other writers, should have been included. Likewise, there is no essay devoted to Benjamin Franklin, whose influence is mentioned in entries throughout the book. If the contributors assigned these men did not meet the deadline, one wonders why the editor did not feel it necessary to fill the void himself. If recent anthologies can be used as a measure of what scholars expect this encyclopedia to contain, the colonial writers Ebeneezer Cooke and Joseph Green should be here in addition to the useful entries on Sarah Kemble Knight, Thomas Morton, and Nathaniel Ward. Henry William Herbert appears as a representative of antebellum humorous sporting writers from the Northeast. Yet Gale overlooks William P. Hawes, a member of that same group more widely acknowledged in his own day for humor. In our own day the burlesque sermons of William Penn Brannan have received repeated, although brief, critical attention. Brannan should have been included not only because of his reputation but also because scholars could benefit from an extended entry on his life and work. Anthologies, including college freshman composition readers, are also useful guides in selecting contemporary humorists. Certainly, Gale would have made his reference book more complete had he listed the frequently anthologized Ellen Goodman, Lewis Grizzard, Florence King, and Calvin Trillin—none of whom would seem to belong in the second volume devoted to “‘serious’ literary artists.” A final comment on the bibliographies which conclude each entry is appropriate. The annotations on secondary sources vary as widely in
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quality as do the entries themselves, and in some cases they suggest that writers were insufficiently informed on their topic. For example, the bibliography for C. F. M. Noland neglects both editions of his Pete Whetstone letters (1957 and 1979) and also overlooks an important American Literature article (1981). This information is, however, available in Trachtenberg. None of those writing on Russell Baker, Erma Bombeck, Art Buchwald, or Mike Royko lists Neil A. Grauer's Wits & Sages (1984) which has long chapters on each of these columnists and essayists about whom little has yet been published. Although many of the entries in Encyclopedia of American Humorists are clear, fluent, and original pieces that humor scholars will want to consult, the problems of selection and thoroughness prevent it from being an adequate reference work.

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Few critics of American fiction would argue with the contention that the confidence man is a major, if not the major, character type in our literature. It also appears that few of these critics can agree on just what the precise nature of that enigmatic figure really is. William Lenz's Fast Talk & Flush Times is the latest attempt to define that nature and, as with other studies, such as Susan Kuhlman's Knave, Fool and Genius: The Confidence Man as He Appears in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction and Gary Lindberg's The Confidence Man in American Literature, its many strengths are finally compromised by its own terms.

Lenz's basic contention is that the confidence man is a product of the "boom and bust 'flush times'" of the 1840s as found in "the new country" of the Old Southwest. He would distinguish the confidence man from "tricksters, promisers, shapeshifters, and rogues" who "appear in many genres and periods" (p. 23), insisting that the confidence man is a distinct type that uses fast talk, clever manipulation, and exploitation of ambiguity for personal (preferably profitable) advantage. Lenz further argues that the confidence man needs to be seen as a response to and an expression of the particular culture that gave him birth—the flush times of the Southwest. The book then traces the convention's rise, its first full appearance in Hooper's Simon Suggs, four "variations" of the type (Ovid Bolus, Sut Lovingood, Melville's
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The Confidence Man, and Billy Fishback), and finally the convention’s decline after the Civil War, when “the confidence man all but disappears from American fiction as the need to idealize intensifies” (p. 150). Only Twain in this “late” period carries on the tradition, and he does so to “illuminate the danger posed by the contemporary practitioner of confidence art” (p. 166). The twentieth century, Lenz concludes, “marks an end to the confidence man as a distinct literary convention” (p. 196).

Lenz is a perceptive reader of the works he examines. His remarks on the rhetorical nature of the confidence game and on Southwestern Humor are very illuminating. On this basis, his study is most worthwhile. But as an examination of the confidence man, the work is hampered by its own restrictions. Lenz’s argument that the confidence man is found only in a frontier setting is not convincing. Poe’s “Diddling” offers ample evidence that the character was well known in city circles. Lenz would account for this discrepancy by calling the frontier version a confidence man, the city version a diddler, but this is not a meaningful distinction, especially since Lenz does not define the difference he says exists. Furthermore, arguing that the confidence man is basically a type generic to Southwestern Humor leads Lenz to examine works that, by his own terms, do not always comfortably fit the convention he is describing. The Sut Lovingood yarns, for instance, may involve the world of the confidence man, but Sut himself does not easily fit Lenz’s depiction of the profit-seeking, shifty con artist. Finally, although Lenz would exclude the confidence man from the twentieth century on the grounds that the world that gave rise to him no longer exists and that current avatars are victims rather than victimizers, one cannot help but feel that modern variations such as, for example, Jay Gatsby, Randle Patrick Murphy, and many of Flannery O’Connor’s characters, are significant manifestations of the type and that excluding them is ultimately reductive rather than enlightening.

