Connotations

A Journal for Critical Debate

Volume 5 (1995/96) Numbers 2-3
Waxmann Münster/New York

Connotations: A Journal for Critical Debate

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

Each issue consists of articles and a forum for discussion. The forum presents, for instance, research in progress, critical hypotheses, responses to articles published in *Connotations* and elsewhere, as well as to recent books.

Contributions will be published within five months after submission so that discussion can begin without delay.

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Connotations is published three times a year. Subscriptions are in Europe DM 60/year, in the U.S. and all other countries $ 50/year, including postage. A disk version in WordPerfect (DOS) is also available at DM 35 or $ 30/year. Single copies: DM 20/$ 18, plus postage.

Orders for subscriptions should be sent to:
Waxmann Verlag GmbH
Steinfurter Str. 555, 48159 Münster, Germany
in America to:
Waxmann Publishing Co.
P.O. Box 1318, New York, NY 10028, U.S.A.

Printed in Germany
ISSN 0939-5482

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

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Special Issue:
The Presence of Mythology in American Literature

Preface

In July 1995 the third *Connotations* symposium entitled "The Presence of Mythology in American Literature" was held at the Fachhochschule Köln. It was preceded in 1990 by a symposium on "Tolerance in Pre-Revolutionary England" and in 1992 by one on "Paronomasia," both held at the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster. These international meetings are part of the critical discussion among scholars of English Literature *Connotations* wishes to promote.

A topic relating to American Literature was chosen for the third symposium because *Connotations* has enjoyed from its beginning the support of many American scholars and, moreover, because it was sponsored for some years by the state of Nordrhein-Westfalen for the express purpose of promoting American studies in that region.

The long-standing fascination with mythology on the part of the editors eventually led to the decision to focus on "The Presence of Mythology in American Literature." There were other good reasons for this choice, of course. Myth, a nucleus of literary creation anyway, has always had two sides for students of American literary history: on the one hand there is the emigrants' attachment to the traditions of Christian humanism but, on the other, there are the mythical realities and potentialities of a New World. Therefore, it might be possible to argue that the presence of mythology in American Literature is something of a paradigm for the interplay of tradition and innovation in the growth of the cultural identity of the United States.

The invitation to the symposium did not contain any restrictions in terms of periods and authors, or a special definition of "mythology." We were convinced that the participants' own scholarly standards would be the best guarantee of interpretative and terminological precision.

Moreover, a wide variety of texts and themes is in keeping with the purpose of *Connotations*, which welcomes a plurality of scholarly approaches provided they respect the "stylistic energy of the poetic word" and are open to critical debate.

Such a debate did, indeed, take place at the symposium, and it is to be hoped that the talks presented in this issue will stimulate or even provoke readers of *Connotations* to submit their responses so that a fruitful discussion may ensue.

We should like to express our thanks to the Rektorat of the Fachhochschule Köln for most generously supporting the symposium as well as the publication of this special issue of *Connotations*.

Connotations
Vol. 5.2-3 (1995/96)

Mythical Aspects of Poe's Detective

LOTHAR ČERNÝ

> Light, seeking light, doth light of light beguile;
> So ere you find where light in darkness lies,
> Your light grows dark by losing of your eyes.
> (*Love's Labour's Lost* 1.1.77-79)

The detective as a literary figure has seen a process of emancipation from his origins in the nineteenth century and seems to exist beyond a specific work or author. Nineteenth-century authors like Poe or Wilkie Collins, and to some extent Dickens, have created the pattern for a virtually endless succession of detectives and related characters in literature and film. Considering also that the detective always implies a detective story with a distinctive plot—by its Greek name *mythos*[1]—we might also think of Aristotle's use of the term mythos as relating events that have happened in the past. One could, therefore, venture the hypothesis that a modern myth has come into existence.[2] If this is the case, the detective is the product of "deliberate fable-making"[3] unlike ancient mythical characters who represent qualities, experiences, situations, or choices which are regarded as fundamental in human existence. Though they are, for all one knows, the result of an unconscious and possibly collective "mythopoeic imagination"[4] there is no reason why a product of art like the detective should not also derive its substance and widespread appeal from such fundamental human experiences or qualities. In literature, furthermore, myths have become the source of many "stories" and may even turn into genres.[5]

Assuming that the figure of the detective is at least implicitly regarded by modern readers and writers as a kind of myth, the answer to the question what makes him so is still an open one.[6] I will risk two further hypotheses:

For debates inspired by this article, please check the Connotations website at <http://www.connotations.de/debcerny00523.htm>.

Firstly, Poe's detective achieves mythical status because he literally stands for truth, traditionally equated with the image of light and opposed to the darkness of ignorance. This tradition goes back (at least) to Plato's Parable of the Cave and to the neoplatonic interpretation of Plato.[7] Secondly, the detective as well as the detective story appeals to readers because the seriousness of the ethical issues involved is held in suspension. It seems as if the activity of detection is primarily an aesthetic one and that the solution of the mystery, though a victory of truth, provides the same kind of satisfaction as the successful completion of a game. These two premises may seem to contradict each other, the one being rather rigorous, the other rather "playful." At the same time the dialectical concept of *serio ludere* immediately presents itself as a connecting link.

On the level of the plot—and therefore at the centre of the "myth"—the detective plays a particular role in the struggle between modern society and the forces of darkness and corruption that continually threaten it.[8] He not only solves the riddle posed by a crime, he also protects or re-establishes order and justice, at times even against their own official representatives. The detective succeeds in restoring order in the "body politic," but his position remains that of an outsider. The extent of his power is limited to a particular case. He never becomes a "ruler" or a policeman. His position is always "ex-centric," at the margin of the social hierarchy, and he is without self-interest. Worldly power or material goods are not his objectives.

Even though he fulfils almost superhuman tasks like the heroes in numerous ancient myths, the detective achieves his real fame not through physical prowess (or any other traditional hero-quality), but above all by his ability to solve the riddle posed by an unexplained crime. His ultimate aim, then, is to serve the truth, to help truth come to light. Poe's Dupin provides the classic formula for this endeavour: "My ultimate object is only the truth" (2: 555).[9] The pathos of this claim to find out the truth is the more obvious as Poe distinguishes this search from the verbal sophistry of the law. Commenting on his companion's advice "to make out his case" Dupin insists: "This may be the practice in law, but it is not the usage of reason" (2: 555). Considering these statements, one might go so far as to say that Poe creates a detective who follows

in the footsteps of Plato's philosopher, his interest being in the truth and his ability to see the truth where others look in vain.

The Platonic metaphor of bringing truth to light identifies light and truth in the act of recognition. In Poe, however, a dialectical relationship between truth and light emerges, as Poe's detective explains the limited success and even failure of the Parisian police, notably of their head, Vidocq:

> Vidocq . . . was a good guesser, and a persevering man. But, without educated thought, he erred continually by the very intensity of his investigations. He impaired his vision by holding the object too close. . . . Thus there is such a thing as being too profound. Truth is not always in a well. In fact, as regards the more important knowledge, I do believe that she is invariably superficial. The depth lies in the valleys where we seek her, and not upon mountain-tops where she is found. The modes and sources of this kind of error are well typified in the contemplation of the heavenly bodies. To look at a star by glances—to view it in a side-long way . . . is to behold the star distinctly—is to have the best appreciation of its lustre—a lustre which grows dim just in proportion as we turn our vision *fully* upon it. (2: 545)

This passage contains epistemological terms and problems familiar from Plato. In the Parable of the Cave in Book VII of *The Republic* light (the light of the sun) functions as the medium in which the world of ideas is perceived. It is metaphorically identified with truth. It participates in the ultimate idea of the good as the source of all that is true and beautiful. The world of ideas represents true reality; empirical reality by contrast is only a shadow. Its appearances represent the reality of the ideas only "darkly," in the form of shadowy images. As these are not essentially real, they are not true either. On the literal level of the parable, moving from the darkness of the cave into the world of light leads to the problem of being almost blinded by its brightness. To overcome this handicap to perception, Plato explains that one would gradually have to accustom one's eyes to the overwhelming experience of seeing.

The Platonic imagery of light and darkness is of central importance to Poe's text: the valleys and the depth of a well imply shadow and darkness like the cave while the mountain-tops, the "surfaces," are associated with light. However, unlike Plato, Poe does not choose the

form of a parable but uses these images in a discursive context to exemplify his criticism of Vidocq's method and by implication to advocate Dupin's. On the one hand his criticism is directed towards the absence of any real method, on the other his argument is directed against the futility of Vidocq's efforts. To drive his point home Dupin resorts to images of overlooking or not seeing the truth. As often in Poe, the name provides a clue to the problem. Vidocq's name begins with the root syllable of *videre*, and continues with the root syllable of *docere* betraying its ironical character. Its bearer does not really teach how to see. Vidocq's sheer intensity of seeing even produces blindness to the object "in view."

The most common failure to see the truth, however, is the result of looking for it in the wrong place; it is not hidden but open to view—as visible as the mountain tops. This is the "philosophical" premise throughout Poe's detective stories. There is a second reason for not seeing the truth. It is not possible to look into the source of light directly. To support his view Dupin also resorts to science, i.e. optics and astronomy where he observes the same law.[10]

The light of the stars "grows dim just in proportion as we turn our vision *fully* upon it" (2: 545). Light is propitious to vision only when looked at indirectly or sideways; "a side-long way" will allow us to see "distinctly." Of Vidocq's intensity of investigation he says: "He impaired his vision by holding the object too close" (2: 545). For an explanation of this error Dupin refers to the light of the stars. Significantly he does not speak of *observation* but of "the contemplation of the heavenly bodies" (2: 545). *Contemplation* leads to associations that go beyond physical perception and points, moreover, to a spiritual and intellectual understanding. What the observation of the physical phenomenon of the star exemplifies, however, is the fact that you cannot look into light itself, that the source of light is visible only indirectly, "in a side-long way." Under these conditions "there is the more refined capacity for comprehension." *Comprehension* is another word that brings the subtext of recognition to the surface. Inversely, the lustre of the star "grows dim just in proportion as we turn our vision *fully* upon it." Looking into the source of light directly may lead to total blindness or, to change the

perspective, "it is possible to make even Venus herself vanish from the firmament" (2: 546).

The essence of Plato's parable of one who is blinded by coming out of darkness into light and the metaphysical sense given to this movement resurfaces here as a problem of optical perception. Dupin's "scientific" comparisons typify epistemological principles, or to put it differently, empirical evidence is used to explain the failure to recognise truth: "Thus there is such a thing as being too profound. . . . By undue profundity we perplex and enfeeble thought" (2: 545). The tenor of the whole passage is resonant of epistemological terms like "thought," "truth," "knowledge," "profundity," "comprehension." The detective assumes the scientific pose, but his search *for* truth is related to the old philosophical question *of the* truth. In that search it seems as if science may not be his only nor his most important tool, as the ironical reference to Dupin's use of his glasses would indicate. He only wears his glasses, at the beginning of "The Mystery of Marie Roget," to hide from the Prefect that he is sleeping while the latter prattles on. They even serve as a camouflage in "The Purloined Letter" where Dupin uses them to keep his examination of the details in the room of the Minister unnoticed. The tool of seeing is not used by Dupin to improve seeing in the literal, optical sense, on the contrary it is virtually irrelevant to the seeing with the mind. In terms of finding out the truth, Dupin does not rely too much on science. Taking into account that the narrator in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" admires Dupin's "ideality" we are reminded of the derivation of Greek *idea* from the verb *idein*, to see, which makes it possible to understand Dupin as a "seer" and that his seeing is identical with recognising the truth of things.

It seems as if Poe is sceptical not only as to the method of the police, but that light as a metaphor of truth comes under attack. This is done, for instance, by naming newspapers according to the formula "lucus a non lucendo". The paper in which Dupin and his companion read about the murders in the Rue Morgue is called *Gazette des Tribunaux* (2: 537). Deriving "Gazette," by way of pseudo-etymology, from *gaze* seems adequate not only because of Poe's (or Dupin's) dislike of mere "gazing" but because of the actual lexical semantics and etymology of the word: *To gaze* derives from the Scandinavian, its ON meaning being

goose, Icl. *gander* and in other Nordic dialects even *fool* and *reckless person*.[11] The association with gossip is obvious. The *gazing* of this paper at the latest news leads to as little insight as the intensity of inquiry applied by the Prefect.

The *Gazette des Tribunaux* "gazes" at the events three times, in other words only repeats the gossip, and finally reports the arrest of the obviously innocent man, whom Poe aptly names Le Bon (2: 544). It is at this point that Dupin, who in spite of his name is not a "dupe," takes up his examinations: "We will go and see the premises with our own eyes" (2: 546). Dupin scrutinises everything and sees more than anyone else, of course. He sees "the peculiarity of the evidence" (2: 549). The truth is not in a well, but visible as on a mountain top. (This would imply that Dupin sees the truth in an instant, but allows the narrator and the reader to follow him in a step by step analysis.)

While some of the names Poe gave to the newspapers in his stories—*Le Mercurie* (3: 753), *Le Diligence* (3: 754), *Le Moniteur* (3: 740)—represent an ironical comment on their claim to reporting the truth, *L'Etoile* and *Le Soleil* invoke the connection between light and truth.[12] For all their pretensions to sun-like or star-like shining, these papers are far from enlightened or enlightening. They are not sources of truth. Dupin speaks of "the dogmatic ignorance of Le Soleil" (3: 761). As newspapers go, their primary interest, as Dupin says about *Le Commerciel* (sic!), is "rather to create a sensation . . . than to further the cause of truth" (3: 738). Neither the light, nor the "gazing" of the papers nor the all too intense inquiries of the Prefect lead to the truth. The metaphor of light has lost its unequivocal reference to truth and the Platonic equation of light and dark seems virtually reversed. The paradoxes resulting from this make for a new structural pattern and require a dialectical kind of understanding.

Dupin prefers darkness to light even to the extent of creating an artificial darkness (2: 532). When this choice is explained, however, the reader is due for another surprise. Dupin does not prefer night for sheer opposition to the Prefect's benighted use of daylight but for an absolutely independent, apparently illogical reason. A follower of the "sable divinity," he is "enamored of the Night for her own sake" (2: 532), a fact which leaves the narrator as baffled as the Prefect (3: 975). The

narrator goes so far as to admit that most people, had they known about the life he and Dupin were leading, would have regarded it as mad. In darkness Dupin's mind seems to be most awake and capable of giving its best to "reading, writing, or conversing." In "The Purloined Letter" this connection between intellectual activity and darkness is highlighted in a paradoxical statement:

> "If it is any point requiring reflection," observed Dupin, as he forebore to enkindle the wick, "we shall examine it to better purpose in the dark." (3: 975)

Poe transposes the state of being metaphorically in the dark (about truth) into a real darkness, where only Dupin is able to "reflect" the light of truth in the double sense of the word. The truth shines in Dupin's darkness of night, be it real or artificial. Dupin's darkness, then, is radically different from the Prefect's. In his darkness Dupin sees the light of truth, while the Prefect even in the light of day remains in darkness. Since, however, such a kind of "being in the dark" in clear daylight is felt to be normal in the world of gazettes, he has every right to suspect Dupin of having "odd notions" (3: 975).

Once the reader follows Dupin into his enlightening darkness, he is in for more paradoxes, for looked at in the dark the problem which baffles the Prefect makes itself known as one whose very intricacy is its simplicity: "the mystery is a little *too* plain" or a "little *too* self-evident" (3: 975). For the Prefect who believes to have reason on his side, this must sound like total nonsense; he is blind for what is evident. For him, the truth of the matter does neither show nor shine. Therefore the Prefect's mind cannot "reflect" the truth. Dupin explains this phenomenon in "The Purloined Letter" by the game of puzzles, in which a word is written "upon the motley and perplexed surface of the chart" (3: 989) in such a way as to make it difficult to be discovered. Words in very large letters which should be most "evident" are, however, most commonly overlooked. In Dupin's view this observation represents an analogy to "the moral inapprehension by which the intellect suffers to pass unnoticed those considerations which are too obtrusively and too palpably self-evident" (3: 990). For Dupin the problem lies not in the particular nature of the truth but in the eye or rather the mind of the

beholder. Therefore all the light of the stars would not suffice to make the Prefect recognise the truth, while not even darkness prevents Dupin from seeing it.

The imagery of light and darkness reverted takes us back to Plato[13] but especially to Neoplatonism, and Christian Neoplatonism.[14] Mystical speculation reached a first climax after the absorption of Neoplatonism into Christian theology in the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite.[15] It continued in the negative theology of the Middle Ages and resurfaces in the mysticism of Renaissance Neoplatonism (including Jakob Boehme), in its philosophical as well as poetical branches. The Christian mystical notion of darkness as an image of God's incomprehensibility and total otherness, as in Dionysius or St John of the Cross are, of course, not the subject of Poe's tales. Dupin's asceticism, however, his life in the darkness of night, his love of silence (in contrast to the loquaciousness of the Prefect),[16] his propensity to "moody reverie" (3: 724),[17] to "abstraction" (3: 724), and also to "meditation" (3: 974), his ecstatic moments of analysis (2: 533)—but equally his poverty and detachment from material possessions which reflect the mystical renunciation of all things earthly[18]—all this calls for regarding him, at least tentatively, as a secularised kind of mystic.[19]

According to Dionysius "the superessential Darkness . . . is hidden by all the light that is in existing things."[20] Therefore the mystic chooses night as a symbol of the renunciation of everything that stands between the soul and the creator. To St. John of the Cross, who continues the speculation of the Areopagite, night is the state in which the sensual part of the soul is at rest, leaving the mind free and unencumbered.[21] Night represents the state of contemplation in which God provides the soul with the light of truth, but its incomparable brightness is experienced as darkness.[22] In the same way believing, to John of the Cross, means intellectual darkness. God appears as dark night to the mind because it is incapable of grasping him.[23]

The process of recognition which the mystics were intent to explore helps to understand the riddle of Dupin's method. The light in which the Prefect and the police try to find the truth is that of the material world: their approach is direct and therefore, seen in the perspective of Neoplatonic mysticism, necessarily ineffective. They are blind to the

truth because they believe that you can look straight into it. Though it seems, at first, as if Poe eliminated the metaphysical sense of truth in the detective stories, the images of light and darkness or night provide a connotative link to the negative theology of the Neoplatonic tradition.

Apart from Plato and the Neoplatonic mystics the German Romantic philosophers Fichte and Schelling seem to have contributed to Poe's imagery of light and darkness.[24] What makes Schelling relevant in this case is not so much the fact that he speaks of creation as "Ausstrahlungen," referring to Leibniz's "Fulgurationen," but that he links the image of the emanation of light to that of the night.[25] It is out of a night sky that God's continuous flash of lightning emerges. Therefore, night and day in God are one. He is eternal night and eternal day. Fichte, in his later work, *Wissenschaftslehre* (1804), talks of God as "absolute light" following the light metaphor in the Gospel of St. John.[26] Such a notion of God provides an additional reason why looking into the light blinds rather than enlightens.

A Romantic theorist whose work Poe knew well and who may, moreover, have served as an intermediary where Plato and the Neoplatonists are concerned, is Coleridge. In "The Destiny of Nations" (1796), Coleridge paraphrases Plato's Parable of the Cave ("Placed with our backs to bright Reality"), and identifies the light of the "eternal Sun" with the notion of God who "with retracted beams, and self-eclipse / Veiling" reveals himself.[27] God, though absolute light, is hidden in darkness. Nature does not allow direct access to his unbearable brightness, but reflects him even in its lowliest forms. God reveals himself "Through meaner powers and secondary things / effulgent as through clouds that veil his blaze" (l. 15-6). Even though mankind cannot bear the full light, it needs the reflections of this light lest it should have to remain in total darkness. The motif of darkness conveys two meanings, here: darkness is the way in which the divine light becomes visible in the world of matter, and it expresses the separation from this light.

While Coleridge may be the most immediate source of such Neoplatonic images and thoughts, love poetry as well as religious poetry of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries celebrate night in terms of mystical paradoxes. Dupin's love of night comes close to Neoplatonic mysticism which in varying ways and degrees permeates Shakespeare's

as well as Metaphysical poetry. The first line of Shakespeare's Sonnet 43, "When most I winke then doe mine eyes best see," provides a formula for the activity of the imagination in sleep that is also characteristic of Dupin. There is also a structural relationship between Dupin's paradoxical love of night and the mystical celebration of night as we find it in Crashaw's Hymn on the Epiphany where the chorus concludes:

> Now by abased liddes [we] shall learn to be
> Eagles; and shutt our eyes that we may see. (232-33)[28]

Reading on one feels tempted to regard Dupin's attitude to darkness as a secularised version of the prayer of Crashaw's poem:

> By the frugall negatiue light
> Of a most wise & well-abused Night
> To read more legible thine originall Ray,
> . . . . (210-12)[29]

Obviously the mystical aspect of Dupin's love of night and his almost mystical ecstasy (when his analytic activity occupies his mind) do not as such constitute a mythical element of his character; they contribute, however, to mark his search for truth in opposition to the method of the police and the speculation of the public in general (represented by the newspapers); and they mark his social eccentricity, i. e. his aristocratic independence from social conventions.[30]

Since, to a large extent, it is the negative way of the mystic which puts him in opposition to the institutionalised everyday world the mystical qualities also help shape the character of the great outsider as a myth, the more so as Poe adds simplicity to the detective's vision of truth. In a society of increasing complexity and incomprehensibility this makes the detective even more of an outsider. To Dupin truth is evident and truth is essentially simple, even playfully so. An element of pleasure pervades the whole process of finding the truth by means of analysis as practised by Dupin:

> . . . I could not help remarking and admiring (although from his rich ideality I had been prepared to expect it) a peculiar analytic ability in Dupin. He

> seemed, too, to take an eager delight in its exercise—if not exactly in its display—and did not hesitate to confess the pleasure thus derived. (2: 533)

Four highly suggestive terms are linked here: "ideality" and "analytic ability" on the one hand, and "delight" and "pleasure" on the other. Rather than being oppositions they point to a dialectical unity. While the term "ideality" reminds us of the Platonic quality of Dupin's philosophy[31] it is also synonymous with the imaginative faculty.[32] And the pleasure Dupin derives from the exercise of the analytic faculty is said to be identical with the pleasure derived from the imagination.[33]

It may be that the principle of pleasure involved in the exercise of analytical detection as an imaginative activity and the readers' participation in this exercise are the reasons for the continuous popularity of the detective story. The fictional detective appeals to our play instinct and we derive pleasure from watching the game. This is, perhaps, why we are not too shocked about the gruesome details Poe has introduced into the genre. Moral issues do not appear to be at stake in his stories. The purpose of playing is the game itself and the effect we derive from it is delight. Dupin is not interested in correcting the wrongs of widows and orphans, or in catching criminals, nor in fighting the forces of evil in the world. If all this really happens it is almost accidental.

> "As for these murders, let us enter into some examinations for ourselves ... An inquiry will afford us amusement . . . ." (2: 546)

Here, instead of the word "pleasure" which Dupin uses to describe the exercise of his analytic ability, he uses the word "amusement," thus giving a hint that a more complex kind of pleasure principle seems to be involved. Nearly all meanings of to *amuse*[34] seem to be present in Poe's usage, the two obsolete ones ("to muse intently, gaze in astonishment" and "to confound, distract, bewilder, puzzle") as well as the more familiar ones ("occupy the attention" and "to cause [time] to pass pleasantly"). However, the most interesting one is the traditional etymology of *to muse* derived from Latin *musa*,[35] another reminder that an aesthetic motive is in the foreground of the detective's work. However, just as light as an image of truth has its dialectical complement

in darkness, so the purely aesthetic motive of the detective is qualified by an ethical one, even though Dupin uses an understatement:

> ". . . and, besides, Le Bon once rendered me a service for which I am not ungrateful . . . ." (2: 546)

Le Bon's very name serves as a reminder that ethical categories are a relevant element even in the pleasure provided by analytic detection. This game has a serious aspect to it—*serio ludere* indeed.

Dupin's endeavours to find the truth, then, appear in a field composed by the co-ordinates light and darkness, but pleasure and serious play constitute a third dimension which prevents the detective from becoming a mere representation of philosophical or theological ideas. He finds the truth on the surface rather than in hidden depths, not in the brightness of light, but in darkness; his way to the truth is not ponderous seriousness but rather in the nature of a game, and not a difficult one at that. This combination is quite different from the great examples of the history of philosophy and religious thinking, not to speak of the seriousness of science or the methodical procedures of the police. Dupin's way of finding the truth is idiosyncratic and perhaps it is his specific, indirect, playful and imaginative way that makes him a new mythical figure.

As far as Dupin is concerned Poe seems to be on a similar course as Dickens who, in *Hard Times*, opposes the world of the Gradgrinds with Sleary's Horse Riding, Cecilia's imaginative "world view," and the circus dogs who mysteriously find their way back home. Both writers seem to have created myths of the imagination, in which the search for truth goes "odd" ways.

Poe's detective looks for truth on the level of a game, but this does not mean that this search becomes trivial. The quest for truth in all its existential and philosophical dimensions which it has acquired in the history of Western philosophy is not eliminated or negated, but present in what I would call a state of suspension—not a suspension of disbelief, of course, but perhaps a suspension of belief. Dupin's claim that his "ultimate object is only the truth" recalls the idea of truth, even though the playful context prevents it from being filled with its strictly

philosophical meaning. Even if the truth is nothing else but the correct analysis of how a murder was committed or how the letter was hidden etc. and that crime and punishment are virtually unimportant, the idea that truth comes to light or that justice prevails provides that horizon of ideality which Schiller thought the literature of the modern age should provide for its readers.[36] He predicted that it would unite in the manner of playfulness the seemingly irreconcilable opposites, reality and ideality, the world of necessity and the world of freedom. The myth of the detective represents this new combination, rooted in the old but continuous quest for truth, and appealing at the same time to the equally deep-rooted sense of play and pleasure as a result of participating in the fictional endeavours of a detection.

Fachhochschule Köln

NOTES

[1]See the *locus classicus*, Aristotle's *Poetics*, 6-8.

[2]W. H. Auden, "Dingley Dell and the Fleet," *The Dyer's Hand and other Essays* (London: Faber, 1963) 407, claims that myths are not "defined by their social and historical context" and myths created by writers "cease to be their author's characters."

[3]See the discussion in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. A. Preminger (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1974) s.v. "myth." For a historical account of the variety of meanings attached to the term "myth" see W. Burkert and A. Horstmann, "Mythos, Mythologie," *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. J. Ritter and K. Gründer, vol. 6 (Basel: Schwabe, 1984) 281-318. Curiously the new *Oxford Companion to Philosophy* does not have an entry under either term.

[4]See the use of the term in Auden 407 ff.

[5]N. Frye, *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (New York: Harcourt, 1963) associates myth with story and describes it in a way relevant to the detective story: "A myth may be told and retold: it may be modified or elaborated, or different patterns may be discovered in it; and its life is always the poetic life of a story, not the homiletic life of some illustrated truism" (32).

[6]John Irwin, at the beginning of his recent book *The Mystery to a Solution: Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995), denies Poe's detective the mythical quality which he reserves for the kind of detective story created by Raymond Chandler, "stories, whose true genre is less detective fiction than the quest romance" (1). The detective in this genre would appear moulded

by the mythology of the knight-errant while "the analytic detective story shows little interest in character, managing at best to produce caricatures—monsters of idiosyncrasy from Holmes to Poirot." If this were true, it would prove rather than refute the mythical quality of the analyst of crime who shares a lack of psychological differentiation with these characters.—The article by Christopher Rollason, "The Detective Myth in Edgar Allan Poe's Dupin Trilogy," *American Crime Fiction*, ed. B. Docherty (London: St. Martin's P, 1988) 4-21, does not discuss the notion of myth. It appears to be used in the Marxist meaning of false consciousness. The study considers the detective figure "as mythical embodiment of a certain conception of the 'full,' integrated, conflict-free subject" (4).

[7]H. Blumenberg, "Licht als Metapher der Wahrheit," *Studium Generale* 10 (1957): 432-47, argues that the dualistic notion of light and darkness is pre-Platonic and observes only in Plato the identity of being with truth and light: "Wahrheit ist Licht am Sein selbst, Sein als Licht" (433).

[8]Though Irwin, *The Mystery*, rejects the quest pattern, he links Poe's detective with the myths of Oedipus and Theseus. Claiming that "Poe's underlying project in the Dupin stories . . . is the analysis of self-consciousness within the larger project of differentiating the human," he implicitly allows for an allegorical and anagogical as well as psychoanalytic reading (xvii; see also 206 ff.). Even on other levels there are structural and thematic parallels between the myth of Oedipus and the detective stories. The detective solves riddles, and like Oedipus, who perpetrated the very crime he is eager to bring to light, the detective is to a certain extent identical with the criminal, not in fact but insofar as he is able to imagine what the criminal actually does. Inadvertently Irwin opens the perspective on mythical dimensions of Poe's detective.

[9]In "The Mystery of Marie Roget" Dupin attests "Reason" a "propensity for seeking the truth *in detail*" (3: 774). See also "The Murder in the Rue Morgue" (2: 548) where Dupin emphasises "that reason feels its way . . . in its search for the true." All quotations from *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 1969-78).

[10]Poe's knowledge of scientific facts derived from popular works like Brewster's *Natural Magic*. See S. B. Brody, "Poe's Use of Brewster's *Letters on Natural Magic*," *ELN* 27 (1989): 50-54.

[11]*OED*, s.v. "gazette" 1. quotes John Florio's explanation of *gazzette* as "running reports, daily newes, idle intelligences, or flim flam tales that are daily written from Italie, namely from Rome and Venice."

[12]One quotation from *L'Etoile* betrays its vain pretension to seeing and recognising the truth: "The things had all *evidently* been there . . . there can be *no doubt*" (3: 751, Poe's emphasis).

[13]Plato develops the parallel between seeing and recognition in Bk. 6 of *The Republic*.

[14]See E. von Ivánca, "Dunkelheit, mystische," *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, ed. Theodor Klauser *et al.*, vol. 4 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1959) 350-58. For a discussion of the different interpretations of light in Plato and in later mysticism see R. Bultmann, "Zur Geschichte der Lichtsymbolik im Altertum," *Philologus* 97 (1948): 22.

[15]For an overview see H. U. Lessing, "Mystik, mystisch," *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* 6: 268-79.

[16]See "The Purloined Letter": ". . . we had maintained a profound silence" (3: 974). The time of day is "just after dark." Dionysius sees silence and darkness in the same analogical relationship to the inexpressible: ". . . the dazzling obscurity of the secret Silence, outshining all brilliance with the intensity of their Darkness . . . ." Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Mystical Theology and the Celestial Hierarchies*, trans. by the eds. of The Shrine of Wisdom (Fintry, Surrey: The Shrine of Wisdom, 1965) 9.

[17]Cf. ". . . we gave the Future to the winds, and slumbered tranquilly in the Present weaving the dull world around us into dreams" (3: 724).

[18]Cf. Dionysius the Areopagite 9: "For by the unceasing and absolute renunciation of thyself and of all things thou mayest be borne on high, through pure and entire self-abnegation, into the superessential Radiance of the Divine Darkness."

[19]Dupin's seclusion from society and daylight when he experiences his "visions" are reminiscent of Plotinus's description of illumination which happens when "everything alien" is removed (*The Enneads*, tr. St. MacKenna, 3rd rev. ed. [London: Faber, 1956] I.2.4).

[20]Dionysius the Areopagite 12.

[21]"Subida de Monte Carmelo y Noche Oscura," *Vida y Obras de San Juan de la Cruz*, ed. Lucinio Ruano O.C.D. (Madrid: EDICA, 1978) 486-87.

[22]Juan de la Cruz 488: "La fe dicen los teólogos que es ùn hábito del ama cierto y oscuro. Y la razón de ser hábito oscuro es porque hace creer verdades reveladas por il mismo Dios, las cuales son sobre toda luz natural . . . . De aquí es que para el alma esta excesiva luz que se le da de fe le es oscurea tiniebla . . . ."

[23]Juan de la Cruz 487-88: "Porque, aunque es verdad que Dios es para el alma tan oscura noche como la fe hablando naturalmente . . . ."

[24]Cf. "Morella," and the discussions with Morella in which the narrator speaks of: "The wild Pantheism of Fitche [sic!] . . . and, above all, the doctrines of *Identity* as urged by Schelling . . ." (2: 226). Poe also refers to the German transcendentalists in a satirical vein. The hanged narrator in "Loss of Breath" reflects on his state: "A rapid change was now taking place in my sensations . . . Confusion crowded upon confusion like a wave upon a wave. In a very short time Schelling himself would have been satisfied with my entire loss of self-identity" (2: 79). In the same place quite a few of Poe's other sources crowd into the narrator's consciousness: "Then came like a flood, Coleridge, Kant, Fitche [sic!], and Pantheism . . . ."

[25]Cf. the quotation in W. Kern, *Geschichte der Europäischen Philosophie in der Neuzeit* (München: Verlag Berchmannskolleg, 1961) 181: "Denn gleichwie der Blitz ausgehet von der finsteren Nacht und hervorbricht durch eigene Kraft, also auch die unendliche Selbstbejahung von Gott. Gott ist die gleich ewige Nacht und der gleich ewige Tag der Dinge, die ewige Einheit und die ewige Schöpfung ohne Handlung oder Bewegung, sondern als ein stetes ruhiges Wetterleuchten aus unendlicher Fülle."

[26]Cf. Kern 162-65.

[27]S. T. Coleridge, *Poetical Works*, ed. E. H. Coleridge (London: OUP, 1967).

[28]R. Crashaw, "In the Glorious Epiphanie of Our Lord God, A Hymn," *The Poems English Latin and Greek*, ed. L. C. Martin (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1927) 254-60.

[29]See Vaughan's very different view of night as a time of danger: "Stars are of mighty use: The night / Is dark, and long; / The Rode foul, and where one goes right, / Six may go wrong." *The Works of Henry Vaughan*, ed. L. C. Martin, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1957) 423.

[30]Poe's detective is one of the aristocratic individuals whom the democratic age seems to have produced as heroes in American literature. De Tocqueville drew attention to this dialectical contrast in democracy. The literature of the new democratic society paradoxically celebrates the individual, e.g. Whitman sings his "self" as a hero, separate and yet representative, Emily Dickinson creates a lyrical voice of spiritual and social independence, and Melville's individualistic truth seekers flee the land and society and yet appear as representatives of humanity.

[31]*OED*, s.v. "ideality," regards this faculty as an attribute of God. It signifies the "Faculty of forming 'ideas' or archetypes" (1).

[32]*OED*, "ideality," refers to its usage in Phrenology as synonymous with the poetical faculty (2) quoting Sidney Smith (1838).

[33]In fact, the aim of Poe's more or less theoretical essay at the beginning of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" is to convince the reader that the analytical faculty is virtually another name for the imagination. Following Coleridge's distinction between *fancy* and *imagination* Poe claims: "It will be found, in fact, that the ingenious are always fanciful, and the *truly* imaginative never otherwise than analytic" (2: 531).

[34]*OED*, s.v. "amuse."

[35]*OED*, s.v. "muse *v.*"

[36]Friedrich Schiller, "Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung," *Werke in Drei Bänden*, ed. H. G. Göpfert (München: Hanser, 1966). See especially 2: 595-97.

Connotations
Vol. 5.2-3 (1995/96)

Calvinism Feminized: Divine Matriarchy in Harriet Beecher Stowe

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I

Confronting her New England religious heritage with more personal credulity than Hawthorne ever did his, the seventh child of Lyman and Roxana Beecher found herself engaged in a lifelong struggle to assimilate—and to remake—her ancestral Calvinism. The fruit of this engagement is evident in the subject matter of later novels such as *The Minister's Wooing*, *Oldtown Folks*, and *Pogunuc People*, as well as in the apocalyptic urgency and evangelical fervor of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Deficient in several crafts of the belletristic novelist, Stowe yet knew how to infuse her writing with the powerful rhetoric of conversion preaching. In fact, her best fiction often shows a temper closer to symbolic romance than to novelistic realism, with the author drawing on mythic and personal energies to sustain her heightened rhetoric. Thus, episodes in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* such as Eliza's perilous crossing of the Ohio River or the deaths of Eva and Tom amount to rituals of passage laden with mythological import.

Inspired with regenerative confidence that the last will be first in God's Kingdom, Stowe exalted society's powerless people—children, blacks, and women—in her tales of the lowly. And as critics like Elizabeth Ammons and Dorothy Berkson have demonstrated for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*,[1] her recognition of women and endorsement of feminine piety centered especially on the saving force of maternity. Stowe's agonistic involvement with Jonathan Edwards and the original faith of New England's fathers issued at length in a reconceived Christianity of American mothers.

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At one level, of course, this paean to motherly love betrays the influence of a post-revivalist and sentimental Christianity, of emerging bourgeois values, and of feeling loosed from all strictures of logic. As Berkson suggests, it also shows Stowe's theological impulse to displace the monarchical God of Edwardsean Calvinism with a divine principle of maternal compassion. At the same time, one can see the author's matrifocal spirituality flowing directly from evangelical tradition insofar as her motherhood theme grounds more incarnationally that classic Reformation-Pauline metaphor of conversion as a "new birth."

For Stowe the resulting focus on divine womanhood, which is central to her vision of this life and the next, drew particular inspiration from the biblical Mary. That Stowe reflected deeply on the Marian Madonna is a little-known fact one might not have predicted in a woman of her era, place, and religious background. She shared this interest with her brothers Charles and Henry Ward Beecher.[2] One indication of it can be seen in her zeal for visual art, particularly as stimulated by her three visits to Europe. In her Hartford residence on Forest Street, tour guides today may point to a copy of Raphael's *Madonna of the Goldfinch* hanging conspicuously in the front parlor to illustrate her pioneering display of Madonna artifacts among the households of local Protestant gentility. What is more, Stowe owned copies of at least three other sacred Madonnas—including the *Holy Family del Divino Amore* and Raphael's *Madonna del Gran Duca*—in addition to secular renderings of the Mother and Child motif. After her first European tour in 1853, she reported in a letter to her sister-in-law that she had just installed a copy of Raphael's Sistine Madonna, the original of which she had viewed at Dresden, in her home at Andover, Massachusetts. She remarked elsewhere that this picture "formed a deeper part of my consciousness than any I have yet seen."[3]

So her iconographic fascination with the theme is plain. And in conjunction with her fiction, Stowe's written discourses on Mary in her verse and nonfictional prose—especially as delineated in *Woman in Sacred History*—offer us valuable understanding of the personal, cultural, and theological significance of her interest. Her Marian attitudes help to clarify, in turn, the distinctive sort of domestic, matrifocal feminism that informs her fictions. It is scarcely accidental that several of Stowe's

redemptive heroines—Mary Scudder in *The Minister's Wooing*, Mara in *The Pearl of Orr's Island*, and Mary Higgins in *Pogunuc People*—even bear Marian names. In the limited purview of this essay, however, my first aim is simply to describe the character of Stowe's attraction to the mythical image of divine womanhood—or, in Christian terms, the Madonna—as indicated in nonfictional prose and poetic writings. What is the import of this Protestant writer's interest in the ostensibly Catholic image of the Madonna?[4] I then want to consider how this interest might bear particularly on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and on one less familiar novel, *The Minister's Wooing*.

II

Stowe's revalorization of the Madonna presented Mary not as Virgin so much as paradigmatic Mother, focusing especially on her conjunctive relation to a maternal Jesus. Thus accommodating Marian piety to Protestant orthodoxy, Stowe sought to refashion her inherited Calvinism into what she conceived to be a more encompassing Christianity. In biographical terms, Stowe's interest in the Marian Madonna may have been stirred not only by her European travel experiences but also by highly sanctified memories of her own deceased mother, Roxana Beecher, who died when Harriet was only five years old. Brother Henry Ward Beecher even testified that "My mother is to me what the Virgin Mary is to a devout Catholic."[5]

Two revealing expressions of Stowe's responses to the biblical Mary can be located in her devotional account of "The Blessed Woman"—included in her *Footsteps of the Master* (1877)—and in her volume of character portraits celebrating *Woman in Sacred History*.[6] Devoting separate chapters of *Woman in Sacred History* to "Mary the Mythical Madonna" and "Mary the Mother of Jesus," Stowe seems at first to reject the mythical Mary altogether on the usual Protestant grounds of scant biblical evidence. To allow unscriptural legends, iconography, and pagan associations to image a Mary who overshadows Jesus is, she charges, a grave mistake.

Yet the resistance here to deifying Jesus' mother may derive less from biblical hermeneutics than from Mrs. Stowe's urge to identify with Mary's palpable experience of womanhood. For Stowe, the woman highly favored is no timeless goddess but a figure of history. Though "the crowned queen of women," Mary manifests her blessedness for Stowe not through supernal powers but in her exemplary bearing among those "that have lived woman's life."[7] And not surprisingly, Stowe identifies this womanhood chiefly with maternity.

Indeed, Stowe's domestic sense of Mary as Mother is so strong that it all but effaces the title of Virgin from her nonfictional commentary. Rejecting in usual Protestant fashion the theory of Mary's perpetual virginity, Stowe reflects instead with knowing sympathy on the trials Mary faced by virtue of "the unbelief of her other children."[8] Moreover, Mary's maternity extends beyond the momentous act of birthing Christ to include her teaching of Jesus and domestic familiarity with him.

This sense of an integral association between Mary and Jesus is central to Stowe's theology. It helps to explain not only her Protestant reluctance to view Mary as an autonomous goddess, but also her arresting insistence on the feminine character of Jesus. For if Jesus lacked a biological father, "all that was human in him" derived from Mary's nature. Accordingly, "there was in Jesus more of the pure feminine element than in any other man. It was the feminine element exalted and taken in union with divinity." So intimate is this association that to express it, Stowe combines imagery of marriage and parthenogenesis: "He was bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh—his life grew out of her immortal nature."[9]

Yet Mary herself retains for Stowe a crucial role as exemplar. It is evident that Stowe identified personally not only with Mary's motherhood, but also with Mary's ironic attainment of public significance through values and activities centered in the private, domestic sphere.[10] Stowe does praise Mary's self-abnegating acceptance of the divine will, to the point of echoing the blessed woman's "Behold the handmaid of the Lord" in the course of describing the newfound faith and vocation beyond perplexity she found in her own religious experience.[11] But Stowe also attributes to Mary the divine fire of poet and prophet, as reflected presumably in her one great effusion, the Magnificat.[12]

Plainly Stowe identifies, too, with Mary's perseverance in facing keen personal loss. She dedicates her 1867 verses on "The Sorrows of Mary" quite explicitly "to mothers who have lost sons in the late war,"[13] and surely the "anguish of disappointed hopes"[14] that pierced the *stabat mater* was comprehensible to a mother who in 1849 lost one son to plague and in 1857 another, nineteen years old, to death by drowning in the Connecticut River. In fact, Stowe's ability to draw mythic power from her own maternal mourning over baby Charley became crucial to her conception of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, just as her affliction over Henry's state of soul at the time of his drowning helped to precipitate *The Minister's Wooing*.[15]

In the final analysis, Stowe's nonfictional writings testify that she could not fully resist the imaginative attraction of "Mary the Mythical Madonna." Even as she laments displacement of "the real Mary" by poeticized imagery, she writes appreciatively of iconographic representations by Raphael, Titian, and Fra Angelico as well as of legends passed down through apocryphal writings. She confesses she is attracted, for example, by the mythic tradition of the Greek Church that "Mary alone of all her sex was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, and pray before the ark of the covenant."

By envisioning Mary as a "second Eve" and quintessential mother worthy of "love and veneration," Stowe comes close to recognizing her—if not invoking her—as the mother of us all. But she is careful to distance herself from Catholic allegiances, observing that the Mariological excesses of the Roman Church "have tended to deprive the rest of the world of a great source of comfort and edification by reason of the opposite extreme to which Protestant reaction has naturally gone."[16]

III

Against the backdrop of such concerns, the prophetic purpose of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* can be seen all the more clearly. Just as the Marian Magnificat looks toward that era when God shall put down the mighty but exalt the humble and meek, so also Stowe's bestseller represents a womanly triumph of evangelical rhetoric on behalf of "the lowly."

And despite the book's technical deficiencies as novel, it is indeed a masterwork of rhetoric. Addressed above all to the maternal soul and conscience of the nation, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is also a book full of motherly characters—to the point where even its black hero, Tom, has been aptly described as figuring a feminized and maternal Christ.[17]

Already in the book's second chapter, entitled "The Mother," Stowe invokes an heroic image of motherhood in the flight of Eliza Harris. Warned as Mary had been that on account of her male child "a sword will pierce through your soul,"[18] Eliza nonetheless enjoys almost miraculous protection as she flees from bondage across the Ohio River, her figurative Jordan and Red Sea, on dancing icefloes. What drives this thrilling Exodus, Stowe suggests, is Eliza's powerful assent to faith and hope combined with "maternal love, wrought into a paroxysm of frenzy by the near approach of a fearful danger" (105). And just as Stowe perceived something stronger in Mary's assent to Gabriel's annunciation than shrinking submissiveness, so also she highlights the fierceness of Eliza's parental commitment.

Another case of compelling maternity is presented by Senator Bird's wife, named Mary, who intercedes successfully with her husband on behalf of the fugitives. In view of the familiar charge that Stowe's sentimental portrayal of womanhood reduces all argument to mere feeling, it is worth observing that Mary applies a fairly rigorous logic of consistency and biblical authority in making her case against the fugitive slave law. By contrast Senator Bird, who lacks Mary's concrete, integral sense of moral reality, succumbs initially to a fallacy of uprooted abstraction in which "his idea of a fugitive was only an idea of the letters that spell the word" (155). Yet ironically, he patronizes his wife as having more heart than head, just as Haley dismisses Mrs. Shelby's concern for her slaves as irrational because women "ha'nt no sort of calculation" (46).

Even more than Mrs. Shelby or Mary Bird, Rachel Halliday, whose comfort Eliza enjoys in the Quaker settlement, presents an image of archetypal maternity. It is surely no accident that in the epigraph appearing one chapter before Halliday's introduction, Stowe cites Jeremiah's prophetic account of Rachel weeping for her children. (192) For Rachel Halliday supplies potential nurture to the whole of afflicted

humankind since "hers was just the face and form that made 'mother' seem the most natural word in the world" (216). As Jane Tompkins observes, Halliday personifies for Stowe something of divine presence because as she is "seated in her kitchen at the head of her table, passing out coffee and cake for breakfast, Rachel Halliday, the millennarian counterpart of little Eva, enacts the redeemed form of the last supper."[19]

Yet Stowe portrays only one virgin mother within her gallery of memorable women. Or at least one could argue that the childsaint Eva, who is evidently a holy virgin, qualifies metaphorically as a mother by virtue of her role in mediating the new birth to characters such as Topsy, Miss Ophelia, and her father Augustine. Hers is thus a true, spiritual motherhood in opposition to the false, fleshly motherhood of Marie St. Clare. Consistent with the book's ironic reversals in which the last become first, Stowe develops here a curious sort of reverse typology in which Eva replaces Mary (or second Eve), and in which the child emerges as more effectively maternal than her own mother.

Beyond the ironic nomenclature by which Eva supplants Marie, Stowe exploits other dimensions of Eva's name. As Evangeline, she serves of course as the book's strongest evangelical instrument of conversion. For the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, conversion to the cause of immediate emancipation, with its conviction of slavery as sin, must be founded at base on the heart's conversion to Christ. But Stowe portrays Eva as stimulating this twofold conversion not through her speech, so much as through a quality of presence that bears the Word into the world. As an antitype of Eve, Eva epitomizes—within the sentimental terms of Stowe's narrative—the saving power of natural womanhood. Recreating her namesake's title as "the mother of all living" (Gen. 3:20), Eva also epitomizes a more universal maternity than that presented by Marie.

At the same time, Eva reveals herself to be a new Eve in that she bears the Word into a world enslaved by sin and offers herself as agent of the New Birth. She also absorbs the pain of others; for like the *mater dolorosa* of Luke 2:51, she knows what it is for such sorrow to "sink into" her heart (326). Through her devotional exercises, this "fair star" (383) consents to act as feminine intercessor before God for her sinful father. When St. Clare sees her off to church where he will not follow, he

nonetheless bids her "pray for me" (278). This intercessory role parallels and supports that of St. Clare's own mother.

However embarrassing by present-day standards of critical taste, Eva's deathscene plainly occupies a pivotal place in the book—and in this character's brief career as mother of conversions. Of course, Stowe does not hesitate to milk the episode for all the Victorian sentiment that a pious maiden's early demise could supply. Precisely the sort of nineteenth-century conventions regarding death that Dickinson mocks so brilliantly in "I heard a fly buzz when I died" come in for solemn treatment here: the circle of chastened mourners, the sacramentalized curls of hair Eva confers as "a last mark of her love," an edifying farewell discourse reminiscent of that given by Jesus in St. John's gospel, and the mourners' urge to glimpse something of the saint's dying vision of joy, peace and love.

Yet beyond its individual demonstration of holy dying, Eva's translation is intended to signal the larger birthpangs of a new order opening from the womb of eternity. As such, the scene incorporates birthing similitudes in its mention of Eva's spasmodic agony leading toward exhaustion, its passage through the tension of midnight vigil when eternity's veil "grows thin" (426) to that blessed change which Tom describes as an opening wide of heaven's door. Still presented as beautiful despite her crimson coloring, Eva dies nobly of consumption, as had the author's mother. In Stowe's idealized fable she is indeed consumed—immediately and integrally, without apparent corruption of body or conflict of spirit—into the dawn of God's Kingdom. No wonder a favorite hymn of Stowe's was the comforting song of death beginning "O mother dear, Jerusalem."[20] This untraumatic form of Eva's rebirth parallels the translation of Mary, otherwise termed her assumption or (in Eastern Orthodox usage) dormition, as set forth in apocryphal and iconographic traditions later described by Stowe in detail. Such traditions regard Mary's assumption as an instance of realized eschatology in which Jesus returns to escort Mary not merely in his role as Son but also as Bridegroom of his beloved.[21] So also Tom counsels watchfulness for the bridegroom's rendezvous with Eva at midnight.

In tandem with this scene, Stowe later depicts a more traumatic version of passage toward the new birth in Tom's martyrdom at the hand of

Simon Legree. Already a reconceived *alter Christus*, Tom is delivered to the Kingdom's larger life as "He began to draw his breath with long, deep inspirations; and his broad chest rose and fell, heavily" (591). Moreover, Stowe associates his death mystically with the birthpangs of the apocalyptic endtime. And plainly the archetype of Tom's triumphant passion is found in Jesus' life-giving labor on the cross: "In his patient, generous bosom he bears the anguish of a world. Bear thou, like him, in patience, and labor in love; for sure as he is God, 'the year of his redeemed shall come.'"[22] In the closing pages of her book, the author underscores the natal trauma of this coming age of cataclysm or millennialistic renewal, "an age of the world when nations are trembling and convulsed," when "a mighty influence is abroad, surging and heaving the world." (629) As George Harris interprets the signs of these times, "the throes that now convulse the nations are . . . but the birth-pangs of an hour of universal peace and brotherhood" (611).

Predictably, readers unsympathetic to Stowe's religious values have scorned Tom's nonviolent resistance, his self-sacrificing resignation, as a form of passive docility demeaning to African Americans. No matter that in his defiant love Tom refuses to flog a fellow slave, that he will die rather than betray Cassy and Emmeline, that his response makes possible both their escape and the liberation of slaves on the Shelby estate in Kentucky. In dramatizing her belief in the spiritual force of kenotic or self-emptying love, Stowe does indeed draw on conventional pieties surrounding motherhood and childhoof; at the same time she subverts normative values, insofar as she argues not simply for a redistribution but for a redefinition of power. That the "powerfully made" (68) and indubitably masculine Tom nonetheless functions as a kind of heroine, incorporating values traditionally branded as feminine or maternal, is a notable finding of recent feminist criticism. And when Tom assures Legree that he (Tom) "can die," the affirmation carries for Stowe an active import understandable only within the visionary terms of his role—shared with Eva—as divine mother of the nascent Kingdom of God.

Because Tom carries maternal compassion so fully in the body of his own person, his biological mother need not play a role in this narrative. Yet two other mothers in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, both deceased, continue

to influence their sons despite or through their absence. These are the absent mothers of Simon Legree and of Augustine St. Clare. Even Simon Legree, it seems, might have claimed salvation had he not rejected definitively the humanizing and divinizing influence of his mother. From beyond the grave she haunts this would-be reprobate with the spectre of an unresolved identity and almost irresistable grace. Linked to Eva by association with a golden hairthread, Legree's mother signifies not only the shadow of potential regeneracy, but also the supressed anima of this "grotesquely masculine tyrant."[23] Despite her son's perdition, her intercessory power bears fruit—even at a heavenly distance—by making possible the escape of Emmeline and Cassy.

As a choice version of what Puritans would recognize as the "natural man," an unconverted but sympathetic man of the world, the ironically named Augustine St. Clare does achieve full conviction of his personal depravity. He might therefore be considered ripe for regeneration. Yet before his deathbed change, he is incapable of passing beyond this stage toward the assurance of grace and forgiveness needed for "effectual calling." He also abandons hope when he fails in his romantic ideal of love. Briefly, this Augustine believes more deeply in his capacity for sin than in his ability to embrace the saving goodness of God. He can appreciate, intellectually, the evil of slavery though he is helpless to affirm, existentially, the imperative of emancipation. Accordingly, his predicament reflects Stowe's moral critique of Calvinism. Without the intervention of heaven-sent intermediaries, "Saint Clare" can be neither saintly nor clear of vision.

Yet he is peculiarly susceptible to the influence of feminine grace by virtue of his "marked sensitiveness of character, more akin to the softness of woman than the ordinary hardness of his own sex" (239). And we know that his bible-loving mother had been, literally, another Evangeline. In St. Clare's estimation she "was divine," or at least immaculately conceived in the sense that she betrayed "no trace of any human weakness or error about her" (333). We are told that St. Clare's father once over-ruled her, despite his supreme reverence for her, as brazenly as he would have "the virgin Mary herself" (336). Yet as a woman of Protestant (French Huguenot) stock who plays Catholic organ music, she transcends sectarian categories. That St. Clare's maternal piety leads

toward a virtual identification of motherhood with divinity seems apparent when, on his deathbed, he declares he is returning "HOME, at last" and invokes "Mother!" as his final word. Thus St. Clare's absent mother ultimately regains Presence.

In her closing exhortation to the congregation of all America, Stowe warns of wrath from above unless the nation reverses its course toward a dis-union effected by slavery and sin. If "this Union" is "to be saved," to regain health and wholeness, her readers must seize the "day of grace" and assist the birth of God's Kingdom in a convulsive era. (629) But by the close of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe establishes that within her hopeful vision of the mother-savior lies the mother-healer who could restore integrity to dis-membered families, souls, and sections of the United States.

IV

Seven years after releasing *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in book form, Stowe confronted more directly her own religious and familial heritage in a New England novel featuring an overtly Marian protagonist. Despite its title, *The Minister's Wooing* (1859) focuses less on the historically based character of Samuel Hopkins than it does on the saintly figure of Mary Scudder. If Hopkins fictionally encompasses Lyman Beecher so as to epitomize for Stowe New England's Calvinist patriarchy,[24] it is telling that Mary ends up displacing Hopkins as the novel's theological center. Similarly, Stowe had already advanced her own claim, within a family of noted clergymen, to exercising a ministry of the Word through her authorship of works like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

It is telling that the opening still life of Mary Scudder in *The Minister's Wooing* shows her enshrined as the New England maiden, an image superimposed on her iconographic portrayal as the original Virgin Mary. The picture of this girl who at first means never to marry comes complete with a descending dove, forming an overall impression of "simplicity and purity" reminiscent "of some old pictures of the girlhood of the Virgin."[25] Indeed the Roman Catholic Virginie de Frontignac later confides to Mary that "I always think of you when I think of our dear

Lady." (394). In her grief, Stowe's American heroine is also likened to the Sistine Madonna and associated with one of da Vinci's Madonnas. Linked repeatedly to the ocean beside Newport, she is even decked out playfully for her nuptials by Madame de Frontignac to resemble a "sea-born Venus." (423)

This image of Mary's divine womanhood—reinforced by further comparisons to Catherine of Siena, to Dante's Beatrice, and to the saintly wife of Jonathan Edwards—is qualified only slightly by recognition that the dove painted into the *mise en scène* actually belongs to her heathenish cousin James. For Stowe quickly establishes that at another level Mary is herself the dove, one in whom the Holy Spirit ultimately bears vitalizing power as "priestess, wife, and mother" (567).

Like Eva, Mary Scudder fulfills a crucial vocation as the mother of new birth for others. She is a regenerative agent not only for James Marvyn—her cousin, future husband, lusty sailor, and natural man—but also, if with less certain results, for the notorious Aaron Burr, grandson of Jonathan Edwards. She even succeeds in "wooing" the learned Doctor some distance from his overcerebral, self-tormenting Calvinism toward a Christianity allowing greater scope for beauty and divine compassion.

While preserving Mary's image of unspotted virtue, Stowe attributes to her the same initiated understanding of affliction that James remembers seeing pictorialized in "the youthful Mother of Sorrows" (36). Even before she finally achieves biological motherhood at the story's conclusion, then, and particularly after gaining precocious wisdom in her grief over James's supposed death at sea, Mary appears less the virginal innocent than her friend, the nearly ruined "Virginie." Stowe's New England maiden qualifies as a mother-nurturer to others because of her initiation "as a sanctified priestess of the great worship of sorrow" (380).

Yet the way in which Mary Scudder quickens conversion differs in at least one crucial respect from that displayed by Eva St. Clare. For Mary, unlike Eva, draws on sexual energies directed initially toward herself on the way to stirring male desires for the love of God.

Thus, in *The Minister's Wooing* Stowe ventures to affirm that *agape* need not efface *eros* in the divine economy of grace. To be sure, disordered *eros* gives rise to the rapaciousness of Burr, or the psychic bondage of

Virginie. Rightly directed, however, natural impulses might elevate the soul toward higher loves, as in the instance of Dante's love for Beatrice. Stowe demonstrates this theological hypothesis by indicating how much of the regenerative inspiration Mary supplies to James Marvyn, Hopkins, and Burr is fueled by eroticism. So *this* Mary is clearly lover as well as spiritual mother—and, without conscious design, she fulfills much of her latter role through the former. The figurative ambiguity corresponds to some traditional symbolizations of the Madonna as both mother and spouse of God.

In *The Minister's Wooing*, then, Stowe underscores her conviction that a progressive scale of affections connects the theological orders of nature and grace, that natural love is indeed sacramental. In contrast to the all-or-nothing ideality of austere Calvinism, she insists that "There is a ladder to heaven, whose base God has placed in human affections, tender instincts, symbolic feelings, sacraments of love, through which the soul rises . . . into the image of the divine." (87).

Within this sacramental scheme, Mary Scudder clearly qualifies as high priestess. Thus James testifies that Mary's image, standing "between me and low, gross vice" (70), elevated his character. In her office as mediator and intercessor, Mary Scudder typifies for Stowe that charism of spiritual maternity shared by many women and some men.

In contrast to this sacramental theology, the hyper-Calvinistic theology of the rungless ladder demands an heroic, unmediated leap of virtue to the point of accepting one's own damnation for the greater glory of God. Stowe suggests that Hopkins' sublime theory of benevolence betrays a masculinized privileging of heroic achievement and individual force of will. For at its worst, the damned theology of Hopkins ends up exalting the nobility of man's self-abnegating exertions over the gracious benevolence of a God who presumably wills to save all repentant sinners. Ironically, this New Divinity comes close to supplanting Calvinism's favored Covenant of Grace with a new Covenant of Works centered in human volition, to replacing the charitable bonds of communitarian Christianity with a virtue borne of heroic individualism.

Depicted novelistically as a sound-hearted eccentric, Doctor Hopkins embodies true virtue both in his personal charity toward African slaves and in his willingness to free Mary from her promise to marry him. But

the novel portrays him as a good man largely despite, rather than because of, the theological system he espouses. For Stowe, the rationalistic, disjunctive logic supporting his theology is far less sound than the pneumenal wisdom that sustains the faith of characters like Mary and Candace, the Scudder family's black housekeeper and nurse. In underscoring this point, the author elaborates a gender division in which the epistemology and semiotic expression of male clerics are superseded by those of holy women.

The male-sponsored, rationalistic approach emphasizes verbal knowledge and expression as epitomized by the Doctor's monumental treatise. It is essentially analytic, cerebral, abstracted. By contrast, Stowe's pneumenal way accents iconic or wordless communication, intuitive and poetic knowledge, and matrifocal values.

It is fair to question the gender-specific validity of this opposition, or what appears to be the anti-intellectual tenor of Stowe's sentimental focus on a religion of feeling. Yet the pneumenal epistemology favored in *The Minister's Wooing* does respect a logic of its own.

Thus, the Puritan logic of "evidences" for election is shown to be ultimately illogical insofar as it purports to find rationalistic criteria for judging pneumenal motions of the Spirit. During James's fearful absence at sea, there is no external, empirical evidence to prove that this natural man ever found personal evidence of his conversion and salvation. Hence Hopkins offers no hope for him. Yet Candace, eschewing the "white folks' way of tinkin" and following another "mode of testing evidence," rightly affirms that "Mass'r James is one o' de 'lect' and I'm clar dar's considerable more o' de 'lect than people tink." (447-88, 349)

By contrast with Hopkins, Candace and Mary demonstrate other, more womanly ways of knowing. As Stowe's African re-embodiment of the archaic earth mother, Candace not only displays special powers of intuitive prophecy but also exercises the universal motherhood typified by the Christian Madonna. Thus, Candace rocks the grieving Mrs. Marvyn "as if she had been a babe" (347), reminding her of how tenderly Jesus of Nazareth "looked on His mother" and assuring her that such a Savior "knows all about mothers' hearts" and "won't break yours" (348).

This black mother's pneumenal and aboriginal power as intercessor likewise emboldens her to invoke the authority of the Spirit when she assures Ellen Marvyn, contrary to one version of Calvinist evidence, that James has been "called an' took" (349) among God's elect. Candace bustles about the house, half comically, as a latter-day goddess of abundance and the hearth, an "African Genius of Plenty" (445) resembling one of those rotund fertility figurines from the Neolithic era. But she also performs Christian intercession as a Black Madonna who spreads her "ample skirts" over the transgressions of her white and black children and who has "secret bowels of mercy" (112) for James when he is convicted of youthful misbehavior. Hers is indeed a queenly motherhood, as underscored by Doctor Hopkins' joking reference to her name as that of an ancient Ethiopian queen (138); and for nineteenth-century scholars like J. J. Bachofen, "Candace" became a generic term associated with a phase of material and spiritual matriarchy.[26]

In her office as evangelizing intercessor, Mary Scudder likewise mediates the Spirit—as when she quickens Hopkins' soul, passions, and instinct for beauty through "the silent breathing of her creative presence" (93). And though James finds her "a living gospel" who shelters the Word, she achieves this end not mainly through verbalized discourse but through an iconic force issuing from silence. Particularly in her pain, she is framed descriptively as an image of reflective and attentive meditation, like her namesake who ponders words in her heart. Stowe underscores the inspirative power mediated through her face, gestures, and listening presence. As Kristeva says of the Virginal Maternal, Mary Scudder's semiotic import extends "to the extralinguistic regions of the unnamable."[27] Because the language of the Virginal Maternal issues from the Spirit's silence, it is fitting that James progresses toward his shipboard conversion not through any direct verbal initiative but through possession of Mary's bible, that physical relic whose extra-linguistic power extends the presence of her physical body.

Yet the author's feminized theology reflects more of an adaptation and transformation than a wholesale rejection of masculine precedents in her Christian tradition. It is scarcely surprising that within the sacred bower of Mary Scudder's bedchamber, the library that feeds her

imagination includes not only the Bible and a few secular writings but also the works of Jonathan Edwards. For holy New England women could find much to sustain them in the contemplative Edwards—the Edwards who recognized the beauty of divine virtue and the virtue of beauty, or who appreciated the emotive power of affections in drawing souls toward conversion.

Only the ultraCalvinist Edwards, the rigorist who highlighted divine sovereignty and human depravity, needed to be shelved. For Stowe this less congenial exponent of the rungless ladder and a monarchical God had, like his follower Hopkins, lost contact with that homelier life sanctified by Mother and Child:

> These hard old New England divines were the poets of metaphysical philosophy, who built systems in an artistic fervor, and felt self exale from beneath them as they rose into the higher regions of thought. But where theorists and philosophers tread with sublime assurance, woman often follows with bleeding footsteps;—women are always turning from the abstract to the individual, and feeling where the philosopher only thinks (25).

In a subsequent letter, Virginie de Frontignac enlarges the meaning of these "bleeding footsteps" when she exclaims with reference to Mrs. Marvyn's loss that "the bleeding heart of the Mother of God can alone understand such sorrows" (382) as the book's grieving women—and, presumably, its author—have known. No wonder Mrs. Marvyn, after James's return, sits "looking into her son's eyes, like a picture of the Virgin Mary" (566). Stowe's narrative returns often to this notion that the *heart of the mater dolorosa* lies close to the mystery of a suffering God and that "Sorrow is divine" (360). For "the All-Father treats us as the mother does her 'infant crying in the dark;' he does not reason with our fears, or demonstrate their fallacy, but draws us silently to His bosom, and we are at peace" (425-26).

V

As I hope to establish in a forthcoming full-length study of six literary figures, Stowe was not unique among Protestant writers in expressing

fascination with the idea of a Christian Magna Mater at odds with the pragmatic, rationalistic, and competitive impulses of American culture. Especially for writers like Hawthorne and Stowe, figures of Divine Maternity also challenged the predominantly masculine symbol-sytem inherited from Puritan forebears. But a distinctive mark of Stowe's treatment of Divine Womanhood is the way her fiction draws from Catholic antecedents but re-presents them in Calvinist instances—in characters like Eva St. Clare, Mary Higgins, or Mary Scudder, who are infused in turn with reminiscence of real-life New Englanders such as Sarah Pierrepont. For Stowe this feminized amalgam of Calvinist rectitude and Catholic mythography attached itself, in addition, to Romantic notions of salvific womanhood and to Victorian glorifications of Motherhood. Praising Goethe's great Romantic poem, Stowe observes that Faust is raised from sin not simply through the abstract force of "the eternal womanly" but through the particular intervention of Margaret, "who, like a tender mother, leads the new-born soul to look upon the glories of heaven." And of course many works published in nineteenth-century America, including Lydia Sigourney's *Letters to Mothers* (1838) or Charles Goodrich's *The Influence of Mothers* (1835), witness to popular faith in the sacred power of a mother's influence in home and community.[28]

Yet for Stowe, post-Calvinist Christian piety supplied an essential continuity beneath all these elements. Thus, her reading of Faust credits Goethe not for articulating a Romantic vision but for displaying appreciation of Christian forgiveness and redemption. It is, after all, not through works but through the womanly mediation of grace that Faust is ultimately saved. And a conspicuous companion of Margaret in the "shining band" of purified women encircling him at his death is "Mary the mother of Jesus."[29] For Stowe, then, the archetype of Divine Maternity found its historic center in the conjoined Mother and Son of Nazareth—the unified epitome of compassionate mother-love.

In personal terms, though, the experience of motherhood seems to have yielded considerable bitterness as well as satisfaction for Stowe.[30] Accordingly, her theologizing imagination drew her persistently toward images of God as suffering servant rather than as superintending monarch, and toward a Jesus who learned something of that servanthood

in the household of the *mater dolorosa*. Stowe could envision only such a woman, recalled in her several variants as Eva, Mary Scudder, or Mara with roots in the "salt, bitter waters of our mortal life," interceding on behalf of struggling humankind.

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NOTES

[1]Elizabeth Ammons, "Heroines in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," *American Literature* 49 (1977): 161-79; Ammons, "Stowe's Dream of the Mother-Savior," *New Essays on Uncle Tom's Cabin*, ed. Eric Sundquist (New York: CUP, 1986) 155-95; Dorothy Berkson, "Millennial Politics and the Feminine Fiction of Harriet Beecher Stowe," *Critical Essays on Harriet Beecher Stowe*, ed. Elizabeth Ammons (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1980) 244-58.

[2]For a summary of views on Mary expressed in writings by Charles and Henry Ward Beecher, see Peter Gardella's *Innocent Ecstasy: How Christianity Gave America an Ethic of Sexual Pleasure* (New York: OUP, 1985) 108, 128. In Charles Beecher's *The Incarnation; or, Pictures of the Virgin and her Son* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1849), the author supposes that Mary's beauty of soul was matched by an "exquisite symmetry of physical development" (53).

[3]Letter to Sarah Beecher, November 11, 1853 at Stowe-Day Library; Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, 1854) 2:343. For information concerning the inventory of Stowe's art works, I am indebted to Kristen Froehlich at the Stowe-Day Library and to Renee T. Williams of the New Britain Museum of American Art for her detailed notes on file at Stowe-Day.

[4]I say "ostensibly" because Marian devotion also figures notably in Eastern Orthodox spirituality and to some lesser degree in the Anglican and Lutheran traditions, as Frau Inge Leimberg reminded us at the recent *Connotations* conference in Cologne. Yet Marian piety found scant encouragement indeed within the more Calvinist scheme of faith and practice to which Stowe was first exposed.

[5]Charles Foster, *The Rungless Ladder: Harriet Beecher Stowe and New England Puritanism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1954) 115.