The above reservations are not intended to imply, however, that Lenz’s study is not worth careful consideration. His restrictions form a necessary counterpoise to the broadness of Lindberg’s recent study and the too-peripheral nature of Kuhlman’s. As a definitive statement on the confidence man in American literature, the work falls short. As an important piece in the puzzle that figure inherently presents, Lenz has given us a work that cannot be ignored.

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In an address of 1848, "The Political Destination of America and the Signs of the Times," Theodore Parker professed that "our permanent literature" is generally unAmerican: "superficial, tame, and weak." In contrast, "The real national literature is found almost wholly in speeches, pamphlets, and newspapers," he said. "The latter are pretty thoroughly American; . . . that vulgarity, that rant, that bragging violence, that recklessness of truth and justice, that disrespect of right and duty are a part of the nation’s every-day life." Parker might have added humor magazines to his media list, for with his description he has characterized the substance of those published not only during his own day but through the course of U.S. history as well. David E. E. Sloane lists about a thousand American comic periodicals in his new compendium, which will become an invaluable resource for the study of American culture—and not *popular* American culture alone.

*American Humor Magazines and Comic Periodicals* opens with a brief Foreward in which Stanley Trachtenberg, the Advisory Editor, points to humor magazines as reflectors of American thought, politics, and social issues, "serving at once as both a critical and cohesive agent." An equally concise Preface explaining the format precedes Sloane’s informative historical Introduction. Thoroughly peppered with titles that will be unfamiliar to all but the well initiated, it presents publishing trends among the comic serials that connotes their significance as indices of their age. Whether satirical, regional, sexual, or oriented toward other approaches common to the genre, Sloane appears to echo Parker in concluding that these magazines “contain much of the American spirit of independence from restraint in personal and political life” and offer “a valuable focus for the history of dissent and commentary in the democracy.”

His volume is organized into four numbered parts. The first presents more than a hundred of the most important magazines with a descriptive historical entry of one to several pages for each. Generally the entries are informative to the extent that data proved available, though occasionally fuller development would be useful. The brief entry by Lorne Fienberg on *Yankee Doodle*, for example, a New York weekly of 1846-47 aligned with "Young America," probably should include specific reference to this group and to the series on "Old Zack" that Melville contributed. Donald J. Yannella’s work on Cornelius Mathews and Perry Miller's *The Raven and the Whale* would have been helpful sources, but neither one is cited. Still, like the other entries in the first part, this concise account of *Yankee Doodle* is both well
written and detailed enough to convey a clear sense of the comic spirit in that short-lived weekly whose publication span covered less than a year. Each historical account is followed by a short list of Information Sources and a Publication History that includes title(s), volume and issue numbers, publisher and place of publication, names of editors, and circulation (if known). Although nearly fifty named scholars contributed most of the entries in Part I, Sloane himself was responsible for more than a few of them.

Part II contains about four hundred more titles of relatively minor periodicals more briefly treated chiefly because dependable information about them is scarce. The entries in this part, nearly all contributed by Sloane, omit the Information Sources and Publication History. The third part comprises two lists, one with titles taken from the copyright files in Washington; neither the editor nor his contributors have seen the periodicals named, and Sloane acknowledges that some of them may not be humor magazines at all. The second list includes the titles of uncopyrighted magazines identified and described by earlier compilers but not examined or verified. The three generic essays that constitute Part IV deal respectively with college, scholarly, and almanac humor in American almanacs. Although all three are rewarding, the last will be especially appealing to browsers because of the plentiful examples of almanac wit and humor with which its author, Robert Secor, seasons it.

Other contributors treat their material similarly, but nearly all of the entries are written in a straightforward historical manner with little sidetracking into the jokes and satire that composed the raison d’être of these periodicals. Many of the magazines included cartoons, and the annotators attempt to convey a sense of their effectiveness by describing them pictorially so that readers might envision the comic scenes as printed on the page. In most cases, of course, the humor is hopelessly outdated.

Following the four parts is a chronological listing of all the humor magazines from 1757 to 1985 that have been confirmed either by examination or by inclusion in the U.S. copyright lists. Because each main entry in Part I is followed by Information Sources, the Selected Bibliography near the end of the volume is limited to about fifty of the most important general reference titles. A double-column index of over 45 pages includes names and titles form the texts of the entries but not those from the appendicized Information Sources following them.

For most of the major entries, Frank Luther Mott’s A History of American Magazines (1938-1965), the standard history in five volumes, provided the starting point, but Sloane’s specialized compilation is meant to serve researchers in American humor who need to go beyond that broad study. Clear, well organized, and crammed with valuable details, American Humor Magazines and Comic Periodicals will prove
essential for all good reference libraries and is not likely to be superseded in the foreseeable future.

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