[6]The footsteps material is also available in the collection, *Religious Studies: Sketches and Poems*, vol. 15 of the Riverside Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1896). Although Stowe produced many of these religious writings (which typically appeared first as articles in the *Christian Union*) considerably later than her best-known novels, the views they offer of theology generally and of Marian themes in particular show a consistent development from earlier brief statements such as her 1849 Introduction to Charles Beecher's book on *The Incarnation; or Pictures of the Virgin and her Son*. The *Incarnation* volume also includes an early printing of Stowe's poem "Mary at the Cross," which demonstrates the role Mariology already played in her thinking

by 1849. "The Sorrows of Mary," another relevant poem collected (with minor revisions) in *Religious Studies*, first appeared in the Supplement to the *Hartford Courant* for February 16, 1867.

[7]*Religious Studies* 31.

[8]*Woman in Sacred History* (1873; rpt. New York: Portland House, 1990) 193.

[9]*Religious Studies* 36.

[10]*Woman in Sacred History* 183, 185-86, 198; *Religious Studies* 36.

[11]"For many years my religious experience perplexed me—I could see no reason for it—why God led me thus and so, I have seen lately, and I believe that He has a purpose for which He has kept me hitherto. I am willing to be just such and so much and be used for what He wills—'Behold the handmaid of the Lord.'" Letter to Charles Beecher, likely date fall 1852, at Stowe-Day Library and printed in *Stowe Day Foundation Bulletin* 1:2 (September 1960).

[12]*Woman in Sacred History* 198, 183; *Religious Studies* 70.

[13]Reprinted in *Religious Studies* 190, 70; *Woman in Sacred History* 183, 70, 190.

[14]*Woman in Sacred History* 190.

[15]Joan D. Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life* (New York: OUP, 1994) 190-91, 214, 254, 274-83. Written after Stowe had lost both Charley and Henry, "The Sorrows of Mary" exposes the poignance of her identification with the *stabat mater*: "Had ye ever a son like Jesus / To give to a death of pain?" (*Religious Studies* 353). But her earlier verses on the same theme, published in 1849 as "Mary at the Cross," were composed before Charley's death. In Charles Beecher's *Plymouth Collection of Hymns and Tunes* (New York: A. S. Barnes and Burr, 1863), a Protestant work with which Stowe was closely associated, Hymn #26 extends involvement of the *stabat mater* figure to any instance of oppression, grief, or terror.

[16]*Woman in Sacred History* 172; *Religious Studies* 31.

[17]In addition to Berkson and Ammons, critics Alice Crozier (*The Novels of Harriet Beecher Stowe* [New York: OUP, 1969]) and Jane Tompkins (*Sentimental Designs*) have stressed the central role of mothers in Stowe's novel.

[18]*Uncle Tom's Cabin, Or Life Among the Lowly*, ed. and intro. Ann Douglas (New York: Viking, 1981) 63. Subsequent references, identified parenthetically, are to this edition.

[19]Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs* 142.

[20]Joan A. Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe* 8.

[21]*Woman in Sacred History* 174-75.

[22]In her *Revelations of Divine Love*, which Stowe could not have read, the fourteenth-century English mystic Julian of Norwich envisions a similar connection between birthpangs and the Passion of Jesus.

[23]Elizabeth Ammons ("Heroines" 175) aptly describes Legree as "a caricature, and a very serious one, of supermasculinity, which Stowe associates with the devil."

[24]See Lawrence Buell, "Calvinism Romanticized: Harriet Beecher Stowe, Samuel Hopkins, and The Minister's Wooing," *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 24 (1978): 121.

[25]*The Minister's Wooing* (Hartford: Stowe-Day, 1859, 1988) 19. Subsequent references, indicated parenthetically, are to this edition.

[26]I am grateful to my graduate student Kurt Heidinger for pointing out this significance of Candace's name. I have also benefitted from discussion of this issue in an unpublished essay by Monica Hatzberger.

[27]Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater," in *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1987) 250.

[28]*Religious Studies* 93-94. In her *Letters to Mothers* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1840), Sigourney extols maternal love as changeless and "next in patience to that of a Redeemer" such that it fulfills a "sacred mission." The nearly complete "dominion" of mothers over their children allowed Christian mothers to perform an angelic ministry within the household (49, 53, 16, 10). Elizabeth Ammons ("Stowe's Dream of the Mother-Savior," 158-59), drawing in turn on historian Ruth H. Block, points out that a distinctly idealized concept of "feminized parenthood" or "'motherhood'" did not take hold in America until after the Industrial Revolution.

[29]*Religious Studies* 93.

[30]In *Harriet Beecher Stowe* (esp. 127, 140-41), Joan A. Hedrick points out that Stowe suffered not only bereavement but also persistent failure in attempting to raise her children and govern her household in a manner consistent with her professed ideology.

Connotations
Vol. 5.2-3 (1995/96)

The Myth of the Self in Whitman's "Song of Myself"[1] and Traherne's "Thanksgivings":[2] A Hypothesis[3]

INGE LEIMBERG

The Title

"Song of Myself," untitled and unsectioned in the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, became "Poem of Walt Whitman, an American" in 1856 and "Walt Whitman" in the succeeding editions, until in 1881 it became "Song of Myself."[4] So the finished title is the product of a number of revisions and, therefore, clearly intentional. *Song* is the English equivalent of *psalm* and *carmen* and *canto* and *chanson* and *Lied*.[5] There are quite a number of "*Songs*" in *Leaves of Grass* but only one of epic dimensions. It is certainly not a "song of sixpence" nor does it belong to the kind of *songs* which are the lyrical counterparts of *sonnets*. In the historical background the great English *Songs* of the Renaissance (not to mention the medieval epics called *Song* or *Lied* or *Chanson*) are looming large. Like Spenser and Milton, Whitman frequently invoked the Muse[6] and, in the end, he gave a name to his "Poem of Walt Whitman" which echoes their words: "Fierce warres and faithfull loves shall moralize my song"[7] and "I thence / Invoke thy aid to my adventurous song."[8]

That Marvell was concerned with the genre of *song* when he read Milton, appears in his poem on *Paradise Lost*: he confesses to having been afraid that Milton

> . . . would ruine . . .
> The sacred Truths to Fable and old Song . . . [9]

This seems like a foreshortened version of Whitman's lines in "Passage to India."

For debates inspired by this article, please check the Connotations website at <http://www.connotations.de/debleimberg00523.htm>.

> . . . the myths Asiatic, the primitive fables.
>
> Not you alone proud truths of the world,
> . . . .
> But myths and fables of eld, . . . (17-20)

The words are nearly the same, only that Marvell is afraid of mixing truth and fable while Whitman is keen on it; moreover Whitman brings in the word *myth* (which has been in use only from 1838 onwards)[10] as a synonym of *fable*, adding "The deep diving bibles and legends, . . . the elder religions."[11]

Apart from the two great epics described by their authors as "my song" there is a modern title which should not go unmentioned: Longfellow's "The Song of Hiawatha" of 1855 which is all about "primitive fables . . . myths and fables of eld . . . the elder religions," with a kind of an Indian Christ-figure for a hero. With these parallels, old and new, in mind the reader of "Song of Myself" has every right to expect an epic poem on a large scale, even one of religious purport.

Syntactically seen, the words "Song of Myself" function in two different ways. Firstly the "of" indicates the "maker or author of a work."[12] This is a "Song" made or written or, as we shall immediately hear, sung by "Myself." Secondly it indicates "the subject matter."[13] As Milton invokes the Muse to sing "Of Man's first disobedience," this is to be a "Song of Myself." The maker and the subject matter of the song are essentially the same. If the expression is taken as a genitive construction, "Myself" is subject and object, like God in "Love of God." God is the one who loves and is loved. "Myself" is the one who sings and is sung.

When the title melts, as it were, into the first line both meanings are augmented: "I celebrate myself, and sing myself." Not only is "Myself" the maker of the song but he also makes it publicly known with his own voice. He did not write it to hand it over to someone else for recitation but he himself sings the "Song of Myself" and consequently, true to the bardic tradition, he sings himself. Since, moreover, his singing is coupled with celebrating, the action and the meaning are charged with sacramental overtones. "Myself" celebrates and sings and is sung and celebrated, he is subject and object of the solemn rite. He brings and is the sacrifice. This tone is clearly kept up in formulae like: "The peace

and knowledge that pass all the argument of the earth . . . ."[14] It is rather tempting to envisage an Emily Dickinson who had Whitman, the singer of the *Leaves of Grass*, the bard of the nation, in mind when she wrote, in characteristic irony of his eucharistic aspirations:

> Further in Summer than the Birds
> Pathetic from the Grass
> A minor Nation celebrates
> Its unobtrusive Mass.[15]

"Myself" in some lines by Herbert and Donne

The "Myself" celebrating and celebrated in the "Song" is more or less identical with the autobiographical author of the "Poem of Walt Whitman, an American," but it is also suggestive of the divine Orpheus, the "true son of God, the poet," going out of himself to meet and embrace and become one with all created beings. It is the nucleus of a world, this nucleus to consist of the one who says: "I dote on myself,"[16] and "If I worship one thing more than another it shall be the spread of my own body . . .;"[17] and ". . . here comes my mistress the soul."[18] The three components of "Myself," the I, the body, and the soul, are well known to readers of Metaphysical Poetry of the 17th century, though with very different overtones. Here they are in George Herbert's *The Temple*:

> While that my soul repairs to her devotion,
> Here I entombe my flesh. . .[19]

What follows is a meditation on death or rather on the putrefaction of all flesh. Myself as a subject of moral and religious self-castigation is Herbert's theme in "Miserie" which is suggestive of *Leaves of Grass* from the beginning because of the biblical definition *"Man is but grasse."* The poem ends with the very words "my self." Man is

> A sick toss'd vessel, dashing on each thing;
> Nay, his own shelf:
> My God, I mean my self.

The "sick tossed vessel, dashing on each thing" which becomes "his own shelf" is a ship which, leaking and unseaworthy, has become a reef to itself on which it will founder; but the words "toss'd vessel" and "dashing on each thing" also suggest drunkenness and finally, "shelf" does not only mean *reef* but *gradine* or *reredos*, that is to say the shelf at the back of the altar which, in the poem, appears misused by man for setting himself up as an object of worship. The words "I celebrate myself" and "I dote on myself" aptly describe what to Herbert was a fatal error.

Where doting on oneself is concerned, Donne must not be unheard. Self-love is one of the great themes of his Sermons. Writing in an age when the list of composite words beginning with *self* suddenly got longer and longer,[20] he was not content with reiterating the harsh condemnations which had come down from the Middle Ages to the Reformation.[21] His main source with respect to self-love is St. Augustine, to whom man's love of himself is inseparably bound up with man's love of God. "That man doth not love God, that loves not himself; do but love yourselves," but: "Only that man that loves God, hath the art to love himself;"[22] this is exactly in keeping with Matt. 22:36-40 where the lawyer asked Jesus:

> Master, which *is* the great commandment in the law?

and Jesus answered:

> . . . Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

What matters to Donne (as it did to St. Augustine or Melanchthon) is that the two laws are essentially one. Without the love of God both love of the self and of one's neighbour will pervert.[23]

To compare the great Americans of the middle and later nineteenth century with the Metaphysical Poets is far from original but it seems worth considering whether the demarcation-line between their perspectives is, perhaps, to be sought not in the decadence of Calvinistic

determinism preceding and in a way provoking Unitarianism and Transcendentalism,[24] but much earlier; not in the late 18th and early 19th centuries in America, but in the late 17th century in England. The Metaphysicals (including Sir Thomas Browne as a theoretical thinker) were anything but dogmatic and narrow-minded, but all their works to the last detail radiate a religious single-mindedness (especially with regard to self-love) which died with them and was practised, much later, only by such writers as Hawthorne, or Emily Dickinson, or Hopkins, who swam against the current.

The God of "Myself"

The word and notion "Myself" seems a possible focus for the change that took place sometime in the later 17th century. The more the gods of the Theists and Neomystics and Latitudinarians and Christian Platonists came into fashion and the revealed God of the Bible was proclaimed to be no fit subject of academic discussion, the office of revelation somehow began to devolve on "myself." The God of the Theists is revealed in a man's own heart,[25] the God of the Christian Platonists by man's sense of human perfectibility,[26] and the God of the Neomystics by their vision.[27] In other words: to the same extent that divine revelation, that is to say, the biblical God of the fathers, begins to be regarded as more or less of a myth, man begins to regard himself as his own source of revelation and thus pretends to just that mythical quality to which he objects in the Books of Moses. To give an example of what is meant here by "myth," I refer to Isabel Gamble MacCaffrey who convincingly argues in her book on *Paradise Lost as "Myth"* that, to modern man, "Christ becomes one among many dying gods."[28] There is much to be said for the process being a reciprocal one involving both God and man. When God is regarded more and more as a mere fable, man begins to regard himself more and more as fabulous. Of this Traherne's *Thanksgivings* provide some telling examples.

The series begins with the sections "Thanksgivings for the Body" and "Thanksgivings for the Soul." So, in a way, the speaker presents himself to us, to say it in Whitman's words, as "the poet of the Body and . . .

the poet of the Soul,"[29] moreover, he worships his "body" and "soul" no less than Whitman does:

O Lord!
Thou hast given me a Body,
Wherein the glory of thy Power shineth,
. . .
Limbs rarely poised,
And made for Heaven:
Arteries filled
With celestial Spirits:
Veins, wherein Blood floweth,
Refreshing all my flesh,
Like Rivers.
Sinews fraught with a mystery
Of wonderful Strength,
Stability,
Feeling.
O blessed be thy glorious Name!
That thou hast made it,
A Treasury of Wonders,
Fit for its several Ages;
For Dissections,
For Sculptures in Brass,
For Draughts in Anatomy,
For the Contemplation of the Sages.[30]

The corresponding enumerations in Whitman spring to every reader's mind and need not be quoted, but his version of the glory of God shining in the body calls for direct comparison with Traherne. In "Starting from Paumanok" Whitman writes:

Behold the body includes and is the meaning, the main
concern, . . .
Whoever you are, how superb and how divine is your body,
or any part of it! (187ff.)

In Traherne's "Thanksgivings for the Soul" (the "mistress" of Whitman's "self")[31] the note of exaltation is sumptuously augmented:

All things are penetrable to the Soul of Man.
All things open and naked to it.
The Understanding seeth
Natures,
Uses,
Extents,
Their Relations,
Ends,
Properties,
Services,
Even all their Excellencies.
And thee my God is she able to behold (217-228)

O my God!
In the contemplation of my Soul
I see the Truth of all Religion,
Behold all the Mysteries of Blessedness (294-297)

. . .
Who hast made me the best and the greatest
Like thee,
Thine Image, Friend,
Son, Bride,
More than thy Throne,
Thy peculiar Treasure!
Such wonderful power hast thou created in me,
That I am able to do more . . . (305-312)

It would be tempting to go on immediately with

Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch . . ."[32]

Bear me indeed as through the regions infinite,
. . .
Bathe me O God in thee, mounting to thee,
I and my soul to range in range of thee.[33]

But, of course, no reader would be taken in by the deception because Whitman's lines are too well known and, of course, of a different calibre in tone and diction and rhythm and poetic energy. There is also a difference in the way God is seen and addressed: to Traherne he is the

"Benefactor,"[34] the giver of good gifts, while in Whitman generally a vague pantheism prevails. But the two speakers are strangely alike in their constant concern, their admiration, their worship of their own selves. From both might be quoted endless repetitions of: I know, I understand, I comprehend, I see, I behold, I say, I sing, I will, I give, I rejoice, I praise, and, last but not least, "I am . . . ." To give a few examples from Whitman and Traherne, freely mixed:

> I am the poet . . . I am the poet . . . I am he that walks . . . I am integral with you . . .
> I am he attesting sympathy . . . Divine am I inside and out . . .[35]

> . . . I am satisfied[36] . . . I am made able to enjoy even thee . . . I am contented with my Being . . .[37]

> I am a dance . . . I am the ever-laughing . . .
> I am the actor . . . I am she who adorn'd herself . . .[38]

> Me! even me!
> Hath thy glory exalted in all these things:
> I am possessor, and they my treasures,
> I am delighted . . .[39]

Whatever the differences: the religious concern with the glory of selfhood is very similar.

From Religion to Myth

In this essay Traherne's meditations and Whitman's poem are regarded with respect to a single theme, not in their various aspects. But it seems that a detailed interpretation would confirm rather than disprove the hypothesis in question: in Traherne God is praised as the giver of gifts (of good ones only) and the self, the receiver of the gifts, is exalted, body and soul. In Whitman the self, body and soul, has expressly become an object of worship.

Traherne still addressed "God" whilst Whitman declares himself to be the inaugurator of a religion.[40] And yet, seen in the light of Christian

theology from St Augustine (or even St Paul) to Luther and Calvin, not only Whitman's but already Traherne's attitude appears, to put it strongly, as irreligious. God the Benefactor is a myth. He has come down in the world as, reciprocally, man has raised himself to that "superb" kind of exaltation which, seen in the light of the Augustinian tradition, declares itself to be nothing less than *superbia*. God the Benefactor is no longer God, and man, glorified and exalted, is no longer man. They meet on the level of myth.

Some criteria for this hypothesis are to be found in the philological as well as philosophical studies of the names of the gods begun by Hermann Usener and continued by Ernst Cassirer. Usener convincingly shows that the names of the gods of polytheism develop according to a certain historical pattern: in the beginning there are certain "Augenblicksgötter" (gods of a moment). To give an example, a flash of lightning might be a moment giving birth to such a god and his name. These are to be followed by "Sondergötter" (gods with a special office). Their names are appellatives, unambiguous and clearly denotative. When such an appellative name changes into a proper name, when the original denotation is forgotten, the name becomes an indicator of a personal idea and relation, the divine office being then no longer clearly defined and selective but comprehensive and mysteriously named. In the course of time the mysterious proper name will, however, be surrounded by surnames which are felt to make the invocation more effective; and so it may happen that one of the surnames overrules the truly numinous name and the process begins anew.[41]

But, as Usener shows, already in Aeschylos the need is felt to break out of this mythical circle and to try and find a virtually different kind of name for a God believed to be virtually different from all "Sondergötter," however impersonated. Aeschylos rejects all nominal attributes because they are inadequate to name the godhead greater than all, that is to say, a godhead only to be compared with himself.[42]

At this point the philosopher takes over from the philologist. Cassirer argues in a way which to me seems congenial, to a certain extent, to Whitman who saw himself on the road toward a new religion[43] while, otherwise, he declared the *Leaves of Grass* to be "only a language

experiment."[44] To Cassirer, myth and language meet in one vanishing point. The last and most difficult effort in the development of language is the formation of the principal notions "I" and "to be" (the latter taken not as an auxiliary but as an active verb); equally the last stage of myth and polytheism is the idea and signification of the one and only God besides whom there must not be any other gods. Beginning in spontaneity and inarticulate vagueness, language and myth resort to particularization until, paradoxically, they arrive at the stage where they help fulfil the ideal of discursive thinking, strict abstraction from particularity, in their own way. That is to say, they help realize an idea of being which is no longer a mere predicate of some thing, least of all of God.[45] This happens, characteristically, in the realm where, according to Donne, "contraries meete in one,"[46] that is to say where the sign is the thing and the word is the god. This word must not be an appellative because *"omnis determinatio est negatio."*[47] It must be the one proper name which is incomparably individual as well as absolutely general, that is to say, it must be the "I AM" which, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, first appears in Exod. 3:13-14:

> And Moses said unto God, Behold, *when* I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What *is* his name ? what shall I say unto them?
> And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.[48]

Usener's and Cassirer's considerations, culminating in this revelation of the name of God, may perhaps shed some light on the development of which Traherne's *Thanksgivings* are an early example and the *Leaves of Grass* a much later one. To put it crudely, against the background of revealed religion, Traherne's Benefactor and giver of good gifts appears as a mere "Sondergott" belonging to some Christian mythology in which Christ has become (to quote MacCaffrey once more) "one of many dying gods."[49] God is no longer I AM with any predicate strictly ruled out; he is a benefactor while man pretends to be I AM in the character of a giver of thanks.

The themes of self-celebration and God-the-Benefactor in a canonical text of the Reformation

Quite a number of the criteria which contribute to the great change from George Herbert's "Nay, his own shelf: / My God, I mean my self" to Traherne's "Me! even me! / Hath thy Glory exalted in all these things:"[50] are contained in what is, perhaps, one of the most exquisite, because completely unaggressive and theologically convincing tracts of the Reformation: Luther's interpretation of the *Magnificat*.[51] It is an added reason for resorting to this theological foil, that Traherne quotes the *Magnificat* in the "Thanksgivings for the Soul":

> My soul, O Lord, doth magnify thee;
> Because out of nothing thou hast exalted thy Servant, (392)

The meditation quoted under the name of *Magnificat* is one of the most beautiful gems in the New Testament (Luke 1:46 ff.). When, after the annunciation, the Virgin Mary wants to give thanks to God, she sets the example for Christ's rule in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:7): ". . . when you pray, use not vain repetitions." Ten verses are sufficient for her, and in these she does not speak in the name of her own self but she says: "my soul doth magnify the Lord, / And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." To Luther the faculties of soul and spirit as used in these words fit into the following order: man is like the Mosaic Temple: his body is *atrium* where everyone can see what he does and how he lives. His soul is *sanctum* where there are seven lights, as there are reason, the power of discrimination, knowledge, and understanding. His spirit is *sanctum sanctorum*, "Gottes Wohnung im finstern Glauben ohne Licht; denn er glaubt, das er nicht siehet, noch fühlet, noch begreifet." ("God's homestead in the darkness of faith without light; for the spirit believes what he does not see, nor feel, nor understand.")[52] Seen from this vantage point Traherne's praise of the wideness of man's understanding appears to be expressive of a rationalist and at the same time, strangely and yet obviously enough,[53] mystical kind of humanism:

In the twinkling of an eye
My Sight removeth,
Throughout all the Spaces beyond the Heavens:
My Thoughts in an instant like the holy Angels.
Nor Bounds nor Limits doth my Soul discern
But an infinite Liberty beyond the World.
Mine Understanding being present
With whatsoever it knoweth.[54]

Whitman's anaphoric "I know" appears as an echo of Traherne's intellectual enthusiasm:

I know I am solid and sound,
To me the converging objects of the universe perpetually flow,
All are written to me, and I must get what the writing means.

I know I am deathless,
I know this orbit of mine cannot be swept by a carpenter's compass,
I know I shall not pass like a child's carlacue cut with a burnt stick at night.
I know I am august,
I do not trouble my spirit to vindicate itself or be understood,
I see that the elementary laws never apologize,
(I reckon I behave no prouder than the level I plant my house by, after all.)[55]

Understanding according to Luther does not reach up to religious belief (which, however, is the very essence of man's intellectual existence, not to be cut off from it as it happens in the New Philosophy).[56] When man is enabled to understand the ways of God rationally, he is acting on a plane where belief does not belong. Furthermore, when man is "exalted" in the sense of being lifted out of his (corporeal as well as spiritual) poverty and depravation, his likeness to God is not enhanced but lost, because (to say it with Donne's words) *vera imago* is *nuda imago*, the naked beggar in his likeness to Christ at the whipping post.[57] Exalted man becomes invisible to God who is the highest and therefore, as Luther says, can see only what is low and poor like the Virgin Mary, "das arme Aschenbrödlein" ("the poor Cinderella").[58] She rejoices in God, her Saviour. And now comes, in Luther, a wonderfully convincing

explication of the *sola fide*: it is as vain to praise God for his works as to try and do some in order to please him.[59] This conviction is the ideal model of personal love which is given as well as taken for nothing, for otherwise, according to Shakespeare, "it but usurps that name."[60]

Religious belief of the kind demanded in the *Magnificat* is realized in Herbert's "Ah my deare God! though I am clean forgot, / Let me not love thee, if I love thee not,"[61] or in Crashaw's apostrophe (to the Magdalene as well as to Christ): "Mercilesse Love."[62] And it is clearly denied by Traherne when he says (having mentioned in passing man's sins):

> Thou hast employed thy Goodness, Wisdom, Power,
> To enrich thy Servant
> With The Chief of Beings. . . .[63]

According to Luther God's grace is essentially invisible ("die unsichtliche Gnade Gottes").[64] According to Donne man does *not* "understand" God, even in the beatific vision, as he is understood by him.[65] Or, to quote the Sermon on the Mount: "God is in secret" (Mt 6.6). The words of the *Magnificat* are recalled in the "Thanksgivings for the Soul" in a way which to Luther would have been a perversion of their meaning: "My soul, O Lord, doth magnify thee; / Because out of nothing thou hast exalted thy Servant, . . ." (392)

Traherne uses an abstract notion, "nothing," where Luther, in characteristic theological realism, speaks of poverty, sickness, hunger, thirst, imprisonment, suffering, dying. And with him the exaltation answering to all this does not consist in riches and honour and glory being conferred upon man but in God's regard for Mary who was so wretchedly poor that the daughter of a man like Caiaphas would not have had her in her household as the lowest servant.[66] There is, syntactically and theologically speaking, no other reason why Mary's soul magnifies God and why she believes in being exalted by him but his having regarded her poverty: ". . . my Saviour, / For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden" (Lk 1:48). She does not praise her humility (which by that very praise would have been perverted into

pride). And when she does praise God for having exalted "them of low degree" (Lk 1:52) it means that he has regarded them, too, and not that by making them rich he has lifted them out of the reach of his view.

This idea that God's regard for man is what finally brings about his conversion is poetically realized, for instance, by Donne in "Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward" (41-42): "Restore thine Image, so much, by thy grace, / That thou may'st know mee, and I'll turne my face." The great thing God has done for Mary is to have given her his regard. She, however, does or even gives nothing. To quote Luther again: "Sie gibt nichts, sondern allein Gott" ("She gives nothing, but only God [gives]").[67] This is pure George Herbert: "To one word only I say, No: / Where in the Deed there was an intimation / Of a gift or a donation, / Lord, let it now by way of purchase go."[68]

God gives; man gives nothing. Even when man wants to thank God let him not think of it in terms of a gift. George Herbert's "Thanksgiving" is a deeply ironical aftermath to "The Sacrifice" and it ends with man's inability to give thanks: "Then for thy passion – I will do for that – / Alas, my God, I know not what." "Thanksgiving" is a biblical word very much in need of interpretation. The 51st Psalm shows the way to its religious use: "For thou desirest not sacrifice: else would I give it . . . The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." In other words, man is

> A sick toss'd vessel, . . .
> Nay, his own shelf:
> My God, I mean my self.

Though in Whitman the "strong music" for "those who have failed!"[69] does as little to qualify his self-celebration as does an occasional "how highly great have my Transgressions been"[70] in Traherne, the power called "god" in the *Leaves of Grass* is not just Benevolence personified. One and a half centuries separate Whitman from Traherne and he freely draws on all the sources supplied by transcendentalist syncretism. Traherne was still very sure about his God while Whitman seems to be on the lookout for his prints everywhere as of someone who has been lost. But the comparison (which can be at best a very tentative one) holds

so far, that Whitman might have found one of the traces he is so eagerly looking for in the *Thanksgivings*. Though the predicate "giver-of-good-gifts" does not absolutely define God in the *Leaves of Grass* it goes a long way to doing so.

The idea that God is a giver of gifts, and of good ones only, and man (though fallen) is redeemed to understanding and exaltation, is ridiculed by Shakespeare in *Hamlet*, and Luther in the *Magnificat* has a prophetic dictum concerning man's covenant with a benevolent God who "exalts" man: "Wenn sich aber Gott verbirgt und seiner Gutheit Glänzen zu sich zieht, daß sie bloß und elend sind, so geht auch Lieb und Lob sogleich aus . . . sie machen sich selbst zum Abgott, und Gott soll sie lieben und loben, eben das ihnen tun, das sie ihm tun sollten; . . ." ("But when God hides himself and draws the shining of his goodness to himself so that they are naked and lost, then their love and praise go out . . . they make an idol of themselves and expect God to love and praise them, to do just that to them what they ought to do to him . . .").[71]

This exactly describes the reversal of God and man meeting on the level of myth, with man's own self playing the role of the golden calf. The creed of a man who worships on this level is "O Lord, I am contented with my Being. / I rejoyce in thine infinite Bounty, / And praise thy Goodness."[72] Traherne still looked upward not only inward or around himself as, according to Mark Van Doren, Emerson did.[73] But what he saw there was an impersonation of benevolence, not God. And accordingly the self which he did not get tired of declaring to be God's image has become the image of just that kind of god. And this is, perhaps, worth considering as part of the intellectual background of Emerson's creed "Nothing can bring you peace but yourself"[74] and of Whitman's self-worship: "I celebrate myself, and sing myself . . ."

* * *

The affinity of the *Leaves of Grass* to the *Thanksgivings* ist just one single component in the tradition of singing the self in English and American poetry. If Whitman echoed Traherne he might have quoted verbatim from a much earlier and a very different source which uses singing the self to introduce Puritan self-exploration:

I sing my SELF; my *Ciuil-Warrs* within;
The *Victories* I howrely lose and win;
The dayly *Duel*, the continuall Strife,
The *Warr* that ends not, till I end my life.

It might be well worth while to try and read the *Leaves of Grass* as Puritan autobiography in reverse, and it might be equally interesting to consider Whitman's "Song of Myself" in the light of Edward Taylor's *Meditations* though Whitman, of course, did not know them. With Taylor "self" is nothing less than a divine name: Christ is the "Self" to be sung and celebrated, "thy Lovely Selfe," "thy Shining Selfe," "thy Sacred Selfe," "thy Glorious Selfe," "thy Mystick Selfe."[75] Since Whitman's poetic "self" is conceived very much in the image and likeness of Christ the Divine Word as well as the *agnus Dei*, Taylor's praise of the Divine Self would fit easily, if parodically, into the fabric of *Leaves of Grass*.

The *Meditations* were written one generation after Traherne and no longer in England but in the New World, but they recall, consciously or unconsciously, the piety and humility of George Herbert. The strands of self-glorification and self-abnegation as well as of secularization and religious sincerity overlap, and it might be rewarding to look for this warp and woof in the texture of Whitman's own poetry. To end this paper concerned with confessions with a confession: the most beautiful part of "Song of Myself" is, to me, the sixth one:

A child said *What is the grass?* fetching it to me with full
hands;
How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any
more than he.
I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful
green stuff woven.
Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropt,
Bearing the owner's name someway in the corners, that we
may see and remark, and say *Whose?*
. . .
Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic,
. . .

This is metaphysical poetry, recalling (from afar) George Herbert, and Sir Thomas Browne, and Henry Vaughan, and foreshadowing a fairly unironical Emily Dickinson. It is symbolic and concerned with the mysteries of creation which appear in such simple garb that it needs a child's ingenuousness to dare and ask for their *quidditas*: "*What is . . . ?*" so that we can ask for their owner: "*Whose?*" Here we are drawn, *via* the speaker and the child and the seemingly real grass and the really metaphorical signature in the handkerchief,[76] towards someone who is not a myth but a numinous entity, actually and personally present in the simplest things and felt to be their source and meaning, but deeply mysterious and essentially unknown, were it not for the old intelligence of his words and deeds which taught our fathers to call him "the Lord."

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NOTES

[1]Quoted text: Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, ed. S. Bradley (1969; New York: Norton, 1973).

[2]Quoted text: Thomas Traherne, *Centuries, Poems and Thanksgivings*, 2 vols., ed. H. M. Margoliouth (1958; Oxford: Clarendon, 1965).

[3]This paper was read at a symposium on *The Presence of Mythology in American Literature* in Cologne from 24th-26th July 1995. The style of oral delivery has been retained.

[4]"Song of Myself," editor's note to title, 28.

[5]Most of the lexical definitions are not doing justice to the function of "song" in titles or descriptions of epic poems. See, for example, *OED*, "Song, *sb.*, 2. A metrical composition adopted for singing; occas., a poem," or *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. A. Preminger (1965; Princeton: Princeton UP, 1974), "Song."

[6]See I. Leimberg, "Zur Tradition der Motive in Walt Whitmans *Leaves of Grass*," *Nachrichten der Giessener Hochschulgesellschaft* 35 (1966): 91-105, esp. 94.

[7]Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (London: Longman, 1977), Proem I.9, and see the editor's note to ll. 1-5 which testify to the word "song" being suggested by (Pseudo-) Virgil: "Lines 1-4 imitate verses prefixed to the opening lines of Renaissance editions of Virgil's *Aeneid* believed to be by him: *Ille ego, qui quondam gracili modulatus avena / carmen . . . at nunc horrentia Martis.*"

[8]John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. A. Fowler (London: Longman, 1971) I.12-13.

[9]*The Poems and Letters of Andrew Marvell*, ed. H. M. Margoliouth, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971) 138.7.

[10]*OED*, "Myth, *sb.*"

[11]"Passage to India" 22-23.

[12]*OED*, "Of, *prep.* V. 17.b. . . . Made, written, painted by." Cf., too, "IV.12.b. *Of oneself*, by one's own impetus . . . ."

[13]*Ibid.* VIII.

[14]"Song of Myself" 92.

[15]Emily Dickinson, *The Complete Poems*, ed. T. H. Johnson (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), No. 1068.1-4.

[16]"Song of Myself" 544.

[17]"Song of Myself" 527.

[18]"Starting from Paumanok" 68.

[19]*The Works of George Herbert*, ed. F. E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1945), "Church-monuments" 1-2.

[20]*OED*, "Self-, the word SELF used as a prefix . . . *Self-* first appears as a living formative element about the middle of the 16th cent., probably to a great extent by imitation . . . of Greek compounds in αὐτο-. The number of *self*-compounds was greatly augmented towards the middle of the 17th cent. . . ." See also *OED*, "Self-love, 1. Love of oneself . . ." (from 1563 onwards) and "2. *Philos.* Regard for one's own well-being . . ." (from 1683 onwards).

[21]See, e.g., Philipp Melanchthon, *Loci Communes 1521*, ed. H. G. Pöhlmann (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1993), "De peccato" 46-99, esp. 50 (9) where self-love serves as a definition of sin: "Fieri enim nequit, quin sese maxime amet creatura, quam non absorpsit amor dei" (See note 104).

[22]*The Sermons of John Donne*, eds. E. M. Simpson and G. R. Potter, 10 vols. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1956), vol. 8, 236.626 ff.

[23]See Rosemond Tuve's interpretation of self-love in the *Faerie Queene*, seen against its medieval background in *Allegorical Imagery. Some Medieval Books and Their Posterity* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1966) 50-51.

[24]See Vernon L. Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, vol. 2, *1800-1860: The Romantic Revolution in America* (New York: Harcourt, 1927), esp. Part 2, Chapter 2, "Liberalism and Calvinism."

[25]See Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, *De Veritate*, transl. with intr. by M. H. Carré (Bristol: J. W. Arrowsmith, 1937), *passim*, esp. Chapter 10, "On Revelation" 308 ff.: ". . . revelation must be given directly to some person; for what is received from others as revelation must be accounted not revelation but tradition or history. . . . the breath of the Divine Spirit must be immediately felt . . . ."

[26]See *The Cambridge Platonists*, ed. C. A. Patrides (Cambridge: CUP, 1969) 128-44, John Smith, "The True Way or Method of Attaining to Divine Knowledge" (esp. 143): ". . . The true Metaphysical and Contemplative man . . . who running and shooting up against his own *Logical* or *Self-rational* life, pierceth into the *Highest life* . . . ."

[27]See R. M. Jones, *Spiritual Reformers in the 16th & 17th Centuries* (London: Macmillan, 1914), esp. Chapter 13, "Early English Interpreters of Spiritual Religion: John Everard, Giles Randall, and others."

[28]I. Gamble MacCaffrey, *Paradise Lost as "Myth"* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1959) 14.

[29]"Song of Myself" 422.

[30]"Thanksgivings for the Body" 42-66.

[31]"Starting from Paumanok" 65.

[32]"Song of Myself" 523.

[33]"Passage to India" 187-93.

[34]"Thanksgivings for the Body" 200-04: "That in us thou mightst see / Ingenuity, Thanksgiving, / Fidelity, Wisdom, / Love, / Even to an absent Benefactor." See also "Thanksgivings for God's Attributes" 251-54: "Shall I not then love thee more than my self? / As much as my self because thou hast given me my self; / Infinitely more for giving me all things: The benefits I receive / being the fuel of my love?"

[35]"Song of Myself" 422; 425; 433; 458; 461; 524.

[36]"Thanksgivings for God's Attributes" 23.

[37]"Thanksgivings for the Soul" 321 and 332.

[38]"The Sleepers" 32-45.

[39]"Thanksgivings for the Beauty of his Providence" 523-26.

[40]"Starting from Paumanok" 102.

[41]H. Usener, *Götternamen: Versuch einer Lehre von der religiösen Begriffsbildung* (Frankfurt a. M.: Schulte-Bulmke, 1948) § 20, 330-349, "Ausgestaltung persönlicher Götter."

[42]Usener 196, 338-39 and 336n11.

[43]Cf., for instance, "Starting from Paumanok" 102, "I too, following many and follow'd by many, inaugurate a religion," and 129-30 "Know you, solely to drop in the earth the germs of a greater religion, / The following chants each for its kind I sing."

[44]Quoted from F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (London: OUP, 1941) 517.

[45]E. Cassirer, *Wesen und Wirkung des Symbolbegriffs* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1956, rpt. 1976) 71-167, "Sprache und Mythos: Ein Beitrag zum Problem der Götternamen." Cf. esp. 137-41.

[46]John Donne, *The Divine Poems*, ed. H. Gardner (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952, rpt. 1964), *Holy Sonnets* (from the Westmoreland MS.) 3.1.

[47]Quoted from Cassirer 137.

[48]Cassirer 139.

[49]See above n27.

[50]"Miserie" 77-78 and "Thanksgivings for the Beauty of his Providence" 523-24.

[51]Quoted text: Martin Luther, *Ausgewählte Werke*, eds. H. H. Borcherdt and G. Merz (München: Christian Kaiser, 1968), vol. 6, 186-244, *Das Magnificat, verdeutschet und ausgelegt durch D. Martinum Luther, Aug.*

[52]*Magnificat* 192-93, esp. 193 (231-32). All translations from Luther's *Magnificat* are mine.

[53]The dialectics of rational theology and inspirational mysticism are manifest, for instance, in the personal revelation of the Theists (see above n24), or in the "rational mysticism" of the Cambridge Platonists, see *The Cambridge Platonists* Intro. 16-18.

An outstanding representative is, of course, Henry More who, first a Cartesian, became a spiritualist.

[54]"Thanksgivings for the Soul" 64-71 and *passim*.

[55]"Song of Myself" 403-12 and *passim*.

[56]See I. Leimberg, *Die geistliche Dichtung der englischen Frühaufklärung* (Münster: Waxmann, 1996; forthcoming), Chapter I.3, "Die Pilatus-Frage."

[57]Donne, *Sermons*, vol. 8, 285.553-564.

[58]*Magnificat* 199 (239).

[59]*Magnificat* 201 (241-42).

[60]*Venus and Adonis* 794, *The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare, The Poems*, ed. F. T. Prince (London: Methuen, 1960).

[61]"Affliction I" 65-66.

[62]*The Poems English Latin and Greek of Richard Crashaw*, ed. L. C. Martin (Oxford: Clarendon, 1927, rpt. 1968) *Carmen Deo Nostro*, "The Weeper" XXII.3.

[63]"Thanksgivings for the Glory of God's Works" 413-17.

[64]*Magnificat* 194 (233).

[65]Donne, *Sermons*, vol. 8, 235.591-93.

[66]*Magnificat* 191 (231).

[67]*Magnificat* 215 (259).

[68]"Obedience" 32-35.

[69]"Song of Myself" 367.

[70]"Thanksgivings for the Body" 466.

[71]*Magnificat* 198 (238) and 200 (241).

[72]"Thanksgivings for the Soul" 332-34.

[73]See Matthiessen 100-13.

[74]Ralf Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance, The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 5 vols., vol. 2, *Essays: First Series*, ed. Joseph Slater (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1979) 27-51, esp. 51.

[75]*The Poems of Edward Taylor*, ed. D. E. Stanford (New Haven: Yale UP, 1960), *Preparatory Meditations*, Second Series, 11.45; 21.32; 36.40; 43.28; 47.21 and the NT subject of this meditation: "Joh. 5:26. The Son hath life in himselfe." I owe this reference, as well as the previous one to George Goodwin's "I sing my SELF," to Professor Ursula Brumm. Goodwin's text is quoted from Owen C. Watkins, *The Puritan Experience* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972) 12 with n35 (17). That the self, instead of the soul, is regarded as the focus of human existence since the early seventeenth century is Hannah Arendt's thesis in *Vita activa oder vom tätigen Leben* (München: Piper, 1981) 249.

[76]The idea of a handkerchief provided by God occurs in *The Temple*, "The Dawning," 13-16.

Connotations
Vol. 5.2-3 (1995/96)

Mythifying Africa

RUTH MAYER

> As for the black—whose brain, not body, had schemed and led the revolt, with the plot—his slight frame, inadequate to that which it held, had at once yielded to the superior muscular strength of his captor, in the boat. Seeing all was over, he uttered no sound, and could not be forced to. His aspect seemed to say: since I cannot do deeds, I will not speak words. [...] Some months later, dragged to the gibbet at the tail of a mule, the black met his voiceless end. The body was burned to ashes; but for many days, the head, that hive of subtlety, fixed on a pole in the plaza, met, unabashed, the gazes of the whites [...].[1]

In *Benito Cereno* Herman Melville delineated the failure of representing blackness. Captain Amasa Delano's glaring misreading of the situation on the *San Dominick*, of the true nature of Don Benito Cereno's and his 'slave' Babo's bonding, and of his own position and significance, testifies to the power of stereotypes not only to shape, but ultimately to efface the perception of the Other. The historical narrative of an incident in 1788 thus serves as a reflection upon the perils of subjective projection in general, bringing into view "the convulsive history of the entire region and epoch—from the Columbian arrival in the Americas, through the democratic revolutions in the United States, Haiti, and Latin America, to the contemporary crisis over the expansion of the 'Slave Power' in the United States" as Eric Sundquist noted.[2] Affecting everybody involved, African, European or American, the history of imperialism and slavery brought forth a huge repertoire of cultural images, a network beyond individual control and subjective penetration. In Melville's story, Babo draws expertly on this repertoire. He makes use of Delano's indissoluble entanglement within an imagery of 'the African,' his incapability of conceiving of such a paradoxical thing as a scheming African, a plotting black.[3]

For debates inspired by this article, please check the Connotations website at <http://www.connotations.de/debmayer00523.htm>.

And yet, the manipulation of the referential system effects nothing but a momentary reversal of the structures of blackness and whiteness, a reversal which points to the arbitrary nature of the given social hierarchy as represented by the system of slavery, yet fails to undo the logic of slavery, the logic of a dialectics of master and slave. When the insurrection is turned down, Babo's effort to withhold, to resist, becomes a futile gesture, a mute, defiant gaze interlocked with "the gazes of the whites"—enacting a kind of suspended interaction that seems to perpetuate and totalize the strange bond between Cereno and Babo, a bond made out of hatred, fear, deprecation and—strangely—mutual dependance: when Babo dies, Cereno dies too.[4]

The narrative's focal constellation, the bond between black and white, master and slave, oppressor and victim, is epitomized in the shaving scene which can be read either as an exemplary act of subservience or as an ultimate threat. The same ambivalent constellation resurfaces over and over in fictional representations of blackness and whiteness. Within the last twenty years, countless efforts to re-appraise the black subject in the history of colonialism and slavery and to revise the myth(s) of blackness have evoked scenarios echoing Melville's *Benito Cereno*. In the following I will concentrate on narratives that situate this revision of blackness within a context which is itself mythical: Africa. The representation of Africa in Western fiction, I argue, epitomizes the inherent predicament any fictional reworking of a mythical entity faces: the concomitant images, evocations and allusions are always as pervasive as they are vague, so that the fiction contrives to control a symbolic framework which has already taken control of the fiction.

I. Out of America: A Postmodern Perspective

Any construction of whiteness is inexorably entwined with a construction of blackness, just as Babo and Benito Cereno are mercilessly yoked together in a symbolic system which ultimately renders the distinction between oppressor and oppressed futile. In Melville's narrrative, the imagery of stereotypes and cultural ascriptions is shown to be powerful because it is unacknowledged *and* central, so that its manipulation

disrupts not only the social system, but threatens to collapse the very foundations of reality, the natural order of things. Toni Morrison has characterized this "dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence" at the core of American culture as "the operative mode of a new cultural hegemony," the hidden referent behind the historical construction of an American national identity and American exceptionality.[5]

If the Africanist figure is situated at the core of U.S.American culture, its centrality within the discourse of postcolonialism is certainly no less pertinent. The problematical 'hyphenated' existence of African-Americans echoes the paradoxical situation of African peoples whose very concepts of identity and autonomy derive from the European discourses they mean to contest. Terence Ranger has shown how the British obsession with tradition and national identity inscribed itself into the 'blank space' of Africa and merged indissolubly with indigenous efforts at self-definition and independence: "the invented traditions of African societies—whether invented by the Europeans or by Africans themselves in response—distorted the past but became in themselves realities through which a good deal of colonial encounter was expressed."[6] In the course of this argument, the very idea of Africa could be conceived of as a myth in the Barthesian sense, as Kwame Anthony Appiah pointed out: "the very invention of Africa (as something more than a geographical entity) must be understood, ultimately, as an outgrowth of European racialism; the notion of Pan-Africanism was founded on the notion of the African, which was, in turn, founded not on any genuine cultural commonality but on the very European concept of the Negro."[7] In light of this recognition, the very search for an 'indigenous' or 'natural' tradition becomes futile: tradition, regardless of its origins, is constituted by the transition of individual habit into communal custom, by a ritualization of mundane practice, by history becoming myth. By this logic all tradition is invented or—conversely—all traditions are indigenous; as the social function and cultural context of traditional settings can vary, they are subject to change and ideological manipulation. The project of cultural criticism, then, amounts to more than merely tracing back the origins of cultural practice, it needs to bring forth the constructive functions of cultural ascriptions, the subtle transformations colonial racialism undergoes once it is adopted (and re-enacted) as tradition.

One of the crucial tasks of a cultural criticism starting from these assumptions would then be to demarcate the peripheries of the discourses of racial stereotyping and ethnic self-fashioning, the transitions, exchanges and exclusions between discourses that transfix racial identity and ethnic stylization. The intermediate realms between a dominant and a subjugated culture, or, in Homi Bhabha's words, the "interstitial disjunctive spaces" pertaining neither to one nor the other, present a space where the seminal work of 'translation' as "the performative nature of cultural communication"[8] takes place. The colonial order and the postcolonial situation arising from it release conflicting desires for control *and* understanding, exchange *and* power, constituting "contact zones" that leave nobody involved unaffected.[9]

Not accidentally, these characterizations of the postcolonial world as a conglomerate of disharmonious voices that nevertheless had to establish valid communicative patterns calls to mind the 'postmodern condition' which equally has been described by way of ruptures, clashes, precarious power structures that constantly realign themselves.[10] However, these two discursive fields, the postcolonial and the postmodern, overlap only in part. Postmodern culture, it seems, is rather concerned with enacting the mythical aspects of these interstices, stylizing the intermediate space as impenetrable, inscrutable, blank and thus epitomizing the collapse of cultural communication, the ahistoricity and opacity of the Other, rather than its subversive or productive potential. So even if postmodern writing, just like postcolonial writing, is obsessed with the idea of historical representation, even if both employ similar rhetorical, tropical and narrative strategies, and even if both collapse existent models of historical representation and recording—their cultural functions and conceptual context diverge considerably.[11] I mean to exemplify this divergence of interest and impact by way of a reading of a chapter of Thomas Pynchon's novel *V.*, "Mondaugen's Story," which enacts a scenario of postcolonialism, yet eschews its project of re-writing history and re-constructing tradition in favour of a postmodern effort at 'collapsing' historiography.[12] This reading of Pynchon's dislodging of postcolonialism will then be contrasted with an analysis of a text suffused with a postcolonialist rhetoric: Nicolas Roeg's film *Heart of Darkness* (1994).

When Thomas Pynchon resumes Melville's project of representing blackness almost one hundred years later, he focuses on the symbolic space of colonial and postcolonial Africa, the "South-West-Protectorate," a region the very name of which points to the perverse logic of colonialism. Just like Melville, Pynchon presents the 'African' as a symbolic system of cultural images and ascriptions, but whereas in *Benito Cereno* Babo manages at least momentarily to get the better of this system and to manipulate the repertoire for his own interests, in *V.* it seems irrevocably at large, beyond individual control or penetration. Just like the tattooed body of the woman in Vheissu, "the gaudy, godawful riot of pattern and color"[13] which mystified and frightened the British imperialist Hugh Godolphin, the unreadibility of Africa threatens to overwhelm the European (predominantly German and proto-fascist) community in its midst, and the frustration before the unreadable is compensated by orgies of pornographic violence and sadistic cruelty.

"Mondaugen's Story" is set in 1922 and relates the weird experiences of the young German scientist Kurt Mondaugen who in the course of a strangely vague African upheaval gets trapped in the farm of a German settler in the South-West, Foppl. The violent confrontation of Europeans and Africans mirrors an earlier situation, the (historical) campaign of General Lothar von Trotha's army in 1904 aimed at the suppression of an African insurrection against the colonial power, culminating in the "Vernichtungs Befehl" and the extermination of "about 60,000 people" (*V.*245). Foppl, Mondaugen's host, was a recruit under Trotha and his nostalgic recollections of the past events begin to infiltrate and dominate the mind of the 'voyeur' Mondaugen, who is increasingly drawn into a "collective dream—[...] a dream of annihilation" and entangled in the pattern of violence and murder he recollects involuntarily, inculpating himself in the very process of 'watching.'[14] Foppl experienced Trotha's crusade as an epitome of personal empowerment and absolute freedom: "[...] he was feeling [...] the pleasure of making a choice whose consequences, even the most terrible, he could ignore." (*V.* 271) Not accidentally this pleasure of irresponsibility is closely associated with a levelling of historical depth, with a dismissal of the past: "I had the same feeling once in the Realgymnasium when they told us we wouldn't be responsible in the examination for all the historical dates we'd spent weeks

memorizing." (*V.* 253). Foppl's feeling of release and freedom is symptomatic of the logic of imperialism—a logic of irreversible structures of power constituting a situation that is liminal, timeless and absolutely exceptional.

This exceptionality and specificity comes to the fore in the 'intermediate zones,' the institial space where colonizers and colonized are forced to meet, or rather to collide—zones that are organized by absolutely unconditional rules of power and submission, where the positions of the powerful and the powerless, the killer and the victim, are absolutely transfixed: one is *exclusively* and *forever* in control, the other *always* and *totally* victimized. When Foppl and his comrade Fleische kill a nameless Hottentot, who had refused to stick to this rule, the perverse pleasure in the absolute stability and eternal exceptionality of the system culminates:

> After Fleische, with the tip of his sjambok, had had the obligatory sport with the black's genitals, they clubbed him to death with the butts of their rifles and tossed what was left behind a rock for the vultures and flies.
>
> But as they did this thing—and Fleische said later that he'd felt something like it too—there came over him for the first time an odd sort of peace, perhaps like what the black was feeling as he gave up the ghost. [...] Things seemed all at once to fall into a pattern: a great cosmic fluttering in the blank, bright sky and each grain of sand, each cactus spine, each feather of the circling vulture above them and invisible molecule of heated air seemed to shift imperceptibly so that this black and he, and he and every other black he would henceforth have to kill slid into alignment, assumed a set symmetry, a dancelike poise. [...] It had only to do with the destroyer and the destroyed, and the act which united them, and it had never been that way before. (*V.*262-63)

Here the colonizer and colonized, white and black, enter into a relationship that demands their absolute singularity and their total representativity: they become *the* destroyer, *the* destroyed. In this perverse bond not only the victim, but also the killers are effaced in anything but their momentary experience—killing, being killed. Yet while Foppl gains a voice, the nameless African does not. Pynchon refuses to write an alternative history that would account for his experience and his position. Here, the power which yokes together oppressor and oppressed is nothing but a projection of the white man on the black man, a projection which in itself turns in a further projection, as Foppl's

recollections infiltrate Mondaugen's consciousness. If this recollection of a recollection that invades Mondaugen is called nostalgia—"nostalgia he didn't want, nostalgia forced on him by something he was coming to look on as a coalition" (*V.* 260)—it is a nostalgia which obliterates past and present likewise, replacing the past by its myth and effacing the present by creating a paranoic 'surplus' of historical depth and reference which contrives to render any idea of individual autonomy and subjective perspective doubtful:[15] "[Mondaugen's] voyeurism had been determined purely by events seen, and not by any deliberate choice, or preëxisting set of personal psychic needs" (*V.*277). In the end we are left with nothing but a blank, the vast empty space of the desert and its inhabitors, a blank which resists projection and foregoes representation:

> The Bondel had lost his right arm. "All over," he said. "Many Bondels dead, baases dead, van Wijk dead. My woman, younkers dead." He let Mondaugen ride behind him. At that point Mondaugen didn't know where they were going. As the sun climbed he dozed on and off, his cheek against the Bondel's scarred back. They seemed the only three animate objects on the yellow road which led, he knew, sooner or later, to the Atlantic. The sunlight was immense, the plateau country wide, and Mondaugen felt little and lost in the dun-colored waste. Soon as they trotted along the Bondel began to sing, in a small voice which was lost before it reached the nearest Ganna bush. The song was in Hottentot dialect, and Mondaugen couldn't understand it. (*V.* 279)

In Pynchon's novel the myth of Africa is depicted as so powerful and all-pervading that it absorbs everybody identified with it. The Bondels' individuality is completely contained within this myth of the African, a myth which is clearly shown to derive from European minds, requiring the indissoluble bond between 'destroyer' and 'destroyed,' imperialist intruder and African victim and—at the same time—the clear and univocal distinction between active and passive part, projecting subject and projected object. Just as Barthes's 'saluting negro' is "not a symbol and much less an alibi, [but] the *presence* of French imperiality,"[16] so the Bondels in Pynchon's novel are projections of an imperialism which has completely transferred and replaced every other trace of signification—there is nothing underneath or behind. Once released from the tight bond, the 'African' is completely devoid of meaning, an empty

cipher. Here, just as in Melville's approach to blackness, the intricate link between blackness and whiteness is impossible to ignore, but unlike Melville Pynchon insists upon the fatal totality of this link: While Melville permits a glimpse underneath the glib surface of racialist ascriptions by enacting the gap between Delano's representation and the reader's growing unease with the represented, Pynchon forces the reader into the imperialist position, ultimately equating the project of interpretation and signification, indeed the project of reading itself, with the project of imperialism.[17]

II. Hearts of Darkness: A Postcolonial Perspective

To represent Africa, Pynchon holds, is to don the glasses of imperialism, otherwise the project of representation shatters at the unyielding surface of the "absolute blackness" (*V.*234). By this logic the history of Africa is nothing but colonial history, since the imagery of Africa as the empty surface upon which history is projected renders a conception of indigenous *African* history absurd. Of course, when Pynchon evokes this projective function of Africa, he deliberately and explicitly perpetuates and parodically epitomizes a huge set of narrative conventions and fictional constellations, a repertoire that can be said to constitute the history of imperialism as it is inextricably linked with that repertoire. Africa, as the primitive space which mirrors and un-masks Europe, the dark, un-decipherable region inhabited by "prehistoric man" belonging to "the beginnings of time"[18] thus literally figures as the 'heart' of a pervading body of fiction on the dark underside, both fascinating and dangerous, of the Western hemisphere.[19] Edward Said has explicated the powerful impact and extension of this repertoire throughout the era of imperialism, claiming that in its time "Imperialism has monopolized the whole system of representation."[20] By today, the long-established conventions of representing Africa are far from being invalidated, to the contrary its pivotal position constantly reasserts itself—if now often reevaluated as Europe's positive counter-image, its primeval Other or untainted origin. Thus the contemporary fictional recapitulation and conversion of colonialist positions testifies to a dense discursive frame-

work, no less contingent and powerful than the older one of imperialism. Thus Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* presents an exemplary and widely discussed instance of the rhetorics of colonialism and imperialism which are so much concomitant to Conrad's work that the attempt of "looking for [...] non-imperialist alternatives" must needs be futile—"the system had simply eliminated them and made them unthinkable."[21] Nicolas Roeg's film *Heart of Darkness* (1993), on the other hand, can be read as an equally compelling narrative of (one branch of) postcolonialism, a narrative which does definitely revise its 'original version,' yet nevertheless enacts a scenario of 'Africanicity' which is at least as entangled in a contemporary context of representing blackness as Conrad's text was in the rhetoric of his time.[22]

Conrad's novel constitutes in many respects a 'pre-text' for the representation of Africa, or—rather—colonialism. Not only Roeg's film pays homage to this, but also Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, not to mention countless intertextual references and allusions in novels, plays and other twentieth-century art.[23] The intricate interlinkage of African and Western systems of reference, which Pynchon's text has contested, presents the foremost structural means of Conrad's approach to Africa. The 'dark continent' is a figure for the underlying, repressed and unconscious nature of Europe—"We live in the flicker—may it last as long as the old earth keeps rolling! But darkness was here yesterday" (*HD* 30)—and moreover comes to embody the very European problem of a failure of control, dominance, containment—"the horror!"

In this novel, just as in Melville's *Benito Cereno*, the death of a black man witnessed by white men constitutes a strange bond, a bond between (white) projection and (black) defiance, the effort to read and the will to resist such a reading. When Marlow's African helmsman dies, killed by Kurtz's men, Marlow and one of the Company agents attempt to pry into his dying, to draw whatever kind of meaning out of it:

> We two whites stood over him, and his lustrous and inquiring glance enveloped us both. I declare it looked as though he would presently put us some question in an understandable language, but he died without uttering a sound, without moving a limb, without twitching a muscle. Only in the very last moment, as though in response to some sign we could not see, to some whisper we could not hear, he frowned heavily, and that frown gave to his black death-

> mask an inconceivably sombre, brooding, and menacing expression. The lustre of the inquiring glance faded swiftly into glassiness. (*HD* 82)

Just as to his death Babo remains inexorably entwined in the white 'gaze,' so the dying helmsman cannot escape the whites' observation and interpretation, not even when communication is abandoned altogether and replaced by a "sombre, brooding, and menacing expression." Only his death can relinquish the link to the whites standing over him—his glance emptying out, glazing over. When Marlow later reflects upon this man, however, he does not recall his death but his living presence, his singular meaning and significance for the journey to the inner station, and thus his conjunction with Marlow's life and project:

> I missed my late helmsman awfully,—I missed him even while his body was still lying in the pilot-house. Perhaps you will think it passing strange, this regret for a savage who was of no more account than a grain of sand in a black Sahara. Well, don't you see, he had done something, he had steered; for months I had him at my back—a help—an instrument. It was a kind of partnership. He steered for me—I had to look after him. I worried about his deficiencies, and thus a subtle bond had been created, of which I only became aware when it was suddenly broken. And the intimate profundity of that look he gave me when he received his hurt remains to this day in my memory—like a claim of distant kinship affirmed in a supreme moment. (*HD* 87-88)

The "subtle bond" between Marlow and the African both displays and contests the structures of colonialism: constituting an agent and an instrument, master and servant, and undermining by the same token the linearity of this relationship. After all, the very wording of the description can be read against the grain: "he steered for me—I had to look after him." Here the positions of master and servant are becoming doubtful—is it really the one who steers who is the servant, the one who 'looks after' who is the master? In this ambivalent phrase, briefly, imperceptibly, the inherent ambivalence of the relationship is acknowledged, and just as the shifting expression on the dying man's face withstood the bystanders' effort at interpretation, so his paradoxical position as a 'steering servant,' proficient guide *and* unreliable underling, disavows the concept of an univocal hierarchy. Consequently, with this

scene a process of disorientation sets in which affects both Marlow and the reader, as clear-cut evaluations and universal judgments seem increasingly to formulate. The servant at the steering wheel demarcates an ambiguity which echoes the uncanny shaving scene in Melville's *Benito Cereno*: Here, too, a servant figure using a symbol of power, the knife, can be read in two ways—as a threatening blackguard or as a devoted barber. In Melville's text, however, the ambivalence is not marginalized and repressed, but adopts a pivotal position of the narrative.[24]

Later, when Marlow meets Kurtz, the memory of the "subtle bond," the "kind of partnership" with the helmsman is merging with the new one, "this unforeseen partnership, this choice of nightmares forced upon me in the tenebrous land" (*HD*110). Kurtz comes to embody both master and servant, both Marlow and the African, paradoxically collating the function of the agent and the function of the instrument, aspiring to the pleasure of control and of submission and ultimately suffering nothing but the painful implications of both states. It is this weird conglomerate of impulses—utter dependence, utter superiority—the 'sickness' of the "white God" which Kurtz's first appearance in the novel epitomizes:

> It was as though an animated image of death carved out of old ivory had been shaking its hand with menaces at a motionless crowd of men made of dark and glittering bronze. I saw him open his mouth wide—it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him. (*HD* 99)

Kurtz's greed and desire to 'swallow' Africa—to master the crowd, to own the land, to dominate the wilderness and to control the darkness—is bound to fail. The powerful system he wanted to conquer has invaded his very body whose whiteness now looks like the ivory he strived to possess.

In Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* the referential system linking Europe and Africa, the Congo and London, constitutes the core of the narrative. In Nicolas Roeg's adaptation of the novel this link is severed. His film does not start out on the river in London, but with a surface the camera traces out, a scarred, dusty, ancient material which we come only gradually to identify as the skin of a dead elephant killed for its tusks.

Roeg's Europeans—with the exception of Marlow (Tim Roth)—want money, not power. For the Company, Africa is a huge storage space to be cleaned out as completely and quickly as possible, the less contact and interaction with the natives the better. Roeg's colonialism has turned postcolonialist. The words "ivory," "ivoire" dominate the conversations and the severed tusks come to stand for 'Africa'—the carcass of the elephant haunts only Marlow's dreams. When Marlow asks the ever complaining company agent Harou why he came to Africa in the first place, Harou answers nonplussed: "To make money, you fool, what do you think!"

While the representatives of the Company remain vague and faceless, unaffected by the African space as they do not really enter it, Conrad's unnamed helmsman undergoes a curious transformation in Roeg's narrative. As Mfumu (Isaach de Bankolé) he becomes Marlow's advisor, guide, translator, and eventually his "friend." Translating in every sense of the word, Mfumu correlates two different referential systems—the abstract, detached and secretly violating commercial system of Europe and the concrete, bodily and openly violent system of African cannibalism. Mfumu is both part of and outside both systems, and thus his very existence figures forth a model of cultural contact which counters the imagery of colonialism: envisioning something beyond commercial exploitation and fearful projection. When Mfumu dies, the project of practical mediation collapses and is replaced with Kurtz's endeavour for mythifying totalization. Three crucial episodes enacting the 'contact zones' between Europe and Africa and the circulation of power at stake may serve to highlight the implications of this curious replacement.

When the expedition camps for the night at the border of the jungle, Mfumu is seen to cover the African carriers with leaves, concealing them from a danger he purports not to believe in: "First time they work for the company. See: people think they good for trading. People think them to exchange for supplies. Mfumu laugh. Mfumu don't believe it." But Mfumu is wrong, the next morning the men are gone and even a well-filled bundle of barter doesn't get all of them back—one of them has obviously been killed by the 'jungle people' who abducted the carriers over night. Marlow is more furious about this obvious unreliability than about the actual abduction: "Did they kill him? For God's sake, we gave

them enough barter to get a bloody village for an entire year. You saying they didn't think it enough and they killed the boy just to make a point? Who are these people?" "Different people. [...] Hunters. They hunt," Mfumu replies cryptically, obviously unimpressed and unaffected by Marlow's exasperation.

While the European commercial system *has* invaded the African space, it is transformed in the course of this invasion. The carriers have to be hidden away like precious goods at night, like the commodity they have become for the European traders. The 'jungle people' in turn make use of this 'commodification' and change the conditions of the game while they play it—acting unreliable, unpredicable, 'different' by refusing to stick to the superimposed logic of exchange. While these people are most certainly Kurtz's men or 'emissaries' as Harou suspects, their power is not his power: "This has nothing to do with Kurtz," Marlow recognizes, "this is much much older." And again, as so often in this film, the camera traces an inscrutable surface, the green wall of the jungle.

In view of this strange and primeval 'old' system the bond with Mfumu, the African, gains vital importance for Marlow, the European. The ambivalence of a partnership based on dependence and guidance, 'steering' and 'looking out,' is impossible to ignore in Roeg's *Heart of Darkness*. "Have you been assigned to me?" Marlow asked upon first meeting Mfumu, and "Non, non," he replies, "c'est moi que ha demandé de la faire. I ask." Explaining, negotiating, acting, Mfumu draws Marlow gradually into his own system of thought, forcing him to accept an order of things where piercing one's face means appropriating an enemy's power. And still, Mfumu dies, and it is the bloody image of his dying, rather than his strategies of coping and survival, that will come to haunt the rest of the film.

In Conrad's novel, Marlow is horrified to witness the bloody death of the African, he throws away his shoes disgusted at the blood he stepped in ("I was morbidly anxious to change my shoes and socks." [*HD* 82]). Roeg's Marlow is deeply moved, rather than disgusted, and Mfumu's death comes to function as a strange ritual, initiating Marlow eventually into the rites of Africa, the rites of the jungle. He won't wipe off Mfumu's blood on his face and when he throws away his shoes this is a gesture of dismissal rather than disgust, an expression of his moving

to the other side, entering the other, older space of Africa. Yet while Mfumu's death seals the bond to Marlow (Mfumu's last words are in his own language and subtitled—"Farewell, my friend. I had no choice"—and still Marlow seems to understand somewhat intuitively), it also forecloses the aesthetics of pragmatic interaction Mfumu represented and initiates a new symbolic order in which Africa represents nothing but Europe's Other, its dark opposite. With the introduction of Kurtz (John Malkovitch), Mfumu's strategy of 'coping' by translation and the 'jungle people's' strategy of subversive resistance are wiped out.

Like Mfumu, Kurtz occupies a transitional or interstitial position between (European) abstract reasoning and (African) concrete referentiality, like Mfumu he translates for Marlow and the viewer, but his wordy explanations come to obliterate the memory of Mfumu and the presence of Africa. What is enacted as an approximation of Africa from the other—the European—side ends up entangled in an obsessive performance of guilt and responsibility which exhausts itself in the futile reiteration of its grandiose failure and inexorable causality.

Significantly enough this change of perspective culminates in a reprisal of the earlier incident of the African carriers' abduction. When Kurtz's men take hostage of another carrier, Kurtz suggests 'business' to the Company agent Verme. In exchange for the carrier he offers half of his ivory. Verme agrees. Kurtz unmasks the inhumane logic of commercial exchange by hyperbolizing it, turning the seemingly abstract logic of commerce into the very concrete, corporeal logic of war: "Ambitious hunter after contracts is Monsieur Verme. Black for white proposition. Irresistible, don't you see? [...] Happiness is to be found only in victory. In commerce as well as war." And yet, Kurtz's maneuvre exposes not only the logic of colonialism, but is shown to be just as deeply determined by the law of the jungle. Hence, while on the one hand Kurtz's 'black for white proposition,' a proposition setting the life of a Black man against a load of ivory, exposes the secret congruity of commerce and war and demarcates the unacknowledged—imperialist—violence underneath both systems, on the other hand the very concreteness and corporeality of this exposure (i. e. the exhibition of the dead carrier's head) reveals an inherent complicity of this—imperia-

list—order with an older, mythical power structure: the violence of imperialism, it seems, is at heart identical with the violence of Africa.[25] Imperceptibly, imperialist 'order' and African 'chaos' come to merge. Marlow's effort to disavow this fatalistic complicity of jungle and colonial logic fails: even if he eventually leaves the ivory behind, he cannot revive the carriers, nor Kurtz or Mfumu at that. The loaded raft is left floating in the middle of the jungle, an image of death and violation.

Whereas the 'jungle people' earlier on were shown to disrupt the conditions of commercialism, Kurtz sticks to them—he totalizes rather than collapses a given logic. In Kurtz's territory there is only one system at work which casts an inexorable spell over the white men and even the—absent—white woman, Kurtz's Intended,[26] drawing them deeper and deeper into its power. This symbolic framework everybody falls prey to is imperialist *and* African, or rather it is Non-European, structured by conditions that are strange, merciless, cruel, fascinating—exotic. Roeg's film ends up depicting an absolutely self-referential framework of black and white signifiers, both reflecting nothing but each other, fundamentally different and yet interdependent: "Zwei Seelen wohnen, ach, in meiner Brust," Kurtz quotes Goethe. When Kurtz dies, the scene is intercut with close-ups of Mfumu's dying and Marlow's gaze, which in its reflection identifies and collates both events and both men and thus reduces Mfumu's death to an image and premonition of Kurtz's dying. The guilt-ridden system of imperialism saturates the African space utterly, it comes to occupy the heart of Africa.

Whereas Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* presents a powerful reflection of colonialism, Roeg's *Heart of Darkness* reflects the system(s) of postcolonialism by way of an imagery which eventually forecloses the very project of approximating Africa; Africa being *per definitionem* the 'Other,' the unapproachable and non-communicable space. With Mfumu's death the film loses a precarious poise, an intermediate and undecided position between two irreconcilable, yet entangled symbolic orders. When Marlow in this version lies to Kurtz's fiancée about his last words, it is not to "keep the conversation going, suppress the horror, give history the lie,"[27] but to bring forth the futility of communication in view of Africa's eternal resistance, its violent rejection to take part in a dialogue with Europe. Mythifying the African space, Roeg eternalizes it at the

same time—consigning it to a referentiality which forecloses change and autonomy once and for all. Where Pynchon eschewed representation, Roeg transfixes difference.

Let me finish with a short digression, to recapitulate the positions I have sketched here. In an article called "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?" Kwame Anthony Appiah has recounted the organization procedures for an exhibition entitled "Perspectives: Angles on African Art" by the Center for African Art in New York in 1987. Several 'co-curators' had been appointed to take part in the process of selecting representative pieces of African art. The major problem for everybody involved, it seems, consisted in defining what should be considered a truly and originally 'African piece.' Significantly enough, only one curator opted for a piece combining traditional *and* contemporary features, a sculpture called *Man with a Bicycle* by an anonymous Yoruba artist, and thus broke with a silent agreement that 'true' African art reflected only the mythical past and thus fitted neatly into "the mold of the Africa of 'Primitivism.'" This guest curator was neither an art historian nor an ethnologist, but the writer James Baldwin.

For Appiah, Baldwin's decision expresses a vision of Africa which abandons the paralyzing imagery of the self-contained and mythical Other and embraces the concepts of pragmatic interaction and cultural dialogue. Consequently, Appiah argues for a circulation, rather than confrontation of cultures:

> If there is a lesson to be learned in the broad shape of this circulation of cultures, it is surely that we are all already contaminated by each other, that there is no longer a fully autochthonous *echt*-African culture awaiting salvage by our artists (just as there is, of course, no American culture without African roots). And there is a clear sense in some postcolonial writing that the postulation of a unitary Africa over against a monolithic West—the binarism of Self and Other—is the last of the shibboleths of late modernism that we must learn to live without.[28]

Returning to my reflections on Melville, Pynchon, Conrad and Roeg, Appiah's plea for dialogue and interaction might serve to highlight once again the pertinence of the 'intermediate zones' all of these artists have dwelled upon. As I hope to have shown, the revisionary approach by

light of postcolonialism will most certainly remain just as inconclusive as the colonialist effort to overcome the contemporary predicament of imperialism. However, just as almost inadvertently an alternative position is opening up in between the rigid oppositions of *Heart of Darkness* when Nicolas Roeg introduces Mfumu, so the very effort at translation and intermediacy contests the unsatisfactory relapse into a dichotomy of white and black. While the myth of Africa cannot be ignored and will certainly not dissolve of its own accord, as it forms an integral part not only of European ascriptions but also of African aspirations, its power is neither unassailable nor eternal. Just like any other myth, the myth of Africa is subject to revisions, breaks and functionalizations: not only a point of origin, but always also a point of departure.

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NOTES

[1]Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno* (1855), *Billy Budd and Other Tales* (New York: New American Library, 1961) 223.

[2]Eric Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1993) 28.

[3]Henry Louis Gates, Jr. has shown how the very idea of 'reason,' 'planning' and 'foresight' was considered incompatible with the idea of blackness and specifically Africanicity in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, so that "[m]etaphors of the childlike nature of the slaves, of the masked, puppetlike personality of the black" were all-pervasive. H. L. Gates, "Editor's Introduction: Writing 'Race' and the Difference It Makes," *"Race," Writing, and Difference*, ed. H. L. G. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986) 1-20, 11. The same conjunction of blackness and stupidity comes up when Captain Delano is shown to take "to Negroes, not philanthropically, but genially, just as other men to Newfoundland dogs" (*Benito Cereno* 185).

[4]Dying, Cereno complies with Babo's earlier order to "follow your leader" (*Benito Cereno* 212), the leader, however, being no longer personified in the white skeleton of Don Alexandro, but in Babo's severed head.

[5]Toni Morrison, "black matters," *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1992) 3-28, 5, 8.

[6]Terence Ranger, "Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa," *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm, T. Ranger (Cambridge: CUP, 1983) 211-62, 212.

[7]Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Out of Africa: Topologies of Nativism," *The Bounds of Race: Perspectives on Hegemony and Resistance*, ed. Dominick LaCapra (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991) 134-63, 143-44.

[8]Homi K. Bhabha, "How Newness Enters the World: Postmodern Space, Postcolonial Times and the Trials of Cultural Translation," *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) 212-35, 217, 228. Bhabha's concept of the postcolonial is clearly in discordance with Jameson's idea of the postcolonial subject. Whereas Jameson conceives of the postcolonial dilemma as based upon a binary constellation—West against diaspora—Bhabha conceives of postcolonial representation as a suspension of the binary and the evocation of a new spatial and temporal order, the culture of the interstice. See: Fredric Jameson, "Secondary Elaborations," *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1991) 297-357.

[9]Mary Louise Pratt used the term "contact zone" in close analogy to the linguistic term 'contact language' to describe the specific interaction of colonizer and colonized, a situation where "peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality and intractable conflict." M. L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992) 6.

[10]Cf. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, tr. G. Bennington, B. Massumi (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984).

[11]Linda Hutcheon has analyzed the interrelations and breaks between postmodern and postcolonial modes of fictional representation. The problem of her model, however, consists in her liability to subsume the postcolonial under the postmodern. Even if she convincingly disclaims any attempt at appropriating or recuperating the postcolonial into the postmodern, she does tend to reduce the postmodern to its postcolonial (or political) validity and readibility. Thus, her very idea of postmodernism has always been determined by a certain negligence in view of non-referential language games or deconstructive projects, and a tendency to interpret playful intertextual allusions as efforts at a fictional re-writing of history rather than a 'mere' deconstruction. This is apparent in her emphasis on the historiographical effort of postmodernism: "Despite the Marxist view of the postmodern as ahistorical—because it questions, rather than confirms, the process of history—from its roots in architecture on, postmodernism has been embroiled in debates and dialogues with the past [...]. This is where it overlaps significantly with the postcolonial [...] which, by definition, involves a 'recognition of historical, political, and social circumstances [...].'" Linda Hutcheon, "'Circling the Downspout of Empire': Postcolonialism and Postmodernism," *Ariel* 20 (1989): 149-75, 152. Here, the postmodern strategy of 'enacting' history in order to collapse it which is apparent in postmodern architecture or (on a totally different level) in Thomas Pynchon's writing, is unduly equated with a postcolonial project of re-writing history. It is no accident that Hutcheon obviously prefers Salman Rushdie's writing over Pynchon's as the former exemplarily performs the postcolonial renegotiation and excavation of historical 'fact' which indeed employs postmodern narrative strategies, but testifies to a different conception of history and identity and is endowed with different cultural functions.

[12]About Pynchon's model of historicity in this novel and his strategy of collapsing contingent marks of orientation see Manfred Pütz, "Thomas Pynchons *V.*: Geschichtserfahrung und narrativer Diskurs," *Ordnung und Entropie: Zum Romanwerk Thomas Pynchons*, ed. Heinz Ickstadt (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1981) 75-103.

The differentiation between postmodern and postcolonial representation I am suggesting here, does not aim at a depreciation of any of these two textual modes.

In another context, Winfried Fluck has reflected on a 'new realism' within U.S.American literature, a literary (re)turn to the realist project of representation, and pointed out that this break with postmodern narrative strategies integrated postmodern stances, so that instead of merely drawing upon former cultural models of literary representation, authors like Don DeLillo or Walter Abish effected "another blow to liberalism's cultural authority." This analysis could be easily expanded to certain branches of postcolonial literature. Moreover, Fluck's approach applies exemplarily in this context as it emphasizes the function of these different narrative modes and thus manages to avoid the paralyzing consequences of a constant evaluation and hierarchization of different literatures: "The purpose of this linkage is to get away from a polemical mode of argumentation and from various unproductive dichotomies in order to demonstrate that the new realism is not just a naive conservative backlash to postmodern daring and innovation, but a new type of writing with its own potential for contributing to our contemporary cultural situation." The analogies to postcolonial literature are apparent. Winfried Fluck, "Surface Knowledge and 'Deep' Knowledge: The New Realism in American Fiction," *Restant* 20.1 (1992): 64-85, 83, 67.

[13]Thomas Pynchon, *V.* (1963; London: Picador, 1975) 171. Hereafter cited in the text as *V.*

[14]Martin Klepper, "Die Moderne entläßt ihre Kinder: Pynchon's *V.* und die Probleme des postmodernen Wissens," *Amerikastudien* 38 (1993): 613, my translation. In his unpublished M. A. thesis, Klepper has explicated this process of inculpation which draws Mondaugen into the history of imperialism and anticipates the mass-exterminations in Nazi-Germany: "Implicit Models of Function in Thomas Pynchon's Novel V" (Universität Konstanz, Mai 1990).

[15]This concept of nostalgia differs considerably from Fredric Jameson's. When Jameson depicts nostalgia as the central element of postmodern historicity, he evokes its function as bringing about a stylized, ahistorical *image* of history, the myth of the past, that comes to replace present and past likewise in their specificity and poses as smooth self-reference and holistic quotation within a present which undergoes an "insensible colonization [...] by the nostalgia mode. [...] This approach to the present by way of the art language of the simulacrum, or of the pastiche of the stereotypical past, endows present reality and the openness of present history with the spell and distance of a glossy mirage." Fredric Jameson, "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *Postmodernism* 20-21. While this phenomenon of a replacement of the past by a smooth image of 'pastness' does hold true in view of Jameson's examples, Lawrence Kasdan's film *Body Heat* and E. L. Doctorow's novel *Ragtime*, it fails to account fully for Pynchon's strategy of constantly forcing the reader to face the constructedness and irreality of the fictional past and thus disrupting and fracturing the 'glossy mirage.'

[16]Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1957) 236. My translation.

[17]On the larger scale of the novel, Pynchon's 'deep aversion against history' as Heinz Ickstadt has called it, just like his skepticism about the project of interpretation and the quest for contingency, are of course countered by an equally deep reluctance to abandon this quest altogether, as it is epitomized in the person of the "untheoretical nihilist Benny Profane [who] refuses to take part in the quest and perishes due to the formless experience of the moment." Heinz Ickstadt, "Thomas Pynchon, *Die Versteigerung von* № *49*," *Ordnung und Entropie* 104-27, 105, 106. My translation.

[18]Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1902; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) 69-75. Hereafter cited in the text as *HD*.

[19]Hartmut Heuermann has characterized this underlying connection between Europe and Africa in *Heart of Darkness* as a mythogenous exploration of universally valid human experiences. In this context, colonialism figures as an allegorical constellation, a "second fall of man enacting death effectively." Hartmut Heuermann, *Medien und Mythen: Die Bedeutung regressiver Tendenzen in der westlichen Medienkultur* (München: Fink, 1994) 149. While this generic and universal symbolism of Conrad's novel is certainly given, it is the very tension between actual historical and political fact (colonialism) and the effort at universalization and abstraction which will interest me in the following.

[20]Edward Said, "Overlapping Territories, Intertwined Histories," *Culture and Imperialism* (1993; London: Vintage, 1994) 1-72, 27.

[21]Edward Said, "Overlapping Territories, Intertwined Histories" 26.

[22]Speaking about postcolonialism in the following, I will limit this term to its 'Western' context, as my focus is on U.S.-American and European discourses of racial ascription and self-fashioning rather than their African reception, subversion or transformation. Edward Said has presented an extensive and inspiring analysis of African revisions of Conrad's novel such as James Ngugi's *The River Between* and Tayb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*. "Resistance and Opposition," *Culture and Imperialism* 230-340, 252.

[23]In a comparative reading of Conrad's novel and Coppola's film, Simon During has shown that the novel's intertextual appropriation and responsive transformation in the twentieth century is integral to *Apocalypse Now*, effecting ultimately a queer "monumentalization of modernism." Commenting upon Coppola's strategy of replacing the Vietnamese enemy by the (mediated, technologized) images of 'resistance' he comes to the conclusion that in Coppola's film the "Other is eliminated by fiat. If there were an enemy available for representation, perhaps then there would be narrative rather than just citation." Simon During, "Postmodernism or Postcolonialism Today," *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty (New York: Columbia UP, 1993) 448-62, 454, 455. While citation and referentiality are as pertinent for Roeg's filmic version as they were for Coppola's, Roeg tries to avoid the concomitant problems of a dehistoricization or elimination of the Other by way of writing the Africans back into the text. See also: E. N. Dorall, "Conrad and Coppola: Different Centers of Darkness," *Joseph Conrad: Heart of Darkness*, ed. R. Kimbrough (New York: Norton, 1988) 303-11.

[24]Arguing against Chinua Achebe's reading of *Heart of Darkness* as a racist concoction, Abdul JanMohamed has pointed out that Africans do not really figure in Conrad's novel, "they are an incidental part, and not the main project of representation." Thus both critics eventually agree on Conrad's strategy of marginalizing the colonized which links up neatly to the totalization of Kurtz's 'horror,' and is broken up only momentarily and almost imperceptibly, as I have shown. Cf. Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," *The Massachusetts Review* 18 (1977): 782-94; Abdul R. JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn 1985): 59-87; Andrea White, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition: Constructing and Deconstructing the Imperial Subject* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993) 167.

[25]This collation of 'war,' 'commerce' and 'jungle' logic within the symbolic system of the film is deeply problematical in that it counteracts any idea of concrete historical reference. After all, the perverse analogy of war and commerce which is epitomized in the colonial situation is inherent in the logic of war in which bodies become 'barter,' are exchanged and finally efface each other, as Elaine Scarry has shown. By equating the 'jungle logic' with the symbolic orders of 'war' and 'commerce,' the interrelation of the latter systems is obscured and replaced by a vague imagery of exotic 'difference,' an imagery which is both all-comprising and non-committal. See: Elaine Scarry, "The Structure of War: The Juxtaposition of Injured Bodies and Unauthored Issues," *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: OUP, 1985) 60-157.

[26]In the course of his journey to the inner station Marlow comes across a number of pictures of Kurtz's 'Intended,' painted by Kurtz. The last picture shows her in an African setting, naked and scarred, and merges eventually with the image of Kurtz's African lover.

[27]Homi K. Bhabha, "How Newness Enters the World" 212.

[28]Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Post-colonial?" *Critical Inquiry* 17 (Winter 1991): 336-55, 354.

Connotations
Vol. 5.2-3 (1995/96)

The Language of Dogs: *Mythos* and *Logos* in Emily Dickinson[1]

MATTHIAS BAUER

Emily Dickinson's attitude to myth and mythology is an elusive subject. The reader scanning the index of Richard Sewall's comprehensive biography,[2] for example, will perhaps at first rejoice at the number of references under "myth" and "legend." None of these items, however, refers to the role of mythical stories in Dickinson's reading and intellectual development. Instead, all the passages indicated deal with the "legendary" aspects of her own life, culminating in Sewall's quoting a letter by Mabel Loomis Todd written in 1881: "It is a lady whom the people call the *Myth*. . . . She has not been outside her own house in fifteen years. . . . She dresses wholly in white, & her mind is said to be perfectly wonderful."[3] But even though biographical material as regards Dickinson's concern with myth may be scarce, Sewall's information is not entirely irrelevant. Emily Dickinson's seclusion from the world, the "myth" of her life, may have more to do with her attitude towards myth or sacred story than meets the eye. To learn about this, however, one has to look at the poems themselves, where one is confronted with a mystery far greater than that of a particular social habit.

It can be taken for granted that Dickinson was familiar with classical mythology, and even more so with the great stories of the Old Testament. While her knowledge of Latin and of classical literature in general was considerable,[4] it is no exaggeration to say that the Bible had always been the foremost reading matter in the Dickinson household.[5] Emily Dickinson never chose to treat a particular myth extensively (with the exception, perhaps, of Eden), and explicit allusions to mythical stories are much rarer in Dickinson than, for example, in Robert Browning or Elizabeth Barrett Browning, whose work she knew well.[6] Nevertheless, when the presence of myth is not merely regarded as a question of

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subject-matter or historical costume it can be recognized as an essential feature of Dickinson's poetry. The ground appearing under the surface of experience is time and again described in terms which link it, by way of allusion, with the great mythical stories, notably with the Garden of Eden and with Orpheus. Myth comes in, so to speak, with the words chosen for a personal experience of immediate, overwhelming impact.[7] The hallowed matter, accessible to those who are endowed with finer means of perception, may and must be told, and the way in which this is done decides about its truthfulness. In the following, one remarkable aspect of the relationship between mythical experience, rational response and language in Dickinson's poetry will be examined: the fact that dogs have much to do with this relationship.

Dogs do not abound in Dickinson's poetry; they are much rarer than, for example, birds, bees, or butterflies. Nevertheless, in several poems the homely figure of the dog has a very special function to fulfil with respect to *mythos* and *logos*. It appears as a companion of the speaker where events in the natural world (which includes human consciousness) become transparent for deeper, archaic, original levels of meaning ("antiquest" is the word Dickinson uses in "Further in Summer than the Birds," 1068). In these poems (in particular 186, 500, and 520) the dog, being able to perceive, understand, and communicate, acts as a mediator between the ordinary and the extraordinary; it helps to disclose and identify the mythical or even religious dimension of the speaker's experience.

By way of contrast, however, it seems useful to discuss first a poem in which the dog has a very different part to play: in poem 1317, a persiflage of the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac, the dog serves to characterize as mere myth what in the book of Genesis figures as an awe-inspiring example of God's power:[8]

> Abraham to kill him
> Was distinctly told —
> Isaac was an Urchin —
> Abraham was old —
>
> Not a hesitation —
> Abraham complied —

Flattered by Obeisance
Tyranny demurred —

Isaac — to his children
Lived to tell the tale —
Moral — with a Mastiff
Manners may prevail.

All the sentences are complete but, like telegraphese (and many nursery rhymes), extremely terse. Thus Dickinson contrives to tell the story in eight lines of five or six syllables, adding a "Moral" which purports to make the biblical event timelessly relevant to the lives of children and adults alike. To Roland Hagenbüchle, in this poem the essentially Christian virtue of obedience is perverted into its very opposite.[9] In his view, Abraham's following the divine order violates a superior commandment, the democratic principle of humanity.[10] It seems to me that Hagenbüchle perhaps takes the poem somewhat too seriously and, upon a different level, not seriously enough.

The speaker apparently claims to tell the story as it was handed down from Isaac and his children. This version, however, differs considerably from the account in Genesis. For example, the biblical statement that "God did tempt Abraham" (Gen. 22:1) is completely left aside. Indeed, the whole event is never taken quite seriously and seems to be told with a wink right from the beginning. It is as if the supposed story-teller's name, Isaac, had been taken as a hint to treat the tale in a rather ridiculous vein.[11] Dickinson's choice of words confirms this impression. The God of this poem (alias "Tyranny") is by no means to be feared like the God of the Old Testament. He can be managed quite easily since he is amenable to flattery. Accordingly, Abraham is not obedient but shows "obeisance," which, as a "bodily act or gesture" (*OED* 3.) is a different thing altogether. The apparently archaic use of the word "demurred" (8) underlines that the event is treated as an outdated story. Abraham and the "Urchin"—the capital "U" drawing attention to the first syllable, "Ur"—seem to belong to a prehistoric age. This version of the story can be moralized, like a myth, but it cannot be taken seriously as an example of man's confrontation with a God who surpasses his comprehension.

The "Moral" points out that the "Tyranny" of this poem never was God but was and is man-made. "Manners," just like the word "Moral," reduces the whole event to the level of social correctness and renders it quite harmless. This is again confirmed by the choice of words with its exaggerated use of alliteration: "Moral — with a Mastiff / Manners may prevail." The word *mastiff* is derived from Latin *mansuetus*, which in turn goes back to *manus*;[12] its etymology thus denotes a dog that has been tamed or "accustomed" (*suetus*) "by hand"; similarly, *manners* is derived from *manus* by way of *manuarius*.[13] This process of taming by hand is also implied in "flattered," which probably first meant "to flatten down, smooth" and "to stroke with the hand, caress," a sense still current in French *flatter*[14] and implied in King Lear's words about his evil daughters, "They flattered me like a dog."[15] The god of this poem is one who can be handled easily; like a big, domesticated dog he may seem fierce but in fact he wouldn't hurt a fly.

The "Moral" reads exactly as if a fable had been turned upside down: it is not the animal kingdom that provides us with lessons for our lives but a story from the earlier history of mankind is taken to be of didactic value with respect to our behaviour to beasts. Moreover, in view of Dickinson's well-known predilection for word-play, I do not think it beside the point to regard the choice of the word "*Mastiff*" as a transformation of *Master*, a suggestion underlined by the echo of the "er" sound in "Manners." Thus attracted to the sound of the words, however, we are called upon to regard "Manners" as a purely human standard, the rules of erring man. The topsy-turvydom of God being taken for a dog is, of course, also a matter of words, since "dog" is "God" turned round, and was used, as the *OED* confirms, in the place of "God" in profane oaths.[16] (Compare the still current expletive "doggone," a euphemistic alteration of "God damn[ed]".) The "Mastiff" is certainly to be seen against this dog/god background, and when we listen carefully to the "Ma*stiff*" that has replaced a Ma*ster* (or Ma-stir), we come to realize that one of Dickinson's satirical thrusts is directed against inflexibility and dogmatism of whatever kind.

Some thirty years before Dickinson wrote her poem, Søren Kierkegaard published a kind of meditation on the story of Abraham and Isaac. To Kierkegaard in *Fear and Trembling*, the story was either to be dismissed

as ridiculous or it was to be taken deeply seriously as an example of the never-to-be-comprehended paradox of faith. Kierkegaard lashes out at contemporary preachers who, in an all too facile manner, insist on God's substituting a ram for Isaac and forget, for instance, all about Abraham's painful three-day ride.[17] In any case, Abraham's behaviour cannot be an example for our daily lives. Dickinson seems to share Kierkegaard's aversion to the moralization of this deeply disturbing biblical story. In her poem, however, the seriousness of the event has to be inferred *e negativo* from the satiric version she presents.

Dickinson's main point seems to be the unmasking of a self-made divinity[18] that does not really demand the sacrifice of the beloved as an act of love (as the New Testament God demands it of himself).[19] The harmless, moralized religion of her own time, as it was propagated, for example, by Unitarian preachers,[20] is exposed as sheer mythology.[21] (Moreover, it contrasts sharply with "The Bumble Bee's Religion" of poem 1522, in which the "little Hearse like Figure" [1] of the dead bumblebee may "The vanity divulge / Of Industry and Morals / And every righteous thing" [4-6].) At any rate, the fate of an ancient sacred story seems to depend on what is made of it; a sacred story degenerates to mere myth—in Sir Thomas Browne's words, becomes "μυθικόν, that is made up or stuffed out with fables"[22]—when it is treated as such. As Dickinson stresses in poem 1545, however, it may serve to express a genuine truth about the natural world, human life, and God, when it is told differently: "The Bible is an antique volume / Written by faded Men" (1-2) as long as the stories are treated like shadows from the past. "Had but the Tale a warbling Teller" (13), that is to say, would the story be told vividly and with melodious clarity,[23] it would have a magnetic effect upon "All the Boys" (14).[24] In Sidney's words, the "forcibleness or *energeia* . . . of the writer" turns an old story into "a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner."[25]

* * *

Where myth is not dead and past but belongs to present experience reason is not excluded. The "warbling teller" as a model of Dickinson's own poetic persona[26] strives to know and understand. This is where

the dog comes in again. While in poem 1317 it appears as a deity who acts quite irrationally but may be tamed, Dickinson elsewhere presents the dog as a help for gaining access to mythical knowledge. This ambivalence coincides with the traditional image of the dog as a representative of the passions and lower instincts and as a faithful companion whose perceptiveness makes it possible to find out or track down what otherwise remains hidden.[27] Specific aspects of this tradition are reflected in poem 500, in which myth, knowledge, language and the humble but crucial role of the dog in these matters are discussed:

Within my Garden, rides a Bird
Upon a single Wheel —
Whose spokes a dizzy Music make
As 'twere a travelling Mill —

He never stops, but slackens
Above the Ripest Rose —
Partakes without alighting
And praises as he goes,

Till every spice is tasted —
And then his Fairy Gig
Reels in remoter atmospheres —
And I rejoin my Dog,

And He and I, perplex us
If positive, 'twere we —
Or bore the Garden in the Brain
This Curiosity —

But He, the best Logician,
Refers my clumsy eye —
To just vibrating Blossoms!
An Exquisite Reply!

In the first part of the poem, the speaker witnesses a hummingbird's visit to her garden.[28] This summary, however, rationalizes an event presented in terms of sheer wonder, culminating in the "Fairy Gig," which locates its rider in the realm of the supernatural and fabulous, the land where Queen Mab in her chariot is "Drawn with a team of little atomi / Over men's noses as they lie asleep" (*Romeo and Juliet* 1.4.57-58). The last line of the third stanza is marked by a rather abrupt change. With the disappearance of the bird the rhyme scheme is interrupted,

and the sudden shift from the ethereal music-maker to the prosaic "Dog" is quite a bit of an anticlimax. The question with which the poet and her dog "perplex" themselves, "If positive — 'twere we," concerns both their own reality (if it were positively we who saw and heard this) as well as the reality of their experience (if we can be positive that we saw and heard this). The specific or momentary natural event blends with a mythical one, as the Garden (twice capitalized) may be one born(e) "in the Brain," that is, it may be (imaginatively) brought forth by the mind as well as kept in it, remembered from time immemorial. The capitalized "Curiosity" helps us identify this Garden as Eden, where, of course, the desire to know for certain, to be positive, had such fatal consequences. In the words of poem 503, the question is whether "Eden['s] — a legend — dimly told" (l. 14) or whether there is an actual remembrance of how "Brooks in Eden — / Bubbled a better — Melody" (9-10).

One might perhaps think that Dickinson is holding "logic" up to ridicule by making a dog its foremost representative, a being that is known for its instinct rather than its power of reason. But then the speaker calls the dog's answer "exquisite," and I doubt that she is just being ironic here, especially since the dog's perceptiveness is contrasted favourably with her own "clumsy eye." The mythical event has had a real, perceivable effect upon nature, just like "Orpheus' sermon" in poem 1545. The bird was quite literally endowed with a moving force: "just vibrating Blossoms" are the dog's evidence for the existence of what now has withdrawn to "remoter atmospheres." That seemingly hybrid being, the dog-logician, embodies the idea of perceptiveness in the sense of keen natural understanding and heightened sensitivity to movements that escape duller minds.[29]

Dickinson in this poem, too, takes advantage of the playful force of words to make her point. If the Dog is the best logician, he must be a philo-logist, too. For instance, if halting and irregular verse is called doggerel, it seems quite appropriate that the Dog makes his first appearance in that part of the poem which bears the closest resemblance to it. Dickinson, as we know from her letters, was nothing averse to dog Latin,[30] and I suspect that "Cur-iosity" is one of the reasons for the dog to become a logician.[31] *Cur* of course means "why" and is

appropriate to the logician who enquires after causal connections. The connection is supported by the Dog's answer being "exquisite," which as a Latin word (*exquisitus*) means "attentive to every detail"; as it is derived from *exquiro*, "to ask about, inquire into."[32] And yet the Dog's logic is "exquisite" rather than merely "inquisitive"; it is rational in the sense of being beautiful rather than merely rationalistic. The "Platonism" of this concept is not as vague as it may at first appear. Thus in the *Republic* (376a-b) Socrates points out the philosophical nature of the dog, observing that its sympathetic reaction rests on the criterion of knowledge.

But Dickinson, one might argue, calls her dog a "Logician," which is not exactly the same as "philosopher" and perhaps an even more surprising epithet. If there is a tradition, however, of referring to the philosophical nature of the dog there are equally familiar models for calling a dog "the best Logician." In Thomas Nashe's *Summer's Last Will and Testament*, Orion (the dog-star) defends the dogs against Autumn's defamatory remarks on "those foul-mouthed mangy" animals.[33] Orion reminds Autumn of the fact that "*Chrisippus* holds dogs are Logicians" (698); for when a dog "commeth where three broad waies meet" (701) and has ascertained that the game he is after has neither gone the first nor the second road, "Without more pause he runneth on the third" (704). This logical deduction may be of the simpler kind but the story had nevertheless been used by the sceptical philosopher Sextus Empiricus as a major argument supporting his critical view of the reliability and superiority of human perception.[34] In a similar context it appears in Montaigne's "Apologie de Raymond Sebond,"[35] and it is this context of scepticism, I think, which casts further light on Dickinson's praise of the dog-logician because it coincides with the speaker's awareness of her own perceptual limitations. In the contemplation of the wonderful appearance and disappearance of the hummingbird's "Fairy Gig," the human speaker realizes that she has but a "clumsy eye" (20) while her dog, obviously in far closer contact to what is going on in the natural world, "Refers" (18) her to the subtle effects she has overlooked. The dog literally carries her "eye" (and her *I*) back into the "Garden" as a place of origin;[36] his logical inference from effect to cause is a re-ply, a folding back[37] upon the original movement of the bird and the "dizzy

Music" (3) of its "wheel." The "best Logician," endowed with superhuman qualities, himself becomes a mythical being while he testifies to the reality of a miraculous event.

One may thus recognize in Dickinson's poem a movement from mythical experience to rational reflection and back to myth, to a fusion of *mythos* and *logos* in the figure of the dog-understander. This concept itself is part of a mythological tradition. In gnostic literature, for example, the dog was held to be a symbol of the *logos*, partly because of his discriminating faculties (judging the living and the dead), partly because his constellation, the Cynosura, was regarded as responsible for the creation of earthly plants just as the divine *logos* created the heavenly plant, man.[38] It is quite improbable that Emily Dickinson was conversant with, let us say, Hippolitus's attack on the Gnostics (from which some of these views are known). As the examples from Nashe and Sextus Empiricus have shown, however, the tradition in which her Dog's role as the "best Logician" is prefigured is by no means an esoteric one.

The affinity of *mythos* and *logos*, as well as of myth and wordplay, is made explicit in poem 1602:

> Pursuing you in your transitions,
> In other Motes —
> Of other Myths
> Your requisition be.
> The Prism never held the Hues,
> It only heard them play —

The poem was enclosed in a letter, but I think its addressee, "you," cannot be identified with a particular human being. The person addressed is rather elevated to a superhuman level in that he or she is regarded as a source of light which the speaker, who compares herself to a "Prism," tries to capture. Dickinson plays on the sound of "Prism" when she says that it "never held the Hues": her speaker cannot be a "prison" to the "you." This elusive, ever-changing, spectral personage can only be seen in the motes that reflect it. The paronomasia "Motes" and "Myths" serves to point out that mythical stories, like specks of dust in a ray of light, reflect an inscrutable, mysterious substance. They have

to change as the light changes, and as they are made of words they do so by means of verbal transformation. When the "Hues" of the "you" are "heard" to "play," the synaesthetic transformation is brought about by likeness of sound. When the "you" is pursued in changing motes this is done by means of changing *mots*,[39] a tacit play on words confirmed by the musical sense of the word *transitions*, which makes it clear that the "other Motes" are also "other modes" into which the original melody is transposed.

In this poem, as in poem 500 or in 1545, there is a demand for the right kind of sensibility or susceptibility. It is the tone of the words, the vibrating of the blossoms, the warbling of the teller that makes all the difference when truth is pursued. The finest nuances may decide whether old stories just belong in "antique" volumes[40] or whether they come alive. Moreover, a characteristic feature of Dickinson's attitude to myth is to be noticed. The reference to "Myth" goes together with the concept or image of pursuit. This is underlined by the synaesthetic "hues," which, in connection with the prism, refer to colours but which also, as they are "heard," denote the cries of the pursuer. At the same time, there is no clear-cut distinction between the pursuer and the pursued: the speaker is both the one who is "pursuing you" and the one who listens to the hues which seem to pursue her. (Simultaneously, she is the medium, the prism which reflects the whole process.)[41]

* * *

The image of the pursuit introduces another mythical role of the dog, in which it may represent the desires and longings of the speaker's heart. Thus in poem 186 the dog is identified, by means of a quotation from the beginning of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, as the anguish of the soul despairing or nearly despairing of salvation:

> What shall I do — it whimpers so —
> This little Hound within the Heart
> All day and night with bark and start —
> And yet, it will not go —
> Would you *untie* it, were you me —
> Would it stop whining — if to Thee —
> I sent it — even now?

It should not tease you —
By your chair — or, on the mat —
Or if it dare — to climb your dizzy knee —
Or — sometimes at your side to run —
When you were willing —
Shall it come?
Tell Carlo —
He'll tell *me*!

This poem was also sent in a letter; its recipient is unknown. As in poem 1602, however, it would be pointless to try and identify its addressee. It is just "you" to whom the soul turns in its anguish and to whom it wants to send her very pain and restlessness, the whimpering "Hound within the Heart." Nevertheless, biographical facts help us understand the poem, in particular the last lines, "Shall it come? / Tell Carlo — / *He'll* tell *me*!" The fact that Carlo is the name of Dickinson's own dog[42] tells us about the way in which communication from the mysterious "you" is expected. This is confirmed rather than disproved by a possible allusion to the extraordinary dog of that name in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (published 1853).[43] The allusion would strengthen the feeling of comic relief in Dickinson's poem but it would also emphasize the perceptiveness of her canine messenger: the dog will be the one who rightly senses the answer of the unknown "thou" ("Thee," line 6) or "you" and will be able to communicate it to the speaker. He will indeed bear a message of relief to her who is haunted by the "little Hound within the Heart."[44]

The dialectical or even paradoxical relation between pursuer and pursued is expressed by the apparent contradiction between the fact that the whining and barking hound "will not go" and the statement in the very next line that it is tied up so that it *cannot* go ("Would you *untie* it, were you me —"). The very fact of being on leash seems to make the dog all the more ready to turn upon the self. Only when it is untied may it act as a go-between and thus, paradoxically, bring about a bond which eases the strain. Dickinson again uses the "material" of language, letters and sounds, to make her statement evident when she chooses an anagram of *unite*, "*untie*," for the possible act of liberation. The twofold image of the dog in this poem—as an embodiment of inner pain

and desire and as a messenger and go-between—corresponds to the ambivalent nature traditionally observed in the dog.[45] (A similar image is used in poem 236, where the speaker sends a message of devotion to a divine personage by means of *"His little Spaniel."*)[46] Like the speaker's dog in poem 500, who serves as a kind of link between her and the magic event in the natural world, Carlo in poem 186 obviously speaks the language that enables him to create a link between the speaker and the mysterious personage to whom the "little Hound" of the first stanza might be sent. And just as the "best Logician" in poem 500 alludes to a literary or philosophical topos, Dickinson transforms a classical motif when she speaks of the dog's "bark and start" in the context of a desired union with the person addressed. The motif is summed up by Eli Edward Burriss:

> When the poets Vergil and Horace describe magic rites which are intended to bring lovers together, the lover's dog usually barks—a sign of the approach of his master and of the success of the rite. This is, of course, a literary conceit, based on Theocritus.[47]

In Dickinson's poem no magic rites are performed and the barking dog is found "within the heart"; but nevertheless, as it seems to me, the allusion is strong enough to bring out more clearly the situation of a lover who longs for her absent beloved.

* * *

The dog appears in yet another role in Dickinson's poetry when it serves to identify the mythic features of the poet's persona. This is the case in poem 520, in which a common event turns out to be a rather unusual one:

> I started Early — Took my Dog —
> And visited the Sea —
> The Mermaids in the Basement
> Came out to look at me —

What at first seems to be an ordinary morning stroll to the seaside is at once, however mockingly, transposed to a mythic sphere by means

of the curious mermaids coming out to look at the speaker and the anthropomorphic "Frigates — in the Upper Floor" of stanza 2 who "Extended Hempen Hands" (6) in order to catch her like a mouse (7). The "Basement" and the "Upper Floor" serve to personify the "Sea" who is paid a visit. When the mythic dimension of the event is established, the dog of line 1 will be recognized as part of it. In the third stanza, the speaker's meeting with the "Tide" is described in terms allusive of ravishment or sexual encounter:

> But no Man moved me — till the Tide
> Went past my simple Shoe —
> And past my Apron — and my Belt
> And past my Boddice [sic] — too —

The goddess who governs the tide and is, moreover, the origin of the morning dew (cf. lines 13-14: "And made as He would eat me up — / As wholly as a Dew") from which in turn the pearl is born (19-20: "Then my Shoes / Would overflow with Pearl") is Selene-Luna, a deity traditionally blended with the figure of Artemis(-Hekate)-Diana.[48] The chaste huntress is, mythologically speaking, closely related to the goddess who governs female cyclicity and fertility. Her standard attribute is the dog.[49] At the same time, the dog is a constant companion of the moon (as we know from the moonshine's own mouth in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*).[50]

Only at the end of the poem the goddess-speaker seems to have the command of the tide that her role demands (23-24: "And bowing — with a Mighty look — / At me — the Sea withdrew"). In the lines before, the huntress, in a characteristic reversal of roles reminiscent of poem 1602, is pursued like a "mouse"[51] (17: "And He — He followed — close behind"). The fact that in poem 520 Dickinson refers to the mythic intercourse between Selene and Okeanos is confirmed by the very similar subject of poem 429, in which, at first, the commanding nature of the female moon seems much more firmly established:

> The Moon is distant from the Sea
> And yet, with Amber Hands —
> She leads Him — docile as a Boy —
> Along appointed Sands —

In the third stanza, however, this clear-cut identity and assignment of roles is questioned or even reversed when "the Amber Hand" is suddenly attributed to the "Signor" and the supposedly female speaker identifies with the sea ("Obedient to the least command / Thine eye impose on me —"). In poem 284, the "Sea" is addressed as a person ("Thee"), "toward" whom the speaker forgets "her own locality." "Thee" here implies the reference to a Greek god (*theos*): a few lines later Amphitrite is mentioned, the nymph who was courted and pursued by Poseidon.[52]

The Luna-Diana figure as a persona of the female poet seems particularly appropriate for the dialectics of chastity and ravishment, command and submission, which characterizes her encounter with the "Man" (poem 520, line 9). While in both poems, 520 and 429, there is a strong erotic element in these meetings, they also refer to a confrontation of the speaker with a mythical power greater than herself, a natural force which is not only personified but regarded as divine. This is confirmed, for example, by the appellation "Signor" as a thinly disguised *Lord*.[53] In Dickinson's poetic strategy, human experience is located within a mythic frame of reference which is transformed or revitalized in such a way that it may become a means of representing the numinous character of the experience.

This is not quite the same as the Christian allegorization of myth which transformed Artemis-Selene into a representation of the chaste Mother of God or into the Church as the Bride of Christ.[54] Neither is it the same as the philosophical allegorization of myth such as Giordano Bruno's interpreting the encounter of Actaeon and Diana, in which the pursuer becomes the pursued, as representing the dialectics of knowledge, i.e. the fact that the learner is as much sought out by the object of his curiosity as it is sought by him.[55] But Dickinson's method in the poems discussed can be regarded as a poetic analogue to these patterns of transformation. They provide a background to the speaker's self trying to account for her own meaning and identity. And this is where the crucial figure of the dog turns up once more (822, ll. 9-12):

> Adventure most unto itself
> The Soul condemned to be —
> Attended by a single Hound
> It's own identity.

As we have seen in poem 520, the dog or hound is indeed a means of identification. It may be an attribute helping us to learn about the role of the person it accompanies. In poem 822, it is the one trustful companion of the soul on its way between its origin and final destination ("traversing the interval").[56] The soul is "condemned to be" an "Adventure most unto itself," or, while it is "condemned to be," it is yet "Adventure most unto itself"; it selects, in the words of poem 303, "her own Society."[57] What seems remarkable is not so much the fact that the soul has an identity but that this identity is called a "Hound." The soul's consciousness of itself requires, in this poem, that it is attended by the most sensitive and watchful of Dickinson's animals, the dog. In the context of Dickinson's other dog figures, this may, paradoxically, suggest that the identity of the soul consists in its ability to sense and detect what remains hidden to human perception. This means, in a kind of circular movement, the "discovery" (12) of "How adequate unto itself / It's properties shall be" (9-10). This adequacy is related to the most "profound experiment" (7), the experience of death (6, 3). "Identity" is the dog which (or who) helps explore this border region. As poems 428 and 520 with their reversal of roles between the moon and the sea have shown, however, the identity by which the soul is attended may be a precarious one and may be gained only when it is lost or put at risk. When it appears as "the little Hound within the Heart," it is deeply painful.

In a letter written in 1862 to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Emily Dickinson tries to explain why she leads such a retired life (the kind of life, we remember, that led to her being called "the Myth"). "Of 'Shunning Men and Women,'" she writes, "they talk of Hallowed things, aloud — and embarrass my Dog — He and I dont object to them, if they'll exist their side."[58] A little earlier she had written to Higginson: "You ask of my Companions Hills — Sir — and the Sundown — and a Dog — large as myself, that my Father bought me — They are better than Being — because they know — but do not tell — . . . ."[59] They "do not tell" that is, like those who talk about "Hallowed things" so loudly that they (as well as the talkers) cease to exist, who empty the myths of their sacred truths or turn a dark, inscrutable personage into a harmlessly tyrannical mastiff. It is as if the biblical injunction, "Give

not that which is holy unto the dogs" (Matt. 7:6) had to be turned around to become true. When God has been made a dog, Dickinson's message seems to be, one should pay attention to what dogs may have to communicate.

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NOTES

[1]I am grateful to Professor Inge Leimberg for her encouragement, criticism and numerous suggestions. Thanks are also due to Dr. Christiane Lang-Graumann and Professor John R. Kayser for valuable material.

[2]Richard B. Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974).

[3]Sewall 216.

[4]See Vincent J. Cleary, "Emily Dickinson's Classical Education," *ELN* 18 (1980): 119-29.

[5]Sewall 694.

[6]See, for instance, Sewall 671 and 678.

[7]For a theoretical discussion of this affinity, see Ernst Cassirer, "Sprache und Mythos: Ein Beitrag zum Problem der Götternamen" (1925), *Wesen und Wirkung des Symbolbegriffs* (1956; 8th ed. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994) 71-158; e.g. 104-05 (extraordinary experience), 112 (the original connection of verbal consciousness and mythical or religious consciousness) and 127 (mythical hypostasis of the word).

[8]Quotations are from the edition by Thomas H. Johnson, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1979).

[9]Roland Hagenbüchle, *Emily Dickinson: Wagnis der Selbstbegegnung* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag, 1988) 252: "Die urchristliche Tugend Gehorsam wird hier in ihr Gegenteil verkehrt."

[10]"Dem Gedicht zufolge verletzt Abrahams Befolgung des göttlichen Befehls ein höheres Gebot: das demokratische Prinzip der Menschlichkeit" (252).

[11]Isaac's name, as Cruden's concordance to the *Authorized Version* explains (p. 708 in the 14th ed., London, 1848) and as Emily Dickinson surely knew, means "laughter."

[12]Cf. *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (*ODEE*), s.v. "Mastiff."

[13]*ODEE*, "manner[1]."

[14]Quotations from *OED*, "flatter," *v.*[1]

[15]*King Lear* 4.6.96-97. Quite surprisingly, commentators seem to take it for granted that Lear compares his daughters to flattering dogs; see, for example, Kenneth Muir's

note in the Arden edition (London: Methuen, 1972). The use of the singular, however, together with the older meanings of the word *flatter*, indicates that Lear also compares himself to a dog who has been tamed by flattery (cf. his "I smelt'em out" in 4.6.103).

[16]*OED* †dog, *n.*[2]

[17]See especially towards the end of the introduction to the "Problemata," called "Preamble from the Heart" in Alastair Hannay's translation (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) 81-82. Kierkegaard's works were not yet translated when Dickinson wrote her poem. *Fear and Trembling* (1843) is not mentioned as a source, however, but as a contemporary intellectual foil. Sewall 699 makes a somewhat distorting reference to Kierkegaard in connection with Dickinson's poem.

[18]Since Dickinson's poem was published only in 1945 and received together with or even after the great works of the modernists, it seems legitimate to compare it with Thomas Mann's treatment of the story in *Joseph and His Brethren*, where Abraham's task is discussed among Joseph and his father Jacob. As in Dickinson's poem, the story is told with a wink. Thus Joseph ingeniously stresses that the point about God's order was not Abraham's obediently fulfilling it but to make him realize that his God is different from all others (notably from Melech, the bull king of the Baalim). He is different in that he abhors such practices as the sacrifice of the first-born. God, in Joseph's version, for a moment plays the role of a cruel animal monster only to correct the more effectively man's conception of him. Accordingly, as in Dickinson, the irony is not so much directed against God but against man's idea of him.

[19]Cf., for example, John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son . . . ."

[20]See, for example, the passage from William Ellery Channing's ordination speech (1819) as quoted in Ursula Brumm, *American Thought and Religious Typology* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1970) 202-03.

[21]Different though this reading of the poem may be from Hagenbüchle's, I would agree with his calling its tone "cynical." Especially since *cynic(al)* is derived from κύων, "dog," it is an appropriate term for the ridicule of a god that has literally gone to the dogs. The word *cynic*, however, has always been ambiguous, expressing contempt for dog-like behaviour but also a positive kind of identification with characteristics of the dog; see e.g. the scholium on Aristotle quoted by Donald R. Dudley, *A History of Cynicism* (1937; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1967) 5. Dickinson seems to have the simplicity and poverty of the cynic in mind (cf. Dudley 98) when her speaker applies the term to herself in poem 178; she realizes that all her "priceless Hay," which she had carefully stored up, has suddenly gone: "And from a thriving Farmer — / A Cynic, I became" (ll. 11-12). The cynic chooses to lead a dog's life, so to speak, on the margins of human society, rejecting all that is illusionary or contradicts the *logos*. See the article on "Kyniker" in *Der kleine Pauly: Lexikon der Antike*, ed. Konrat Ziegler and Walther Sontheimer (1975; München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1979) 3: 399-400.

[22]*Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, ed. Robin Robbins, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1981) 35 (I.vi.). In Webster's 1828 dictionary (New York: Johnsen Reprint, 1970), "mythic" is glossed as "fabulous."

[23]Cf. *OED*, "warble" 2.a. and b. *Warble* may often be "a jocose substitute for *sing*" (*OED* 2.a.), and in transitive use it may mean "To express or celebrate in song or verse" (3.b.).

[24]The crucial role of the "Warbling" voice of the poet is confirmed by the fact that Dickinson noted down no less than thirteen different alternatives in her draft, where she opts for "thrilling" after having noted down "typic — hearty — bonnie — breathless — spacious — tropic — warbling — ardent — friendly — magic — pungent — [again] warbling — winning — mellow —" (Johnson ed., vol. 3, p. 1067). Cf. Charles R. Anderson's comment: "The point of her attack is not the Old Testament but its expounders." *Emily Dickinson's Poetry: Stairway of Surprise* (London: Heinemann, 1963) 19.

[25]Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1973) 138 and Shepherd's note (226); 113.

[26]On Dickinson's role as the "warbling teller" of "a nineteenth-century American Gospel," see Dorothy Huff Oberhaus, "'Tender Pioneer': Emily Dickinson's Poems on The Life of Christ," *American Literature* 59 (1987), repr. in *On Dickinson: The Best from* American Literature, ed. Edwin H. Cady and Louis J. Budd (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1990) 139-56.

[27]See, for example, the chapter on the dog in Beryl Rowland, *Animals with Human Faces* (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1973) 58-66, and *Der kleine Pauly* 2: 1245-49. For the ambivalence of the English lexeme *dog*, see Lilo Moessner, "Dog—Man's Best Friend: A Study in Historical Lexicology," *English Historical Linguistics 1992*, ed. Francisco Fernández, Miguel Fuster, and Juan José Calvo (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1994) 207-18.

[28]When the female pronoun is used for Dickinson's speaker, this does not mean that the "I" of her poems is always a woman.

[29]Anderson's conclusion seems too reductive: "These two intruders then proceeded to argue the problem of appearance versus reality, and the positivist won out over the idealist in a logical Q.E.D." *Emily Dickinson's Poetry* 115.

[30]A delightful example is letter 34 in *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1958), which was actually published as a "Valentine" in *The Indicator* (Amherst College) 2 (7 February 1850) and contains both dog Latin ("Magnum bonum, 'harum scarum,' zounds et zounds, et war alarum, man reformam, life perfectum, mundum changum, all things flarum?") as well as doggerel verse ("The Dog is the noblest work of Art, sir. I may safely say the noblest — his mistress's rights he doth defend — although it bring him to his end — although to death it doth him send!").

[31]There is a tradition of exchanging the syllables *cur* and *dog*. See for example, the explanation of the word *condog* (i.e., *concur*) in the *OED*.

[32]*Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ed. P. G. W. Glare (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982). On Latinisms in Dickinson's style, see Lois A. Cuddy, "The Latin Imprint on Emily Dickinson's Poetry: Theory and Practice," *American Literature* 50 (1978), repr. in *On Dickinson* 92-102.

[33]*A Pleasant Comedie, called Summers last will and Testament, The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. Ronald B. McKerrow, repr. ed. F. P. Wilson, vol. 3 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966) l. 648. The passage is reprinted in *The Literary Companion to Dogs*, ed. Christopher Hawtree (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1993) 71-74.

[34]*Pyrrhoniae Hypotyposes* (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism*) I.60, 64-72. It is a sign of the popularity of the story that Nashe did not draw directly from Sextus Empiricus. See McKerrow's commentary in *The Works of Thomas Nashe* 3: 428-31.

[35]Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, ed. Alexandre Micha, vol. 2 (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1979) 128-29; cf. Hawtree 78-79 (Florio's translation).

[36]Cf. *OED* "refer" *v.* I.2.: "To trace (back), assign . . . *to* a person or thing as the ultimate cause, origin, (author,) or source"; and also Webster's (1828) second definition of "refer": "To reduce as to the ultimate end"; with an illustrative quotation from Bacon: "You profess and practice to *refer* all things to yourself."

[37]Cf. the etymological note in Webster: "L. *replico*; *re* and *plico*, to fold, that is, to turn or send to . . . ."

[38]See C. G. Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis* (Zürich: Rascher Verlag, 1968) 162.

[39]Webster (1828) "mot": "Primarily, a word." Cf. the parallel to poem 500 with its "r*emoter* atmospheres" (my emphasis). The affinity is underlined by "exquisite" (500, line 20) and "requisition" (1602, line 4).

[40]Cf. poem 403, ll. 15-16: "But Ararat's a legend — now — / And no one credits Noah — . . . ." Just like poem 1317, however, this statement does not question the truth of the mythical story itself. What is deplored is its current ("now") lack of credit.

[41]Cf. the end of the first part (Sonnet 26) of Rilke's *Sonette an Orpheus* (*Werke*, vol. 2 [Frankfurt: Insel, 1980] 503-04): "O du verlorener Gott! Du unendliche Spur! / Nur weil dich reißend zuletzt die Feindschaft verteilte, / sind wir die Hörenden jetzt und ein Mund der Natur." ("O you god who is lost! You infinite track! / Only since ravaging hatred dispersed you at last / Are we the listeners now and a mouthpiece of nature.")

[42]Carlo is first mentioned in her letter no. 34 (February 1850; cf. n30 above).

[43]Carlo is a creature of discriminating taste. For example, Mrs. Jamieson tells her hungry afternoon guests "how intelligent and sensible the dear little fellow was; he knew cream quite well, and constantly refused tea with only milk in it." Elizabeth Gaskell, *Cranford / Cousin Phillis*, ed. Peter Keating (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976) 124. The allusion is not ruled out by the fact that Dickinson seems to have owned her Carlo at least since 1850.

[44]Another, however indirect, mythical reference may be to the Prometheus figure who is, in Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound" and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's translation of Aeschylus's "Prometheus Bound," punished by heaven's (or Zeus's) "wingèd hound" (Shelley I.i.34; E. B. Browning, *The Complete Works*, ed. Charlotte Porter and Helen A. Clarke [New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1900] vol. 6, l. 1211; Aeschylus's "πτηνὸς κύων"). The hound is an image of the anguish of the soul, as well as of a jealous God, in Francis Thompson's "The Hound of Heaven," written some thirty years after Dickinson's poem (which remained unpublished until 1945).

[45]See above n27.

[46]See lines 12-15: "Say — that a *little life* — for *His* — / Is *leaking — red* — / *His little Spaniel* — tell Him! / *Will He heed*?" Either the Spaniel is the messenger who is entreated to "tell Him," or the speaker herself is the faithful dog that dies for its master.

[47]Eli Edward Burriss, "The Place of the Dog in Superstition as Revealed in Latin Literature," *Classical Philology* 30 (1935): 32-42; here 36. References are to Horace, *Epodon* V.58; Vergil, *Eclogae* VIII.107 and the second idyl of Theocritus.

[48]See e.g. the article on Diana in *Der kleine Pauly* 1: 1512; Hugo Rahner, "Mysterium lunae," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 63 (1939): 311-49, 428-42; 64 (1940): 61-80, 121-31, especially 64 (1940) 61-68.—In a far more direct way "reality" and "mythology" are blended in the dog figure by Elizabeth Barrett Browning in "Flush or Faunus." See *The Complete Works* 3: 175.

[49]Only one of many literary sources is Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* 379 E.

[50]Cf. 5.1.249: "this dog [is] my dog." In Dickinson's poem 663, the moon replaces the dog accompanying figure.

[51]For "mouse" as a girl who is being pursued cf. the term "mouse-hunt" in *Romeo and Juliet* 4.4.11. Cf. also *OED* "mouse" 3.a. and b. and Richard Riegler, *Das Tier im Spiegel der Sprache* (Dresden: C. A. Koch, 1907) 63-64.

[52]On this poem (in the context of Dickinson's mythical "thou") see Hagenbüchle 219.

[53]The fact that Dickinson describes religious experience in paradoxical, erotic terms (and vice versa) shows that she deliberately connects herself to a tradition characterized by such formulations as Donne's "for I / Except you'enthrall mee, never shall be free, / Nor ever chast, except you ravish mee." *Holy Sonnets* XIV, ll. 12-14, quoted from *Poetical Works*, ed. Herbert J. C. Grierson (1929; Oxford: OUP 1971) 299.

[54]See Rahner, e.g. 313-14.

[55]See the fourth dialogue of part 1 in Giordano Bruno, *De gl'heroici furori. Des fureurs héroiques / De gl'heroici furori*, ed. Paul-Henri Michel (Paris: Société d'édition "Les belles lettres," 1954).

[56]On the poem, see Charles R. Anderson, "The Conscious Self in Emily Dickinson's Poetry," *American Literature* 31 (1959), repr. in *On Dickinson* 33-51, 50. I am not quite sure whether Dickinson's "identity" may be equated with "the Self," as Anderson does at the beginning of his essay (33).

[57]Cf. Lothar Cerny's discussion "Emily Dickinson's 'The Soul Selects Her Own Society': An Approach through Political Imagery," *Literatur in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 19 (1986): 112-28.

[58]Letter 271.

[59]Letter 261.

Connotations
Vol. 5.2-3 (1995/96)

Modern Republicanism and the Education of Achilles: An Interpretation of *Tom Sawyer*

JOHN R. KAYSER and JOHN FITZGERALD

> For our part, if we are forced to make our choice between the first shoemaker and the author of three books "On Anger," we pronounce for the shoemaker. It may be worse to be angry than to be wet. But shoes have kept millions from being wet; and we doubt whether Seneca ever kept anybody from being angry.—*Macaulay*[1]

Publius, the *nom de plume* of the federalists, presents the American founding as a repudiation of past foundings which resulted more from "accident and force" than "reflection and choice."[2] He asserts its reasonable and principled character. Publius, nevertheless, understands the new nation to be in need of sustaining myths which produce prejudice and habits favorable to the new Constitution.[3] Within the breasts of ambitious office-seekers, the American founder thought it necessary to install "sacred reverence" for the Constitution.[4] To this end, Publius asserts that men "of pious reflection" cannot help but see "the finger of that Almighty hand" in the work of the constitutional convention.[5] He prepared the groundwork for what would become reverence for the Founding Fathers, whom a good many still esteem as a race of demi-gods.[6]

Yet Publius did not rest satisfied with "reverence" to secure the new republic. Alexander Hamilton and James Madison deliberately chose the name of Publius Valerius Publicola to defend the Constitution. Their reasons for doing so become clearer once one considers that the founding of republican Rome is commonly attributed to L. Junius Brutus. Brutus roused the Romans against the Tarquins, which led to their banishment, and established the consulate, which was the highest civil and military authority in Rome. But before Brutus could complete his work, he fell in battle against the remnants of the Tarquins' forces. His second

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colleague in the consulship, Publius Valerius, established the institutional framework and republican modes necessary to secure the republic. Although Publius served as consul four times, he performed his most impressive and useful services to Rome while he served alone after the death of his colleague. He enacted a series of reforms: he increased the size of the Senate by adding men well disposed toward the new republican orders; granted defendants the right to appeal the consuls' decisions to the people; increased the people's zeal for manufactures and commerce; made it a capital offense to assume any office not bestowed by the people, and ordered that the lictors' rods be lowered toward the people when either consul entered the assembly.[7] This last innovation, in Plutarch's words, "emphasized the majesty of the people." Publius's renunciation augmented "his real influence over (the people) just as much as he seemed to take away from his authority and the people submitted to him with pleasure and bore his yoke willingly." The people gave him the name Publicola, which means "people-cherisher."[8]

The American founder enacted "legislation" quite similar to the innovations of Publicola. We restrict ourselves to a discussion of the *least* deliberative of Publius's founding enactments. Publius intended to increase the people's zeal for manufactures and commerce. We do not insist that he believed a commercial republic to be an unmixed blessing, for he gave to America "the best constitution the (then) present views and circumstances of the country" permitted.[9] Suffice it for our purposes to add that his discussion of commerce arises in a two-fold context: (1) a prudent discussion of "a republican remedy" for "domestic faction and insurrection," and (2) a demonstration of the necessity of meeting external threats to the peace and security of the nation.[10] His understanding of the utility of commerce issues from profound reflections on human nature.[11]

The utility of commerce in helping to render men, or at least most men, pacific is a lesson well and clearly taught by David Hume. He writes that

> . . . Where luxury nourishes commerce and industry, the peasants, by a proper cultivation of the land, become rich and independent, while the tradesmen

> and merchants acquire a share of the property, and draw authority and consideration to that middling rank of men, who are the best and firmest basis of public liberty. These submit not to slavery, like the peasants, from poverty and meanness of spirit, and having no hope of tyrannizing over others, like the barons, they are not tempted, for the sake of that gratification, to submit to the tyranny of their sovereign. They covet equal laws, which secure their property, and preserve them from monarchical, as well as aristocratical tyranny.[12]

Certainly Publius understood too that "all orders of men look forward with eager expectation and growing alacrity to . . . reward of their toils."[13] But reward cannot be understood, as even Hume implies with mention of barons, aristocrats, and monarchs, to mean merely money and those needful and pleasant things which it can purchase. Publius understood "love of fame" to be "the ruling passion of the noblest minds."[14] Love of fame, however, issues in conflict unless properly directed. To learn more about its education, we turn to Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer*.

Mark Twain closes *Tom Sawyer* by informing his readers that it is "strictly a history of a boy."[15] If it were not for our estimable predecessors, we would have to begin by making the case that Twain's "history of a boy" is that and much more.[16] Moreover, as a more or less careful reading of the more recent *Lord of the Flies* indicates, stories using boys as major characters are not necessarily merely stories about boys. Bernard DeVoto, for example, read *Tom Sawyer* merely as "the supreme American idyll."[17] He later came to see the novel as "something more than realism, it is a distillation, a generalization, a myth."[18] James L. Johnson states that "so successful is Tom's domination of the world that he becomes the culture hero of St. Petersburg, not merely the chief exemplar of community values, but a figure able to decree what values and activities are most acceptable."[19] Finally, Harry V. Jaffa makes a compelling case that Tom is "the master figure of American literature in whom, more than any other, Americans fancy themselves to be reflected and idealized."[20] If these testimonials are correct, Twain endeavors to convey the essence of America through his history of a boy. *Tom Sawyer* conveys to us a regime-sustaining myth. Tom then personifies not only what is characteristic of the American experience

but also the character required for the new republican order. He is the new "Model boy."

To help demonstrate our point, we linger at the end of the novel. Tom is clearly the hero of St. Petersburg. He is "the center of all activity. Other characters are important only in their relation to him."[21] This orphan, from modest means, who does not shine in school and appears to have no outstanding vocation, has risen to the top of society by his wits and courage.[22] He is crowned, so to speak, by Judge Thatcher who "said he meant to look to it that Tom should be admitted to the National Military Academy and afterward trained in the best law school in the country" (433). What accords better with the genius of America than this rise from obscure beginnings to that great career envisioned by Judge Thatcher?[23] The quintessentially American hero is "merely" a boy. Through Tom, we are presented as young, full of promise, and consequently more the stuff of comedy than tragedy. Nonetheless, Tom's heroism prompts one student to declare Twain a "seriocomic" Homer.[24]

As the novel opens, Tom is introduced as one whose frauds seem forever new. Aunt Polly asserts that he is capable of fooling adults and complains of "old fools," such as herself, who "can't learn ... new tricks" (288). Tom's frauds are so innovative that "he never plays them alike two days, and how is a body to know what's coming?" (288). Shortly after making this observation, she questions him about whether he had played hooky to go swimming. Aunt Polly thinks she has devised a foolproof stratagem for catching him because she had sewn on his shirt-collar. Yet upon inspection she finds the collar still sewn. Alas for Tom, his cousin Sid alerts Aunt Polly to the fact that the thread is different from the one she had used. This fraud is good enough to fool Aunt Polly, but not good enough to fool another child. We learn later that Tom will use other means to bring Sid into line. Although Tom's preferred mode is fraud, he does not scruple to resort to force.[25]

As careful modern readers might surmise, one gains better insight into Tom's nature when it is tested. Twain has Aunt Polly test Tom before our eyes by punishing him for playing hooky. She orders him to spend that uniquely American children's holiday, Saturday, whitewashing her fence. The results of this famous incident hardly need retelling. Tom's shrewd analysis of human nature helps him defraud

his fellows. He cleverly separates the other boys from their possessions. The fence gains three coats of whitewash. The narrator adds, as if sharing in Tom's triumph, "If he hadn't run out of whitewash, he would have bankrupted every boy in the village" (296). The author draws the famous moral, which he, as "great and wise philosopher . . . comprehended." Our wise and great philosopher is not certain Tom understands that famous moral: "Work consists of whatever a body is *obliged* to do, and that Play consists in whatever a body is not obliged to do" (296).

We fear, however, that our wise philosopher, like his character Tom,[26] is not always entirely honest with us. Tom does not merely make "work" seem akin to "play, " but also makes that "work" appear exceedingly difficult, nay exacting:[27]

> Aunt Polly's awful particular about this fence—right here on the street you know—but if it was the back fence I wouldn't mind and *she* wouldn't. Yes, she's awful particular about this fence, it's got to be done very careful, I reckon there ain't one boy in a thousand, maybe two thousand, that can do it the way it's got to be done (295).

Tom understands, in the effectual sense, that the natural inclination for pleasure can be transformed into a "raging" yearning. He first makes fence painting appear to be pleasant "play." The boys' thirst for distinction, however, is piqued by Tom's presentation of whitewashing as a rare skill of the most exacting kind, they are not merely enticed by "play." The other boys pay for the opportunity to demonstrate their quality. Tom appears to understand that in modern republics distinction is hard to come by. This difficulty does not, of course, diminish the natural inclination of some souls. "I told you before that children love *Liberty* . . . . I now tell you, they love something more, and that is *Dominion*." These are the words of the celebrated philosopher of modern republicanism, John Locke.[28] What is true of children is also true of adults when their passions have not been properly directed, or redirected. The yearning for honor, while mainly repressed and frustrated in democratic regimes, nonetheless seeks an outlet.[29] It is more prudent, as sober republicans recognize, to offer a controlled outlet - such as "fence painting"—to which those animated by the quest for glory might aspire. To maintain the public peace, prudent friends of republican

government have consciously redirected the competitive spirit of men into more profitable and less violent pursuits.[30] Where there were once captains in war, there are now captains of industry and finance.

What we have in mind can be gleaned from reflecting on Hobbes's view that all men have a "similitude of *Passions*," but not a "similitude of the *objects*" of those passions.[31] Among the passions natural to all men is "the contestation of honor and preferment."[32] This passion leads to conflict and war, unless redirected, because honor is indivisible.[33] To maintain the public peace, nay to avoid sinking back into ancient chaos, the sovereign power must redirect the yearning for honor and preferment into less violent and more profitable pursuits.[34] The passion to be preferred ought to be taught to desire wealth, so to speak.[35] As this paper indicates, Publius adopted "the commercial republic" because it was necessary and useful. He also left another avenue for the operation of the passion for preferment. That other avenue is the subject of the remainder of our analysis of *Tom Sawyer*.

Tom demonstrates how wealth may serve higher aspirations and purposes. On the Sunday following the fence painting venture, Tom spends his time before church trading away his newly acquired goods for Bible verse tickets. Each blue ticket represented two verses, ten blue tickets equaled one red ticket, ten red tickets equaled one yellow ticket, and ten yellow tickets, two thousand verses memorized. Two thousand verses memorized merited a Doré bible. That Bible, worth merely 40 cents, was not itself a worthy prize. But the reputation which came with the prize was earnestly desired:

> It was possible that Tom's mental stomach had never really hungered for one of those prizes, but unquestionably, his entire being had for many a day longed for the glory and the éclat that came with it (303).

On this particular Sunday, Tom's desire for glory was especially keen. Inside the church sat a distinguished visitor, "altogether the most august creation these children had ever looked upon," Judge Thatcher. The judge's presence was a major event for all in attendance. All the boys and girls "showed off" in various ways, and "the only thing wanting to make Mr. Walter's (the Sunday-school superintendent) ecstasy complete, and that was the chance to deliver a Bible prize and exhibit

a prodigy" (305). When the appointed time arrives, Tom presents himself and his nine yellow, nine red, and ten blue tickets. Despite his shock, for "he had not expected an application from this source for the next ten years," Mr. Walters awards the prize to Tom. Tom's fellows are quickly beside themselves with envy. Their envy adds relish to his already savory victory. Tom's victory is not rendered less delectable by his erroneous identification of David and Goliath as the first two disciples. Judge Thatcher certainly does not appear to be rendered ill-disposed to Tom.[36] And there is not even an allusion to his error in the remainder of the novel.

Tom is, as these incidents demonstrate, no stranger to the yearning for honor.[37] Later in the novel we catch a glimpse of the object to which Tom's love of glory is attached:

> Even the glorious Fourth was in some sense a failure, for it rained hard, there was no procession in consequence, and the *greatest man in the world* (as Tom supposed), Mr. Benton, an actual United States Senator, proved an overwhelming disappointment—for he was not twenty-five feet high, nor even anywhere in the neighborhood of it. (381)

Tom's ambitions are kept within legitimate bounds, although they are not limited to the pursuit of wealth. "There were some," as the narrator informs us, "that believed (Tom) would be President, yet, if he escaped hanging" (387). As Jaffa rightly contends, "Tom's destiny is that of a guardian of the democratic republic."[38] There are then other means of harnessing ambition to serve the public good in a modern republican context. The American republic by design, it has been convincingly argued, allows lovers of fame "to compete before the people for its favor."[39] The few do the many benefits while gratifying their own ambition.[40] While love of honor can be made compatible with civil society, it becomes less useful and increasingly malignant as it gains force and its scope increases.[41] The malignant form of love of honor is reflected in the character of Injun Joe.

We should recall that the ancient poem of glory *par excellence*, Homer's *Iliad*, literally opens with "the wrath of Achilles."[42] Achilles is angry because he feels slighted by Agamemnon. This perceived insult makes him reckless. He disregards both his own well being and that of his

companions in order to vent his spleen. This is the classic view of "great vainglory," or excessive pride. Injun Joe is moved by revenge for perceived slights. This is his motive for Dr. Robinson's murder:

> 'Look here, what does this mean?' said the doctor. 'You required your pay in advance and I paid you.'
>
> 'Yes and you done more than that . . . five years ago you drove me away from your father's kitchen one night . . . you said I wasn't there for any good, and when I swore I'd get even with you if it took a hundred years, your father had me jailed for a vagrant. Did you think I'd forget? . . . And now I've got you and you got to settle you know!' (330).

On "Injun Joe's" enmity toward the Widow Douglas now that they have found Murrel's gold, Joe comments:

> 'You don't know me. Least you don't know all about that thing.' 'Tain't robbery altogether—it's *revenge*!' and a wicked light flamed in his eyes. (397)

Later, the accomplice wishes to take the gold and leave for Texas and, upon learning that there are people in the vicinity of the Widow Douglas's house, he tells Joe, "better give it up." Joe's retort demonstrates the depths into which frustrated honor can lead:

> Give it up, and I just leaving this country forever! Give it up and maybe never have another chance. I tell you again, as I've told you before, I don't care for her swag—you may have it. But her husband was rough on me . . . he had me *horsewhipped*!—horsewhipped in front of the jail . . . HORSE-WHIPPED!—do you understand? (407)

In the novel, Injun Joe exemplifies the danger of love of honor. Much like an Achilles, his desire for retribution—to avenge his sullied honor—prods him on. He demonstrates the threat posed to civil society by the passion for preferment. The moderating education of modern republicanism has not touched Injun Joe.[43] As long as he lives he presents a danger to the community:

> The villagers had a strong desire to tar and feather Injun Joe and ride him on a rail, for body-snatching, but so formidable was his character that nobody could be found to take the lead in the matter, so it was dropped. (339)

Unlike Tom, Injun Joe's customary mode is force. Tom's thirst to distinguish himself, moreover, and to remind the reader, can be sated within the limits set by the regime.

Tom has begun to pave the way for his eventual career as foreseen by Judge Thatcher. His honor is, moreover, circumscribed by the conventions inculcated by the American regime. His attachment to convention is reflected in his respect for the written word. For a boy who seems such a poor student, Tom is a stickler for precision. He does not enjoy prayers, nevertheless, he resents even the most trifling emendation of prayer as "unfair and scoundrelly" (309). We can think of few characteristics more compatible with the American innovation of a written Constitution,[44] i.e., a nation under written laws. Tom is, moreover, concerned with appearing "respectable" (434). Even when playing Robin Hood, he goes strictly by the book:

> 'Fall! Fall! Why don't you fall?'
> 'I shan't! Why don't you fall yourself? You're getting the worst of it.'
> 'Why, that ain't anything. I can't fall, that ain't the way it is in the book. The book says.'
> There was no getting around the authorities. (326).

On Jackson's Island, where the boys play hostile Indians and then seek peace, they must smoke a peace pipe. Tom and Joe Harper had just spent the better part of the day recovering from their first experience with smoking pipes, but now they were confronted with the need to make peace, which was "a simple impossibility without smoking a pipe of peace. There was no other process that ever they had heard of. Two of the savages [Tom and Joe] almost wished they had remained pirates" (361). Tom's ambition is not lawless, although he does claim an inordinate share in "lawmaking."

For all his apparent rebelliousness, Tom defers in some sense to "authority." His commercial success is undeniable, from whitewashing Aunt Polly's fence to investing his profits. Yet he seems destined for an even more glorious future. That glorious future is shaped by the American regime. That regime was deliberately designed to take advantage of Tom's "ruling passion."[45] Publius thought it prudent to harness and moderate love of honor, "one of the strongest incentives

of human conduct," to the public good. A moderated love of honor encourages one "to plan and undertake extensive and arduous enterprises for the public benefit" without hazarding the anarchy and violence unleashed by an Achilles.

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NOTES

[1]Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Francis Bacon," *Critical and Historical Essays*, ed. A. J. Grieve (New York: Everyman's Library, 1931) 2: 358-59.

[2]*Federalist* No. 1, *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Clinton Rossiter (New York: Mentor, 1961) 33. All further references to The Federalist Papers will be to this edition.

[3]Even Plato's "nation of philosophers," Publius avers, would require sustaining prejudices (*Federalist* No. 49, p. 315, compare *Republic* 414d).

[4]Compare *Federalist* No. 25, p. 125, and No. 49, p. 315.

[5]*Federalist* No. 2, p. 38.

[6]As students of classical history know, the founders of the ancient cities of the Western world were reputed to have been the sons or students of gods. See, for examples, Livy, *From the Founding of the City*, trans. B. O. Foster (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1988) I.7-8, and Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980) III.xi.

[7]"Life of Publicola," *Lives*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1993) X.5-XI. Cf. Livy II.vii.7-8. Compare Charles R. Kesler, "The Founders and the Classics," *The Revival of Constitutionalism*, ed. James W. Muller (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1988) 76.

[8]Compare Livy II.viii.1-2.

[9]*Federalist* No. 85, p. 523. In *Federalist* No. 9, the commercial republic is introduced as part of a larger "catalogue of circumstances." Publius does not choose it in the sense in which he could have chosen otherwise. He makes a virtue of necessity by using it to control factions which mechanism he explores more fully in the over-celebrated No. 10. A more adequate understanding of this point requires reconsideration of No. 10 in light of Nos. 51 and 63. Cf. Alexander Hamilton's *Continentalist* No. 6.

[10]See *Federalist* No. 9 (beginning), 10, and 11. Cf. Alexander Hamilton, *Report on Manufactures in Alexander Hamilton's Papers on Public Credit, Commerce, and Finance*, ed. Samuel McKee, Jr. (New York: Liberal Arts P, 1957) 227.

[11]Publius takes issue, however, with those who claim that commerce necessarily renders mankind pacific. Commerce is useful for controlling domestic strife but not for moderating conflicts between nations (see No. 6, pp. 57-59). Although the question

is by no means adequately answered, our experience makes it seem unlikely that commerce can completely transform human nature by altogether eliminating spiritedness. It remains useful.

[12]"Of Refinement in the Arts," *Essays Moral, Political and Literary* (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1987) 277-78.

[13]*Federalist* No. 12, p. 91.

[14]*Federalist* No. 72, p. 437.

[15]*The Favorite Works of Mark Twain*, ed. Owen Wister (Garden City: Garden City Publishing Co., 1950) 435. All subsequent references to *Tom Sawyer* will be to this edition by page number in text.

[16]But cf. Judith Yaross Lee, who speaks of "the hero's induction into the adult world" ("Tom Sawyer," *The Mark Twain Encyclopedia*, ed. J. R. LeMaster and James D.Wilson [New York: Garland Publishing Co., 1993] 657).

[17]*Mark Twain's America* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1932) 304. Apparently accepting DeVoto's notion of idyll, Robert K. Miller argues that Tom Sawyer portrays a dream vision of American childhood (*Mark Twain* [New York: Frederick Publishing Co., 1983] 59).

[18]*Mark Twain at Work* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1942) 19.

[19]*Mark Twain and the Limits of Power: Emerson's God in Ruins* (Knoxville: The U of Tennessee P, 1982) 59.

[20]"Tom Sawyer: Hero of Middle America," *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy* 2 (Spring 1972): 194-225.

[21]John C. Gerber, "*Adventures of Tom Sawyer*," *The Mark Twain Encyclopedia* 14.

[22]Tom is obviously the hero of the novel despite the fact that he does not "get the girl." But cf. John Seeley, "What's in a Name," *Mark Twain: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Eric J. Sundquist (Engelwood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994) 49-62. Seeley argues that "although celebrated as a hero by the town, he refuses to accept the final act in all hero stories" (61). Seelye ought to consider that neither does Achilles. Tom's ambition precludes serious romance (see Jaffa 200). Miller suggests that Tom's "all-consuming ambition to achieve personal distinction" forecloses such things (72).

[23]Jaffa 195.

[24]Van Wyck Brooks, *The Times of Melville and Whitman* (New York: Dutton, 1947) 300.

[25]Jaffa 196, and Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985) chs. 18 and 25. Cf. *Discourses* III.ii-iii, and ix.

[26]Tom, for example, later tells Aunt Polly he was going to leave a message to let her know he was all right and on Jackson's Island. He says he left the bark with the message in his jacket. After he leaves the house she goes to the closet tempted to seek out the bark in the pocket. But she hesitates: "No I don't dare. Poor boy, I reckon he's lied about it—but it's a blessed, blessed lie, there's such a comfort come from it . . . . It's a good lie—it's a good lie—I won't let it grieve me" (327).

[27]Compare Jaffa 198-99.

[28]*Some Thoughts Concerning Education, Educational Writings of John Locke*, ed. James Axtel (Cambridge: CUP, 1968) sec. 109, 103-05.

[29]But cf. Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., "Returning to the Founders: the debate over the Constitution," *The New Criterion* (September 1993): 50-51.

[30]In addition to the passages cited above, see Adam Smith, *Lectures on Police, Justice, Revenue, and Arms*, ed. Edwin Connan (New York: August M. Kelley, 1964), esp. 257-58.

[31]*Leviathan* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1947), "The Introduction."

[32]*De Cive*, ed. Sterling P. Lemprecht (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1949) V.5.

[33]*De Cive* I.2, *Leviathan*, chs. 6, 8, and 13.

[34]*Leviathan*, ch. 30 and "A Review and Conclusion."

[35]Censuring minds will complain that this analysis imputes a Hobbean cast to Publius's work. It suffices to quote Publius: "The prudent inquiry, in all cases, ought surely to be not so much *from whom* the advice comes, as whether or not the advice be good" (*Federalist* No. 40, p. 254).

[36]The notion that Tom is humiliated is common. See, for example, Everet Emerson, "Mark Twain and Humiliation," *Mark Twain Journal* 29 (Spring 1991): 2-7. Emerson comments that "Tom is humiliated as fully and completely as possible . . ." (7). Jaffa's point that essentially nothing distracts from Tom's triumph is more persuasive (203).

[37]In the unfinished "Tom Sawyer's Conspiracy," *Mark Twain's Hannibal, Huck and Tom*, ed. Walter Blair (Berkeley: U of Califoria P, 1969), Tom is animated almost exclusively by the desire for glory. Huck tells Tom that he (Tom) will "get up to something that's full of danger and fuss and worry and expense and all that . . . ." Tom replies, "You're forgetting the glory—forgetting the main thing" (165). See also 167.

[38]Jaffa 195 and 225.

[39]"Returning to the Founders: The debate on the Constitution" 52.

[40]Cf. *Federalist* Nos. 72, p. 437, and Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., *America's Constitutional Soul* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993) 126.

[41]To see that this lesson was well understood by a prudent friend of republicanism, please consult Abraham Lincoln, "Lyceum Address," *Abraham Lincoln: His Speeches and Writing*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New York: Da Capo Press, 1990) 76-85.

[42]It literally opens with wrath (I.1): "Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά, Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος [(the) wrath sing goddess, of Peleus' son Achilles]."

[43]Cf. Francis Bacon, "Of Revenge," *The Essays* (New York: Penguin, n.d.) 72-73.

[44]*Federalist* No. 53, p. 331. Cf. Federalist No. 9, pp. 72-73, and 78, pp. 467-68.

[45]*Federalist* No. 72, p. 437, and No. 51, p. 322.

Connotations
Vol. 5.2-3 (1995/96)

Noble Imagery: Wallace Stevens and Mesoamerican Mythology

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Recent critical debates around Wallace Stevens's poetry often explain away the more obscure passages of his poems by connecting them to their possible sources in contemporary culture (see Lentricchia, Filreis, MacLeod, Longenbach). This approach comes to replace an equally strong trend in the criticism that related the poet's work to various philosophical orientations, most of them of European origin. While the new historical contextualizations do not contest the poet's philosophical affiliations, they have a tendency to prove the former criticism either too speculative or too cosmopolitan. But if the historical approach invites us to see Stevens as an American immersed in the consumerism of his age, it also makes his poetry look more literal and downplays its aesthetic dimension. This outlook may not only appear curious to those familiar with Stevens's investment in poetics, but it may diminish the importance of the historical context as well.

The roots of a poetry in its surrounding culture should be obvious and incontestable, but while historical contextualization reveals otherwise unaccountable meanings, the reduction of a text to its cultural subtext may be as little warranted as a purely philosophical speculation. What is neglected in both cases is the text and its relation to its readers, a relation that ultimately determines not only the meaning of a poem but also its aesthetic impact. This relation reflects the complexity of historical background combined with ideas about the nature of poetry that determine interpretation. Equally complex are the ways in which poetry grows from its roots in the historical moment and the forms that poetic imagination fashions out of the cultural material at its disposal.

A reading of Wallace Stevens in relation to Mesoamerican mythology, which I will try to perform in what follows, goes beyond providing a

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historical context for his poetry—a series of nativist theories regarding American identity and its origins in precolumbian cultures—because it tells us something about his poetics—the extent to which his poetic practice results, in a manner of speaking, from America's own imprint on the imagination. Whether Mesoamerican mythology can explain Stevens's more obscure passages seems to me less important than the fact that reading the poems with an awareness of that mythology can give us an insight in his complicated aesthetic and its relationship to history. Equally interesting is, I think, the fact that such a source of inspiration seems so improbable as to be ignored by virtually all his readers. And what I would like to contend is that this kind of ignorance is largely the basis for poetic effect.

Normally, mythological allusions or reinterpretations of myths are clearly recognizable in poetry. In most cases, the meaning of a poem depends directly on the reader's familiarity with the respective mythology. It would be inconceivable, for instance, to read Yeats's "Leda and the Swan" without knowing Leda's identity. But what happens if we do indeed ignore the mythology? The results can vary between incomprehension and interpretive excess, and Stevens's "Sunday Morning" is definitely an example of the latter.

"Sunday Morning," the most fascinating and widely interpreted poem by Wallace Stevens, won him, at the start of his career, the reputation of a hedonist (Yvor Winters, Frank Kermode), and continued to focus the attention of all critical orientations that followed. Part of its fascination lies in the play between its apparent classic clarity and the mystery that it envelopes. Clarity attracts explication, but most critics are able to explicate the poem only up to stanza VII, where speculation inevitably sets in. Stanza VII is also, not surprisingly, the main source of disagreement among critics. All perceive a change in pace at this point in the poem, but the nature of that change remains a bone of contention. Yvor Winters sees suggestions of pantheism; J. V. Cunningham takes it as the expression of a new religion based on sensory detail; Randall Jarrell considers it an evocation of Romantic wilderness; Frank Kermode envisages it as an antidote to paradisiac boredom.

The turn toward a more philosophical interpretation of the stanza can be found in Lentricchia's early criticism that connects it to the

dialectic between reality and the imagination (1967). Later, Harold Bloom sees the stanza as a Nietzschean negation of God, and the philosophical implications do not stop there. More recently, Lentricchia has turned the interpretation around the question of gender and is able to see the dance of the ring of men as phallic (1988). Placing the poem in its historical context—the poem was written in all probability around 1915—James Longenbach interprets the stanza as an homage to the "men that perish" in the war. The variety of interpretations is clearly indicative of a hidden meaning which, unless attributable to poetic imagination or even caprice, has yet not been agreed upon. The stanza seems to justify both the attention and the difficulty in interpretation:

> Supple and turbulent, a ring of men
> Shall chant in orgy on a summer morn
> Their boisterous devotion to the sun,
> Not as a god, but as a god might be,
> Naked among them, like a savage source.
> Their chant shall be a chant of paradise,
> Out of their blood, returning to the sky;
> And in their chant shall enter, voice by voice,
> The windy blue lake wherein their lord delights,
> The trees, like serafin, and echoing hills,
> That choir among themselves, long afterward.
> They shall know well the heavenly fellowship
> Of men that perish and of summer morn.
> And whence they came and whither they shall go
> The dew upon their feet shall manifest.
>
> (*CP* 69-70)

All critics might agree that the stanza's mystery, if solved, would give a clue to the whole poem. Randall Jarrell's criticism attracts attention because it suggests a historical context for Stevens's poetic project: "In *Harmonium* [Stevens] still loves America best when he can think of it as wilderness, naturalness, pure potentiality (he treats with especial sympathy Negroes, Mexican Indians, and anybody else he can consider wild); and it is this feeling that is behind the conclusion of *Sunday Morning*" (203). Jarrell correctly identifies Stevens's romantic outlook on the "savages" of America, but he does not find worth pursuing the implications of the symbolism that this interest in "savages" might be injecting into the poem.

How correct Jarrell's assessment of Stevens's interests was can be proven by the references the poet makes to ancient Mesoamerican civilizations in his letters. As early as 1900, Stevens mentions Mexico in his journals as the destination of a possible vacation. A number of references to Mexico and the Maya appear in his correspondence with Jose Rodriguez Feo, showing interest for the latter's Hispanic background, but also hinting that such interest was more than casual: "During the last several years I have been taking a number of Mexican magazines. In the last week or two, I have discontinued my subscription to Cuadernos Americanos. It is an extraordinary publication but it overwhelms me" (*Letters* 543). Such interest in things Mexican may have been fostered in Stevens by his contact with people who studied Mesoamerican civilization. According to Brazeau, one of his colleagues at the Hartford Insurance Company, Benjamin Lee Whorf, was an authority in Maya and Aztec civilizations and languages (19n). It is quite conceivable that Whorf might have been discussing his findings with his colleagues at the Hartford office, where, Brazeau tells us, virtually everyone had an intellectual interest outside the job.

Although the more serious preoccupations with Mesoamerican civilizations seem to come later in Stevens's life, a quick examination of one of the best known Aztec myths seems to suggest that the "wild" Mexican Indians might play a more important role in "Sunday Morning" than Jarrell was ready to see. The beginning of the world is imagined in Aztec mythology as the decision to appoint a Sun/god for whom all the other gods must be sacrificed. Bernardino de Sahagun, the most assiduous chronicler of Aztec history and mythology, renders the myth in the following words:

> But this is plain, [that] there at Teotihuacan, as they say, in times past, when yet there was darkness, there all the gods gathered themselves together, and they debated who would bear the burden, who would carry on his back—would become—the sun. . . . And when the sun came to arise, then all [the gods] died that the sun might come into being. None remained who had not perished (as hath been told). And thus the ancient ones thought it to be. (*Florentine Codex* IV, 1)

This is only one version of the myth, but the version that seems to be reenacted in the most famous, if not infamous, Aztec ritual in which

human sacrifices to the sun were performed. Diego Duran describes and interprets the sacrifice in terms of which Stevens's poem seems to be an echo:

> The victim, carrying the bag of gifts to the sun together with the staff and shield, slowly began to climb the steps of the pyramid. In this ascent he represented the course of the sun from east to west. As soon as he reached the summit and stood in the center of the great Sun Stone, which represented noon, the sacrificers approached the captive and opened his chest. Once the heart had been wrenched out, it was offered to the sun and blood sprinkled toward the solar deity. Imitating the descent of the sun in the west, the corpse was toppled down the steps of the pyramid. (Qtd. in Todorov 229)

One can easily imagine how some versions of the myth and its ritual reenactment might impress a poetic imagination with a taste for romantic savages and an interest in recovering their ancient spirituality. Details from other descriptions of the Aztec ceremony have it that the sacrificial victim was indeed a naked man who represented the sun, "not as a god but as a god might be." Western eyes would perceive the ritual as "boisterous" and savage and would place it in what appeared, to the early explorers of American land, to be an earthly paradise. Although it is hard to assess how familiar Stevens was with Aztec mythology at the time he wrote "Sunday Morning," it is quite possible that the source for stanza VII was some watered down version of the myth for popular consumption or touristic advertisement. It is also highly probable that such knowledge of the Aztec ritual may have circulated in Stevens's intellectual circles. In fact, books like Waldo Frank's *Our America* prove that an interest in native American past was prevalent at the time.[1]

Our America also shows the purpose of such interest. What interested Frank, as well as other contemporaries of Stevens, was to define "Americanness" beyond the condescending view that England bestowed upon its former colonies. The effort had been there ever since the eighteenth century, when Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson had put aside their prejudices against the Indians in order to prove to the English or the French that the native American element was culturally and racially on a par with the European civilization.[2] This was a form of historical validation for America, which was most often described as a country without history.

Stevens himself seems to have been involved in the enterprise of reconstructing the American past from the ruins of older, native civilizations. The nature of his interest in the Maya appears to be similar to Waldo Frank's. In a letter discussing the art of former British colonies, he portrays the Maya as adopted precursors of American civilization:

> I don't know whether you know about Maya art. This consists very largely of glyphs and sacrificial and calendar stones, all of them completely hideous. They are found in Mexico and in the jungles of Central America, Yucatan, and so on. Many people believe that these early Indians came from the South Pacific. We feel a special interest in things of this sort because they give us the antiquity which the English like to deny us. The English insist that Americans have no background. (*Letters* 614)

The Maya past is thus, according to Stevens, one to which Americans can refer in support of their claims to civilization. Although the Maya and their art remain essentially alien and "hideous," they are claimed as native American ancestors in order to validate America's prestige among other nations.

One may ask why, when Stevens and his contemporaries felt the need for a history and a mythology that would endorse their civilization, they went to the Mayas, Aztecs, or Incas for inspiration, rather than to North American native tribes. The reason may be that the Mesoamerican civilizations had long been hailed for their value and sophistication, perhaps because they were more commensurate with European standards than the cultures of the Northern Indian nations.[3] Stevens registers a trend in American culture, a trend that asserted American identity against the European disdain by invoking the grandeur of certain native civilizations.

Acknowledging the traces of Aztec mythology in "Sunday Morning" would place the poem in the line of such nativist preoccupations with American identity that have also produced a number of other poems of which "The Comedian as the Letter C" is only the most salient example. Edward Marx's recent article "The Comedian as a Colonist" in the *Wallace Stevens Journal* convincingly demonstrates that reading the poem as a colonizing adventure is in harmony with "an American consumerism of the exotic" prevalent in Stevens's time (195). The

inclusion in "Sunday Morning" of the Aztec ritual among other religious and mythological allusions has to be seen in the context where the Mesoamerican past serves as a means of validating contemporary American culture. In this light, the poem appears to be not an inquiry into religious feeling, as it is most often interpreted, but a way toward American self-definition through the examination of religious options.

This new perspective alters the significance of other details in the poem. Most interpretations take for granted that the religion debated in "Sunday Morning" is Christianity, and the alternative to it is something pagan or imagined, therefore practically anti-religious. Once we accept that the ring of men in stanza VII may be performing an Aztec sacrifice, the whole poem appears as a search for the religion most appropriate to the American self and not a rejection of religion. In the woman's examination of her religious options, Christianity is evidently the most obvious, and perhaps the most boring choice, given that it is being rejected in favor of bourgeois comfort. However, the "silent Palestine" at the end of the first stanza might be an allusion to Hebrew rather than to Christian religion. The classic Greek option is itself represented by a version of the rape of Europa by Zeus, who is called in Shakespearean manner, Jove, in stanza III. In one of his letters, Stevens agreed with Hi Simons that his purpose in stanza III (about Jove) and stanza VII (about the ring of men chanting to the sun) was indeed to suggest a more naturalistic religion as a substitute for supernaturalism (*Letters* 464). One may note here that the incursion in Greek mythology in stanza III is as transfigured by the imagination as the Aztec ritual in stanza VII. And significantly, the "savage" religious ritual turns up at the end, after the other options of finding a more "natural" religion have been exhausted.

Stanzas IV to VI explore imaginative alternatives related to the life surrounding us but the need for "some imperishable bliss" suggests that we (or the woman) shall return to a religion as rooted in tradition as Christianity is.[4] The vote is not likely to be cast for Christianity because of its detachment from the soil of America. In many of his later poems, Stevens insists that a culture should be related to its soil: "Man is the intelligence of his soil" becomes "The soil is man's intelligence" in "The Comedian as the Letter C." Martha Strom has argued that such lines

may be mocking localists like William Carlos Williams. The target of Stevens's mockery, however, is not the quest for the American self but the way in which poets like Williams went about it. His own sentiment on the relation between a culture and its roots in the soil is more clearly expressed in "A Mythology Reflects Its Region":

> A mythology reflects its region. Here
> In Connecticut, we never lived in a time
> When mythology was possible—But if we had—
> That raises the question of the image's truth.
> (*The Palm* 398)

The ancient religion of the native inhabitants of her region is thus a more natural choice for the woman in "Sunday Morning," but it also leads to the awareness of the unusual relationship of the American culture to its soil, to "the question about the image's truth." The "tomb in Palestine" reappears in the ending stanza, followed by a description of nature, perhaps in order to indicate the cultural estrangement implied in American identity. Its essentially hybrid character and the spiritual loss it entailed was also noted by Waldo Frank: "The soil of Europe was still rich with its spiritual past. Not so America. The spiritual fall was slow in Europe. In America, it was immensely swift. Absorption in the outer world became with us an imperious need: compelled attention to impersonal channels. The personal life faded. The personal God also" (67). Frank's insistence on the loss of spirituality seems to be of the same order with Stevens's emphasis on the necessity to search for a religion, for some spiritual identity. His woman is as absorbed in the outer world of her bourgeois comfort as Frank's colonists were in their struggle with the new land. Her (our) final indecision and her (our) commitment to the "chaos of the sun" are mirrored in the "ambiguous undulations" of the birds falling "downward to darkness, on extended wings."

Keeping in mind the possibility of allusions to Aztec mythology in "Sunday Morning" helps us see Stevens engaged in a project of American self-definition not much different from that of Waldo Frank. But this new meaning of the poem is the result of our relationship with it, a reading in another context. How necessary or true this context is is of less importance than the change its presence or absence imposes upon

the poem itself. Has the poem become better for this new context? That will depend on what we want to achieve with the reading. If clarity is our purpose, then the new context is to be preferred, because it certainly makes it easier for us to see what the poem means. We do not have to appeal to as complex a philosophy as Nietzsche's in order to understand what the boisterous men are doing in stanza VII. We do not have to suspect Stevens of fabricating pagan religions. We may even have to abandon the search for phallic symbolism. The poem becomes, quite clearly, an examination of religious options, and the stanza is no more than a stylized description of an Aztec ritual. But one may wonder whether in understanding the poem this way we have not forcibly removed the charm of its obscurity, an obscurity that Stevens may have cultivated.

The readership to whom Stevens addressed his poem could not have been exceedingly familiar with Mesoamerican mythology, and its evocation might be serving the purpose of increasing the mystery and enhancing the poetic effect. This has been, in fact, the effect on the reading public so far. The possibility is worth considering that the ignored or forgotten mythology is simply used as a source of poetic imagery. When working upon a known mythology, a writer would want to surprise his reader with his interpretation of the myth, a new twist added to an old story. Had he counted on his reader's familiarity with the Aztec ritual, Stevens might have done the same. But such familiarity is difficult to prove even for Stevens himself, who may be only unconsciously recovering the memory of a strange and exotic ritual.

His work upon the original is minimal, for beside the overlay of exoticism, there is not much in his vision to distinguish it from the accounts of Duran or Sahagun. Stevens's main changes consist in leaving out some essential details about the setting of the scene. Like Duran's explanatory description, Stevens's focuses on what presumably the ritual meant to its performers, but he leaves out the explanation for the uninitiated reader. It thus happens that the essential feature of the ritual—the representation of the sun as a naked man, who is about to be slaughtered so that his blood may go back to the sun—appears as a hard-to-decipher metaphor: "Naked among them like a savage source, / Not as a god but as a god might be." This is a beautiful image, the

more beautiful when we do not quite know what to make of it and have to exercise our own imagination to give it a meaning. The evocation of the ritual in carefully selected fragments performs the function of creating an aesthetic effect.

But the aesthetic effect does not lie only in the mystery of ancient images. The images themselves, even when we know their origin, are laden with poetry. The alien cultural context endows them with as much aesthetic potential as we need in order to find them profoundly poetic. The aesthetic effect generated by the encounter of two very different cultures is evident in the chronicles of the conquest which, as Mario Vargas Llosa well noted, surpass fiction in their propensity to fabulate. They are also responsible for transforming the reality of the American continent into a sort of poetry: "Our country, our countries, are in a deep sense more a fiction than a reality" (14). Vargas Llosa's observation leads us to see Stevens as a discoverer rather than a creator. The textual remains of the past have only to be brought up to light in order to produce a poetic effect. The poet's work, in such cases, is not very different from that of an excavator that brings to life metaphorical treasures. We should not forget, however, that what makes them into treasures is the very process of excavation. And what such a process brings to light is as meaningful as what it leaves under rubble.

There are many of Stevens's poems where images from Mesoamerican mythology might be at work. "A Rabbit as King of the Ghosts," for instance, may be based on the ending of the Legend of the Suns documented by Bernardino de Sahagun and others. In the course of the story, two suns are produced instead of one. One of the gods throws a rabbit in the second sun's face to dim its light, and thus creates the moon. Stevens's rabbit rises against the moon encompassing the world for itself. The monstrous deity from "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon" also resembles Maya or Aztec deities who do not share the physical beauty of Greek gods. In "The Auroras of Autumn," the paradise we all assume to be Biblical has an "Indian in his glade" suggestive of the Florida glades, once seen as paradise by Spanish or French explorers. The serpent of this paradise may be not Eve's tempter but the plumed serpent of Aztec mythology.

Leaving aside the task of proving the authenticity of such details, I shall follow Stevens's poetic excavations in a couple of other poems, under the caveat that the difference between the historical detail and the poet's imagination is by no means clear or possible to document. My interest is not in proving the authenticity of sources but in noting the shifts the awareness of Mesoamerican mythology produces in the reading of the poems, as well as in the way the aesthetic effect results from changing contexts.

Unlike "Sunday Morning," "Some Friends from Pascagoula" is one of the most neglected poems by Stevens. And yet it must have been important to Stevens himself since he took the trouble to explain it in a letter to Hi Simons (*Letters* 349). In a different way than "Sunday Morning" the imagery of "Some Friends" can be traced back to the same Legend of the Suns so pervasive in Aztec mythology. The legend, as transcribed by Bernardino de Sahagun, tells about two candidates for becoming the sun. One is rich and a coward, the other is poor but brave. The rich and coward one does not have the courage to jump into the fire, the act required to be reborn as the sun. The poor and brave one jumps without flinching. He is then followed by the coward, who cannot bear the humiliation. With them jump in the fire their symbolic animal incarnations, the eagle and the jaguar. The eagle's wings are said to be singed by fire, and the leopard's spots are supposed to be the traces of burns. From this fire are born the two suns, of which only the first will rule the heavens. Leaving aside the less significant details and the second sun that Stevens might have used in "The Rabbit as King of the Ghosts," one could see the legend emerging in the poem:

> Tell me more of the eagle, Cotton,
> And you black Sly,
> Tell me how he descended
> Out of the morning sky.
>
> Describe with deepened voice
> And noble imagery
> His slowly-falling round
> Down to the fishy sea.
> Here was a sovereign sight,
> Fit for a kinky clan.

Tell me again of the point
At which the flight began,

Say how his heavy wings,
Spread on the sun-bronzed air,
Turned tip and tip away,
Down to the sand, the glare

Of the pine trees edging the sand,
Dropping in sovereign rings
Out of his fiery lair.
Speak of the dazzling wings.
(*CP* 126-27)

One may say that here Stevens has restored the myth to its metaphorical stage, where the descent of the eagle toward the sand lighted by the sun gives the impression of a flight into fire. But this is the mythical eagle already, because with its "dazzling wings" he is the source of light, and he may indeed be the sun of the Aztec legend. The fact that the poem is set up as an entreaty or injunction to tell what might be a sort of legend is more reason to believe that this is no more than a repetition of an ancient myth. The original myth tells us how the sun began, whereas its repetition takes place in the presence of that sun. The beginning is thus reenacted as in a ritual. Mircea Eliade tells us that such rituals are meant to regenerate time: "through annual repetition of the cosmogony, time was regenerated, that is, it began again as sacred time, for it coincided with the *illud tempus* in which the world had first come into existence" (*The Sacred and the Profane* 80).

A similar process of regeneration, at the verbal level, takes place in Stevens's poem. Taking for granted that the sun is an eagle, the teller of this story has him fall toward its own light, as if in a fire that will give him birth as the sun. The metaphoric core of the myth is thus doubled upon itself and becomes strangely literal. The reader's ignorance of the myth helps in construing the image as a straightforward description of a natural phenomenon. It is, however, a natural phenomenon of such grandeur and beauty that the eagle is liable to become a symbol, and we might suspect that the formulaic introduction aims to aid just such a transformation. But in spite of the suggestion

of archaic preexistence that the beginning of the poem may lead us to, the symbolic value of the eagle is potential rather than realized. The image has been emptied of its meaning through the elimination of its original context and through a deliberate literalization: an eagle descending on a sunlit beach may literally look dazzling. Nevertheless, the separation from the original context of the legend is by no means complete. What Stevens preserves of it is precisely the myth/legend quality and the potential for deep symbolism.

I have argued elsewhere that the sound scheme of the poem, together with its syntax, first empties the words of their symbolic value and then restores it to them, but on another plane. The weakening of the sound pattern in the middle of the poem and its intensification at the end leaves the impression, to the ear, that the eagle is indeed a symbol, but one to which a symbolic value has yet to be ascribed. In this sense, the imagery in the poem is itself like music, because it functions as an empty sign. According to Kevin Barry, to think of poetry by analogy with music gives us a different perspective on significance and aesthetics: "Given that a piece of instrumental music must appear, according to Lockean principles, to be empty of signification, its enjoyment is evidence of the necessity for an aesthetic complex enough to include the pleasures of uncertainty and interpretation and of some free subjectivity in response" (*Language, Music and the Sign*, 3). Such an aesthetic is the more necessary for Stevens as the plenitude of his images may be lost somewhere in the mythologies of the past. The image of the ring of men in stanza VII of "Sunday Morning" is aesthetically interesting precisely because it lets the reader's imagination fill in the missing details and produce their significance. So is the eagle in "Some Friends from Pascagoula."

It would seem that an awareness of Aztec mythology helps to confirm an impression of significant emptiness that the poem can produce, even if, or maybe especially because, we read it in ignorance of its possible source. More powerfully than the reworking of a myth in "Sunday Morning," the disembodied imagery of "Some Friends from Pascagoula" leads us to believe that Stevens may have found a different use for the images derived from Mesoamerican mythology. Instead of integrating that mythology into America's self-definition, he struggles, in fact, to invent a mythology, one more reflective of its region, perhaps. This is

also his declaration of intent, at least as far as the latter poem is concerned: "This is neither merely description nor symbolical. A man without existing conventions (beliefs, etc.) depends for ideas of a new and noble order on 'noble imagery'. This poem is an attempt to give a specimen of 'noble imagery' in a commonplace occurrence. What seems to be a description is, after all, a presentation of a 'sovereign sight'" *Letters* 349). Here, Stevens seems to have transcended the worries about America's lack of historical pedigree on the international arena. His purpose is more personal, but no less related to being an American—"a man without existing conventions."

Such a man stands in need of "noble imagery," and whether this imagery derives from a commonplace occurrence (we are at a loss to see how this visionary descent of an eagle can be a commonplace occurrence), or from the noble imagery of other races, it is the poet's own imagination that has to endow it with nobility. Its poetic effect, however, resides, more than Stevens himself seems to be aware of, in fragmentation and selection, in the play of memory against oblivion. No images of a commonplace occurrence could leave that impression of symbolic power without a legendary antecedent radiating from their obscurity.

Bringing light to what lies in obscurity is in itself a dubious enterprise because such action might diminish a poetry born from America's own history and encouraged by its habit of reinventing itself at every turn "in the course of human events." Oblivion is perhaps to be preferred, but reinvention, and perhaps poetry, are not possible without the material traces of others, without a historical debris in itself as fascinating as the most beautiful poetry. It is hard to assess whether some of the most striking poetic effects in Stevens stem from his own imagination or are scattered fragments of ancient Mesoamerican myths or history. It must be said, in favor of the hypothesis that he was consciously or unconsciously inspired by such material, that his images bear a striking resemblance with those to be found in the chronicles of the conquest of America such as those written by Diego Duran, Bernardino de Sahagun, and as I want to point out in what follows, Bernal Diaz del Castillo.

But first let me bring up another example of extraordinary imagery whose unexpectedness makes us perceive it as no less than violently beautiful. "A Postcard from the Volcano" is a poem about history, a vision of ourselves in the future seen by our descendants, in about the same manner as we see our ancestors. This is the sight of the future intimately identical to the site of the past:

> Children,
> Still weaving budded aureoles,
> Will speak our speech and never know,
>
> Will say of the mansion that it seems
> As if he that lived there left behind
> A spirit storming in blank walls,
>
> A dirty house in a gutted world,
> A tatter of shadows peaked to white,
> Smeared with the gold of the opulent sun.
> (*CP* 159)

In a poem that leads us calmly along the path of a commonplace meditation about death and the future, in a poem where imagery is reduced to descriptive purposes, the ending shocks not only because of the sudden metaphoric flight of the words but also because of the violence it does to our common sense expectations. We might expect anything from a "dirty house" but to be "in a gutted world," and "smeared with the gold of the opulent sun." The shock value resides in the clustering of words that almost never go together. "Smear" is often used in relation to blood and echoes another powerful image from "Contrary Theses I," where "Blood smears the oaks." "Gold" may be related to opulence, but here it is closer to smearing, and that suggests that it might be molten and ghastly similar to blood. The sun, on the other hand, we would readily describe as gold, but Stevens makes it opulent, the source rather than the semblance of the gold that smears. Are we invited to see the sun bleeding the richness of its light over the dirty house? And what sense does this all make?

These are questions which we normally do not ask, because if the violence of the words does something, it is to obliterate our common-

sense perceptions of language. The image touches us as poetic, therefore acceptable beyond unacceptability, because nowhere—in no context we know—could anything be "smeared with the gold of the opulent sun." The symbolic value of the imagery is the more powerful for being empty, almost impossible to fill. But what if it were not empty?

How much more shocking and violent these images could become in a real context, we can see by flipping through the *History of New Spain* written by Bernal Diaz del Castillo. He was a soldier in the army of Hernando Cortes, who took the pen to settle misconceptions about his beloved general and left us a testimony as fascinating in the violence of its images as it is crude in its style. For if they horrify us today with their own violence and greed, in their progress through Mexico, Cortes's soldiers encountered the new world with more wonder and horror than we can possibly conceive of. Awed by the human sacrifices, Cortes thought he did the work of God when he ordered the local *cues* or temples to be whitewashed and transformed into Christian churches. On such occasions, Diaz del Castillo gives us the facts with no poetic embellishment:

> There were two masonry walls before the entrance to the *cue*, and the court was paved with white stones like flagstones, and all was whitened, burnished and clean. . . . A little way away was a place of sacrifice, all blood stained and black with smoke. . . . Near this place of sacrifice there were many large knives and chopping-blocks like those on which men cut up meat in slaughter-houses . . . . (239)

Among these dirty houses of this literally "gutted world," Cortes's men were looking for treasure, for the gold of Montezuma:

> I heard a report that, at the time when the great *cue* was built, all the inhabitants of that mighty city placed offerings of gold and silver and pearls and precious stones in the foundations, and bathed them in the blood of the prisoners of war whom they had sacrificed. They also put there every kind of seed that grew in their country, so that their idols should give them victories and riches and great crops. Some curious readers may ask how we came to know that they had thrown gold and silver and precious *chalchihuites* and seeds into the foundation of the *cue*, and watered them with the blood of the Indian victims. . . . (238-39)

It is easy to see how the horrific images that Diaz del Castillo was spinning out of his memory could have fallen, mangled and mingled, into the metaphoric order of Wallace Stevens's poem. But does the juxtaposition of original and created images clarify the latter for us? Does it make them more intelligible and less violent? It is doubtful, for the verbal violence is only doubled by the actual violence behind the original images, and we would not know whether to stand in awe of the poetic imagination that invites us to see the light of the sun as molten gold/blood smearing a dirty house in a gutted world or of the actual violence that lies somewhere at the foundation of the culture that produced that imagination.

In a way, Stevens's project to define America and being American is confirmed by his use of Mesoamerican mythology and history, but such use is no simple evocation, nor is it only a complacent consumption of the exotic. Stevens does not have an audience to whom the simple evocation would make sense, and he cannot allude to events that his readers would have forgotten or never learned about. For he addresses an audience amnesiac and detached from its own past, a past too violent and unacceptable to remember. The fragmentation of that past and the reintegration of its fragments, although potentially poetic gestures in themselves, do not reach his audience. But their aesthetic effect can displace and replace the missing historical awareness with a mythology no less powerful and authentic because it is practically invented.

Frederic Jameson once noted that "The symbolic space opened up by Stevens' work, the autonomization of image from thing, idea from image, name from idea, is in itself neither true nor false, neither scientific nor ideological: it is an experience, and a *historical* experience, and not a theory about language or a choice susceptible of ethical or political judgment" (189; my emphasis). The historical experience is that which produces Stevens's aesthetic and not a mere source of allusions. His "empty" symbols result from the complicated process that at once eradicates and demands meaning. Beyond the simple fact that his theme is America, Stevens works with an aesthetic that cannot be separated from the historical process that engendered America.

Stevens makes us return to a past that we do not know, or prefer to forget, in the same way classical myths make us eternally return to a

center that has had to be imagined. His poetry does not revive or revise the old myths but ambitions to replace them with a "noble imagery" that is "of the soil"—a mythology that only America can claim as its own. Poetry itself becomes mythological in the sense that it functions in the same universe of discourse where myths are generated, where empty signs are made full in the process of interpretation. Mircea Eliade explains how myths endow with significance places that otherwise would be empty of it. Words are such places for Wallace Stevens, but words do have meanings, and in order to become the perfect receptacles of our interpretations, they first have to be voided by the meanings they once had. History offers, in a hyperbole we call colonization, a very suitable analogy for Stevens's poetics, for the task of giving meaning to emptied signs is at once the task of the poet and of the colonist.

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NOTES

[1]It is perhaps interesting to note that Waldo Frank wrote for Cuadernos Americanos at the time when Stevens subscribed to the magazine, and that his work may have been familiar to Stevens.

[2]Benjamin Franklin, "Remarks Concerning the Savages of North America" (1784), and Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785) both extol the virtues of the American savages against scientific theories from Europe which tried to debase Amerindians as an inferior race.

[3]Further research may reveal that Stevens drew upon the folklore of the tribes on US territory as well.

[4]Stevens noted in one of his letters that "Sunday Morning" is "not essentially woman's meditation on religion and the meaning of life. It is anybody's meditation" (*Letters* 250).

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Connotations
Vol. 5.2-3 (1995/96)

Faulkner and Racial Mythology[1]

ARTHUR F. KINNEY

"Born the year after the custom of racial segregation and the popular minstrel image of blacks as Jim Crow were encoded in the legal texts as 'separate but equal' *(Plessy v. Ferguson,* 1896)," Bernard W. Bell writes, William "Faulkner, a native son of Mississippi, was torn psychologically between the curse and blessing of his Southern heritage. He felt compelled in his quest for personal wholeness and a unified artistic vision to come to terms with 'the Negro,' in the Southern white psyche as, in [Ralph] Ellison's words, 'a malignant stereotype (the bad nigger) on the one hand and a benign stereotype (the good nigger) on the other.'" He goes on to remark, "Faulkner's characters range from the stereotypical Sambo and tragic mulatto to the rebellious marginal man when treating miscegenation and the struggle of 'the Negro' to affirm a biracial, bicultural identity—the complex sociopsychological state that W. E. B. DuBois called 'double consciousness'—as an Afro-American. The fear and courage, guilt and innocence, shame and pride, of mixed blood and interracial marriage, as *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Light in August* illustrate, involve the social and cultural issues of heritage as well as the sociopsychological myths of white supremacy and Negro inferiority." These are, in America, home-bred myths, with little or no connection to the mythology of classical Greece and Rome which have, over the centuries, worn thin and tolerable with usage, so that they seem to us more like models or metaphors than (as they were and are) primitive, shaping truths of belief and passion in Western civilization. Rather, these two American myths of race—white supremacy and black inferiority—retain a living presence and power that is still, though far more subterranean even than it was throughout Faulkner's lifetime, present in American culture.

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Bell notes that "Etymologically, 'negro' is derived from the Latin *niger* and the Spanish *negro*, both signifying the color black. The term was first used around 1441 by the Spanish and Portuguese to designate African slaves from below the Sahara, thus tying color to race and blackness to slavery and degradation. Although such eighteenth-century organizations as the Free African Society and the African Methodist Episcopal Church rejected the term in naming themselves, 'negro' was still the preferred racial classification at the turn of the twentieth century. In response to a campaign by the NAACP in 1930, the *New York Times* and other media began to capitalize the term, which in the 1960s was displaced by 'Black,' 'African,' 'African American.'" These are not merely verbal displacements, of course; initiated by the black race, they are meant to bring dignity to color and heritage to the fore, underscoring the melting pot of the United States by which no one is native to the country and the land but the Indians, now styled "Native Americans"; "African American," in fact, was a deliberate analogy to "Asian American," to make this point clear in its parallelism.

For many years now, Bell has been our leading scholar on the Afro-American novel, tracing its development through the glass, darkly, of DuBois' potent and powerful concept of the strained black consciousness, at once personal and proud and also necessarily social—personally or racially, and socially or stereotypically, defined: a double bind that has led to a number of stock behavioral patterns that have themselves become secondary racial myths in America: Jim Crow, Sambo, Mammy; they are seen as primitive, Satanic, mean, sexually insatiable, or as loving, maternal, loyal, and servile. Bell notes this too. "The concept and sign of 'the Negro,' 'nigger,' or 'Sambo' in American racial discourse and in Faulkner's novels," he notes, "obscure, devalue, or mythicize the humanity and individuality of Afro-Americans, imaginatively reconstructing or deconstructing them as stereotype, type, or archetype: an oversimplified, reductive popular mental image or judgment of a group; a representative character that embodies a substantial number of significant elements of a group; and a character type that occurs frequently in literature, myth, religion, or folklore, and is, therefore, believed to evoke profound emotions because it touches the unconscious memory and thus calls into play illogical but strong responses."[2] He

has in mind the responses I have already cited, but his genealogy of primary and secondary American racial myths concerning blacks implies deeper and more difficult questions: must a Southern American writer like Faulkner write about blacks in order to portray his society? can he do so without drawing on mythic stereotypes because they are always at play in the culture he describes? and, most difficult of all, can any white writer, even one so superbly gifted and so seriously committed as Faulkner, escape his own racial heritage and consciousness—can he, that is, ever really write about, or even conceive, what it means to be black?

This final question seems so tricky, so charged, and so complex that we probably dismiss it by changing the terms and so passing off the responsibility, by saying (or at least thinking) that the burden of responsibility is Faulkner's if he chooses to write about blacks as a white man in Mississippi, that it is his choice and his problem. Perhaps we could even have gotten away with such a response forty years ago. But aware now as we are of reader-response theory and reading dynamics, that too has become a myth of another sort; we are now aware that any literary text, if it functions as it should, is complicit with the reader: by providing us with racial definitions, Faulkner asks us to get involved, to confront them and evaluate them too.

Now this is easy in Faulkner's first novel of Yoknapatawpha, *Flags in the Dust*, in a now-notorious passage in which Faulkner explicitly calls for "Some Cincinnatus of the cotton fields [to] contemplate the lowly destiny, some Homer [who] should sing the saga," rather like a Greek or Norse heroic myth, but here "of the mule and of his place in the south," that lazy creature which "with its trace-galled flanks and flopping, lifeless ears, and its half-closed eyes drowsing venomously behind pale lids, apparently asleep with the monotony of its own motion" and an animal which is both "Outcast and pariah" and "Ugly, untiring, and perverse," is thus a creature which thereby resembles "(the nigger who drives him) whose impulses and mental processes most closely resemble his."[3] As I have remarked, this seems open and obvious to us now, and we might wonder why it was not distasteful to Faulkner in 1929. The answer, I think, is because it displays, briefly but openly, a cultural myth which universally in the South connected mules and

blacks in the word *mulatto* for those of mixed racial ancestry. Originally a necessary racial term to handle the increasing population of slaves and, later, freed blacks, it was etymologically based on the similarity of color between man and mule, as well as similarity of function and—most awful to contemplate—similarity in their desired sterility. By Faulkner's time, however, the heavily-laden word mulatto had become virtually value-free: neutral, normal. It is, in its way, linked to another American racial myth, this time deliberate in its duplicity: the false etymology of the term *miscegenation* that Sidney Kaplan has revealed was part of the anti-abolitionist movement in the Presidential campaign of 1864 when two newspapermen on the New York *World*, David Goodman Croly, the managing editor, and George Wakeman, a young reporter, wrote a pamphlet of 72 pages entitled *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro*, beginning with this bit of fiction almost at once turned myth: that *miscegenation* was a word derived from the Latin *miscere*, to mix, and *genus*, race, or, even more precisely, from the Greek *melaleukation* (a combination of the Greek *melas*, black, and *leukos*, white): now outrageous, then something highly credible.[4] Both terms, I think, helped first to make racial myth palatable, understandable, and eventually something that could be accommodated, because the fact of interbreeding in the South was so obvious and so uncomfortable. And since every discernible action and object in our society must, by our rules of language, have a name, over the decades the name of the act of interbreeding, *miscegenation*, and the name of the result, *mulatto*, became commonplace. At least they became commonplace for white Southerners in America; it is clear from the writings of Richard Wright, also from Mississippi and only slightly younger than Faulkner, that they were not commonly accepted among blacks.

Still, it is not clear to me that, however unconscious Faulkner and his first editor Ben Wasson were about the black-mule comparison in *Sartoris*, that unconscious stretches include the portrait of Elnora in the same novel. In both versions, *Flags in the Dust* and *Sartoris*, it is clearly implied, although never explicit or emphasized, that she is the interracial child of Old Bayard Sartoris and a black servant. Nothing is made of this because she, along with her family, are part of the larger Sartoris family

and seem content to serve them. It would go unnoticed now, too, except that Elnora is given a sort of hymn to sing to distract her that is pointedly, in the fiction, meant to be choric, insightful, thematic. It goes like this:

> *Sinner riz fum de moaner's bench*
> *Sinner jump to de penance bench;*
> *When de preacher ax'im whut de reason why,*
> *Say, "Preacher got de women-Lea' de same ez I."*
> *Oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd!*
> *Dat's whut de matter wid de church today.*[5]

That is clearly a gospel tune based in the architecture of a black gospel church and ritual and even with the slight change of "Say" to "Says" for the later *Flags in the Dust*, edited by the white Virginian Douglas Day, the language is distinctly dialectical, subgrammatical, inferior to white speech in the novels. The question that this passage poses and that makes it much more difficult than the encomium to the mule is that here we are to see folk wisdom from the primitive race, closer to the land and to the truth than their superior white employers. Elnora thus sets off —is she thereby meant to modify or even excuse her cheating husband and braggart, lazy son?—other portraits in the bulk of the novel and anticipates in good measure one of the final scenes where the white protagonist Bayard approaches a black cabin at the margins of Yoknapatawpha and there finds some solace on Christmas Day that he is unable to find among members of his own race:

> A fire burned on the broken hearth, amid ashes and charred wood-ends and a litter of cooking-vessels. Bayard shut the door behind him on the bright cold, and warmth and rich, stale rankness enveloped him like a drug. A woman bent over the hearth, replied to his greeting diffidently. Three pickanninies became utterly still in a corner and watched him with rolling eyes. One of them was a girl, in greasy nondescript garments, her wool twisted into tight knots of soiled wisps of colored cloth. The second one might have been either or anything. The third one was practically helpless in a garment made from a man's suit of woolen underclothes. It was too small to walk and it crawled about the floor in a sort of intent purposelessness, a glazed path running from either nostril to its chin, as though snails had crawled there.
>
> The woman placed a chair before the fire with a dark, effacing gesture. Bayard seated himself and thrust his chilled feet to the fire. "Had your Christmas dram yet, aunty?" he asked.

"Naw, suh. Ain't got none dis year," she answered from somewhere behind him. He swung the sack toward her voice.

"Help yourself. Plenty there." The three children squatted against the wall, watching him steadily, without movement and without sound. "Christmas come yet, chillen?" he asked them. But they only stared at him with the watchful gravity of animals until the woman returned and spoke to them in a chiding tone.

"Show de white folks yo' Sandy Claus," she prompted. "Thanky, suh," she added, putting a tin plate on his knees and setting a cracked china cup on the hearth at his feet. "Show 'im," she repeated. "You want folks to think Sandy Claus don't know whar you lives at?"

The children moved then and from the shadow behind them, where they had hidden them when he entered, they produced a small tin automobile, a string of colored wooden beads, a small mirror and a huge stick of peppermint candy to which trash adhered and which they immediately fell to licking solemnly, turn and turn about. The woman filled the cup from the coffee pot set among the embers, and she uncovered an iron skillet and forked a thick slab of sizzling meat on his plate, and raked a grayish object from the ashes and broke it in two and dusted it off and put that too on the plate. Bayard ate his side meat and hoecake and drank the thin, tasteless liquid. The children now played quietly with their Christmas, but from time to time he found them watching him steadily and covertly. The man entered with his pail of milk.

"Ole 'oman give you a snack?" he asked. (289-91)

The question for me is this: why is this scene here? Its simplicity, its refusal to ask questions (Bayard has just recklessly had a car accident in which his grandfather has died from a heart attack and he is on the run from home), and its sense of good manners and warm welcome are clear enough; the black family is contrasted with the sterile white MacCallum family he has just left, and their family spirit is at odds with the troubled Sartoris household. The stereotypical description, however, manages at the same time it provides these ideas and values to circumscribe the behavior and atmosphere—circumscribe it in racially mythic ways. Bayard never loses his central position as protagonist or as the chief focus of Faulkner and the reader. Does this mean, then, that the blacks are so much scene-painting, a fictional device to define Bayard's character and position as a runaway? Further, we might ask, if Faulkner's description is limited to the mythic, why does he give us this scene? And how presumptuous of him is it to bring to this scene the same detailed reportage that characterizes the Sartoris household

which is based on that of his own family? How much does he know? How reliable is this portrait? The answer here, and I suspect he knew it at least unconsciously to justify the scene at all, is that he does know a black cabin as long as a white man is in it. But he does not, in the end, give us that black cabin; he gives us the white's mythic perspective of that cabin based on a sense of class as well as race. *Sartoris*, and later *Flags in the Dust*, are both revealing works: and, paradoxically, they are revealing both for their honesty and for the myths that they reinstate.

All this is necessary background, I believe, for the far better-known novel that follows: *The Sound and the Fury*. Here Faulkner manages to give us a more varied portrait of a black servant woman in Dilsey—but that is because she is seen in the white man's house and especially, given her color, in the white man's kitchen. He grew up knewing Dilseys, and it is said she is primarily based on his own Mammy, Callie or Caroline Barr. (It may not be irrelevant to note that when Callie died, at an an indeterminate age of perhaps 100, that Faulkner insisted on preaching her eulogy and burying her himself, and refusing to let her black people do either, although she is in the black section of the Oxford town cemetery. Even her gravestone reads "Her white children bless her" with no mention of her black kin.) I have argued elsewhere in detail how, in every observation of dress, speech, and behavior and attitude, Dilsey is the stereotypical, mythical—Bell would say archetypal—black Mammy and how this severely restricts her function in the novel as a moral norm or as a hope for the Compson family she serves or the emerging twentieth-century South of which she is a part. Her appearance surrounds a scene similar to that Bayard experiences in a black cabin—this time a white 33-year-old man suffering from Downs Syndrome in a black church on Easter rather than Christmas Sunday. What he sees is a monkey-faced black preacher who runs about under Christmas decorations made of crepe paper, a man whose message in tongues becomes more and more primitive, more fully and ritually black, and dwells on the crucifixion of Christ as the bleeding and dying figure that, rather than the risen Christ, makes most sense to his congregation. This scene, like the scene of Bayard in the cabin with the nameless black family is given to us not objectively (as critics too often claim) but from a white author's eyes.

> "Brethren and sisteren," it said again. The preacher removed his arm and he began to walk back and forth before the desk, his hands clasped behind him, a meager figure, hunched over upon itself like that of one long immured in striving with the implacable earth, "I got the recollection and the blood of the Lamb!" He tramped steadily back and forth beneath the twisted paper and the Christmas bell, hunched, his hands clasped behind him. He was like a worn small rock whelmed by the successive waves of his voice. With his body he seemed to feed the voice that, succubus like, had fleshed its teeth in him. And the congregation seemed to watch with its own eyes while the voice consumed him, until he was nothing and they were nothing and there was not even a voice but instead their hearts were speaking to one another in chanting measures beyond the need for words, so that when he came to rest against the reading desk, his monkey face lifted and his whole attitude that of a serene, tortured crucifix that transcended its shabbiness and insignificance and made it of no moment, a long moaning expulsion of breath rose from them, and a woman's single soprano: "Yes. Jesus!"[6]

Yet here, I think, the scene works in a way that the scene in *Sartoris* does not; here, with the white perspective implicitly from and on Benjy, we are prepared for the rest of his day: his serenity here looks forward to the serenity he achieves in his own graveyard ritual at the close of the novel: "each in its ordered place" refers not only to "post and tree, window and doorway," the town square or to Sunday morning, but to race as well (321).

Two years later, in 1931, Faulkner published one of his most powerful stories of racial myth and racial violence. "Dry September" tells the story of Will Mayes, a black night watchman at the Jefferson ice plant who is accused of sexually violating a white spinster, Minnie Cooper, clearly a lonely and frustrated woman embarrassed by her plainness, who remains his only accuser. On such slim evidence, four white men, three of them angry, await the black man after dark, ambushing him from their car and taking him to the woods to lynch him.

> They didn't move until vague noises began to grow out of the darkness ahead; then they got out and waited tensely in the breathless dark. There was another sound: a blow, a hissing expulsion of breath and McLendon cursing in undertone. They stood a moment longer, then they ran forward. They ran in a stumbling clump, as though they were fleeing something. "Kill him, kill the son," a voice whispered. McLendon flung them back.
>
> "Not here," he said. "Get him into the car," "Kill him, kill the black son!" the voice murmured. They dragged the Negro to the car. The barber had waited

beside the car. He could feel himself sweating and he knew he was going to be sick at the stomach.

"What is it captains?" the Negro said. "I aint done nothing. 'Fore God, Mr John." Someone produced handcuffs. They worked busily about the Negro as though he were a post, quiet, intent, getting in one another's way. He submitted to the handcuffs, looking swiftly and constantly from dim face to dim face. "Who's here, captains?" he said, leaning to peer into the faces until they could feel his breath and smell his sweaty reek. He spoke a name or two. "What you all say I done, Mr John?"

McLendon jerked the car door open. "Get in!" he said.

The Negro did not move. "What you all going to do with me, Mr John? I aint done nothing. White folks, captains, I aint done nothing: I swear 'fore God." He called another name.

"Get in!" McLendon said. He struck the Negro. The others expelled their breath in a dry hissing and struck him with random blows and he whirled and cursed them, and swept his manacled hands across their faces and slashed the barber upon the mouth, and the barber struck him also. "Get him in there," McLendon said. They pushed at him. He ceased struggling and got in and sat quietly as the others took their places. He sat between the barber and the soldier, drawing his limbs in so as not to touch them, his eyes going swiftly and constantly from face to face. Butch clung to the running board. The car moved on.[7]

As with many climactic scenes in Faulkner—the death of young John Sartoris; the rape of Temple Drake—we do not witness the actual lynching of Will Mayes. Instead we see its consequences, with Minnie Cooper. Suddenly a person of note and concern in Jefferson, friends (who are unnamed) take her to the cinema to ease her mind, but the responsibility of Will Mayes' death, carrying her secret to his grave, brings a fit of madness on her, and her friends take her home accompanied by her uncontrollable laughter.

> They removed the pink voile and the sheer underthings and the stockings, and put her to bed, and cracked ice for her temples, and sent for the doctor. He was hard to locate, so they ministered to her with hushed ejaculations, renewing the ice and fanning her. While the ice was fresh and cold she stopped laughing and lay still for a time, moaning only a little. But soon the laughing welled again and her voice rose screaming (181-82).

Her madness is brought on by a closed society that welcomes and refuses to question her story inspired by the myth of the primitive black man,

the uncontrollable stud. For a brief moment, at least, she becomes the white Southern belle, on a pedestal and wildly desirable. The story ends with McLendon's own more subdued state of madness, himself a victim too of this myth of superior black masculinity, shown in his brutal treatment of his wife. Then he

> . . . went on through the house ripping off his shirt, and on the dark, screened porch at the rear he stood and mopped his head and shoulders with the shirt and flung it away. He took the pistol from his hip and laid it on the table beside the bed, and sat on the bed and removed his shoes, and rose and slipped his trousers off. He was sweating again already, and he stooped and hunted furiously for the shirt. At last he found it and wiped his body again, and with his body pressed against the dusty screen, he stood panting. There was no movement, no sound, not even an insect. The dark world seemed to lie stricken beneath the cold moon and the lidless stars (183),

as elsewhere, earlier, it does for Bayard Sartoris. Both Minnie and McLendon are last seen in bedrooms sweating—she surrounded by friends, he alone as befits their gendered portraits. It is clear they both have a sense of guilt; but it is also clear Minnie will not confess to the fabrication and McLendon will not be punished.

This might seem a solution for Faulkner, since here he is able to portray racial myth accurately and with an appropriate sense of the black's innocence, seen from the outside, in gesture and in speech, and the whites' guilt seen more from within. This anatomy of a lynching —fast, swift, irrevocable justice without benefit of trial—also seems thoroughly condemned. This might seem a solution for Faulkner except, as it happens, he was simultaneously writing about lynching more publicly and locally, and in very different terms.

It began, innocuously enough, with an innocent letter published on February 2, 1931, not in the Oxford, Mississippi, *Eagle* but in the more distant Memphis, Tennessee, *Commercial Appeal*. The author of the letter, known only as W. H. James, of Starkville, Mississippi, was overwhelmed with gratitude and wanted to express it.

> Now that the good women of Mississippi have organized themselves in a body to eradicate or fight the evils of lynching, we as colored people should feel more hopeful than ever. I am sure that they will have the prayers of all

> of my people, who seem to suffer most from this inhuman crime, which as they say is striking at the very foundations of our most sacred institutions,

James wrote, continuing,

> How strange it seems that history never gave a record of a single lynching until after the days of reconstruction.
>
> We are today for the most part as humble and submissive as we were then.
>
> The good women felt that something needed to be done. I have list[e]ned long for them and now they are here and with the backing of some of our good men I am sure they will succeed, because when they are determined they know no defeat. I believe that the good lady, Mrs. J. Morgan Spencer, who heads this organization, would be an ideal one for governor. I do not feel embarrassed to say this, for I feel that we have some friends who will protect us against the crime which has been perpetrated against so many of us without even a possible chance to prove our innocence or guilt. But through the efforts of these good ladies, when we flee for protection to the strong arm of the law, we won't be met with the rope and torch.[8]

That is the letter in its entirety and it is difficult to know what taboo was broken, what racial myth was sufficiently challenged that with no other known instigation, Faulkner responded in the Sunday *Commercial Appeal* of February 15 with a letter seven times as long. Perhaps it was the thought of nominating Mrs. Spencer as governor of Mississippi. Perhaps it was simply the outspokenness of a black (or, in polite terms, "colored" person) questioning the basis of white practices of justice. The ostensible, public cause was the mistaken notion of history by a black.

Faulkner opens his lengthy reply by correcting mistaken impressions.

> History gives no record of lynching prior to reconstruction days for several reasons.
>
> The slave-holders and slaves of the pre-Civil War time, out of whose relations lynchings did, or could, take place, were not representative of either people, any more than the Sicilian expatriates and shopping women in Chicago stores, out of whose accidental coinciding the murder of innocent bystanders (or fleers) occurs, are representative of European emigrants or American women and children, or of the General Cooks and the George Rogers Clarks who made Chicago possible.
>
> Secondly, there was no need for lynching until after reconstruction days.
>
> Thirdly, the people of the black race who get lynched are not representative of the black race, just as the people who lynch them are not representative of the white race.

> No balanced man can, I believe, hold any moral brief for lynching. Yet we in America have seen, ever since we set up to guide our own integral destiny, miscarriage of elementary justice on all hands. Like all new lands, not yet aware of our own strength, we have been the prey of opportunist and demagogues; of men whose sole claim to rule us was that they had not a clean shirt to their backs. So is it strange that at times we take violently back into our own hands that justice which we watched go astray in the blundering hands of those into which we put it voluntarily? I don't say that we do not blunder with our "home-made" justice. We do, but he who was victim of our blundering, also blundered. I have yet to hear, outside of a novel or a story, of a man of any color and with a record beyond reproach, suffering violence at the hands of men who knew him. (4)

A bit later, Faulkner writes,

> Lynching is an American trait, characteristic. It is the black man's misfortune that he suffers it, just as it is his misfortune that he suffers the following instances of white folks' sentimentality.
>
> Let James go to his county tax collector, who will tell him (his county being fairly representative of Mississippi hill country as distinct from the delta) that there is more white-owned land sold up for taxes than colored-owned, though the delinquent list be the same. There may be reason for this[,] white man's reason: as, for instance, it will be proved that the colored man had never had title to the land at all, having used, as they do, two or even three separate names in making trades or borrowing money from the government loan associations, and so having used the land tax-free for a year and made a crop and moved on. Thus: Joe Johnson arranges with a white man and a bank to buy a piece of land. He is about to make a good crop; he is a hard worker; maybe he runs the neighborhood blacksmith shop; he is getting ahead. Then one day the cashier of the bank and the Farm Loan secretary compare notes and they find that a certain John Jones has borrowed 5700 on land identical in description with that in the temporary possession of one Joe Johnson. There's nothing to do. Joe Johnson, or John Jones, tricked two white men. "Oh, well," the white men, the cashier and the secretary say, "he's a good man. He may make out." And he not only may and will, but he perhaps does make a good crop by hard work. But he has first committed one felony in person and a second one by proxy in permitting to compound it one of that unwitting race which holds with the Bible that justice is a matter of violent and immediate retribution on the person of the sinner: a sentimentalist. (5)

Following other similar instances—in which one breaking of faith deserves another—Faulkner concludes the letter this way:

> I hold no brief for lynching. No balanced man will deny that mob violence serves nothing, just as he will not deny that a lot of our natural and logical jurisprudence serves nothing either. It just happens that we—mobber and mobbee—live in this age. We will muddle through, and die in our beds, the deserving and the fortunate among us. Of course, with the population what it is, there are some of us that won't. Some will die rich, and some will die on cross-ties soaked with gasoline, to make a holiday. But there is one curious thing about mobs. Like our juries, they have a way of being right. (5-6)

This is an astonishing document, startling me each time I read it, as it startled the two scholars, Neil R. McMillen and Noel Polk, who found it in the lynching files compiled by Tuskegee Institute in Alabama in 1994. "We are hard pressed to understand Faulkner's letter, since it stands so completely in accord with contemporary racial attitudes in white Mississippi and the South generally, and runs so completely counter to the sensibility and the sympathies that write so profoundly about racial problems in his fiction" (p. 6). But my point is precisely that that divide is not really there. Racial myth perseveres, is difficult to abolish, because it serves fundamental social needs which, through myth, are transformed into beliefs and so made accessible and acceptable. The particular case of Will Mayes is wrong because he committed no wrong action while the cases of lynching are usually right because they punish actions and not mere accusations. But I think that is only part of it. A deeper, more necessary part of it is that in the instance of "Dry September" the subject is not so much the lynching of an innocent black man—what might seem to us to be the central event and the major concern—but the metaphor for telling us about the extreme frustrations, in a closed and regimented society, of a poor white woman like Minnie Cooper to whom fate did not deal an especially kind or *customary* hand. Myth is most powerful when it is not recognized. I do not see, then, any great disjunction between the story and the letter, nor any irony. Nor did Faulkner.

I do not think Faulkner was aloof to racial intolerance encapsulated in and prolonged and protected by myth, nor hardened to it. Quite the opposite: I think all of the illustrations from his writing I have presented here show his deeply troubled (and deeply personal) struggles with racial myth. Conditioned by another culture, we are too quick to judge and

too deaf to hear his own contested and divided response, although it erupts visibly in his earliest work, with the black family Christmas, Elnora's choric song, and the Reverend Shegog's transcendence through his view of the blood of sacrifice. It is especially there with the treatment of Will Mayes as a dramatic indictment of his own regulated society. But when myth imprisons us in belief and behavior, we lose sight that it is myth and not fact, myth and not history, myth and not truth.

Let me conclude by suggesting that what I have sketched here has a kind of culmination in *Light in August*. That novel focuses sharply and unrelentingly on the "double consciousness" DuBois claimed makes what Bell calls the "marginal man." Joe Christmas is both white and black in his behavior—as judged by mythic cultural standards—regardless of his blood and, in a town which cannot afford to tolerate exceptional behavior—here of a black taking on the role of a white—he is punished. Percy Grimm is another McLendon and Joanna Burden functions as another Minnie Cooper in this novel: the society must close ranks on expending swift and absolute justice on a black man who is accused —and only accused—of violating a white woman (that she dies nearly decapitated only proves that, by the rules of myth, a black man attacked her). Grimm is never once mentioned until the bottom of p. 449 of a 507-page novel—something that has raised critical bewilderment, apology, or attack—but to the Faulkner I have been discussing, and to the work we have been examining, it comes as no surprise: in a culture such as the South of Faulkner's fiction he is always already there and will always come when developments in the culture require him. Myth prompts such actions as Percy Grimm's sudden slaying of Joe Christmas to secure the myths themselves. Faulkner describes Grimm as one who

> had been born in the town and had lived there all his life save for the periods of the slimmer encampments [the State national guard]. He was too young to have been in the European War, though it was not until 1921 or '22 that he realised that he would never forgive his parents for that fact. ...It was the new civilian-military act which saved him. He was like a man who had been for a long time in a swamp, in the dark. Then suddenly his life opened definite and clear. On each national holiday that had any martial flavor whatever he dressed in his captain's uniform and came down town. And those who saw him remembered him again on the day of the fight with the exsoldier as

> glittering, with his marksman's badge (he was a fine shot) and his bars, grave, erect, he walked among the civilians with about him an air half belligerent and half the selfconscious pride of a boy.
>
> He was not a member of the American Legion, but that was his parents' fault and not his . . . .[9]

Just as sentimental white men allow blacks to cheat them with land and loans and so justify lynching, Grimm's slaying of Joe Christmas is predictably, *necessarily* brutal:

> he ran straight to the kitchen and into the doorway, already firing, almost before he could have seen the table overturned . . . . Grimm emptied the automatic's magazine into the table; later someone covered all five shots with a handkerchief.
>
> But the Player was not done yet. When the others reached the kitchen they saw the table flung aside now and Grimm stooping over the body. When they approached to see what he was about, they saw that the man was not dead yet, and when they saw what Grimm was doing one of the men gave a choked cry and stumbled back into the wall and began to vomit. Then Grimm too sprang back, flinging behind him the bloody butcher knife. "Now you'll let white women alone, even in hell," he said. (464)

Like McLendon, his mythic consciousness causes him to annihilate a sexual danger prescribed in communal belief without aid of trial.

Still Grimm is not the only interpreter of racial myth here. The most cerebral man in town matches myths with the most physical: according to Gavin Stevens, the myth of blood and of blood consciousness drove Joe Christmas.

> "It was not alone all those thirty years which [his victim] did not know, but all those successions of thirty years before that which had put that stain either on his white blood or his black blood, whichever you will, and which killed him. But he must have run with believing for a while; anyway, with hope. But his blood would not be quiet, let him save it. It would not be either one or the other and let his body save itself. Because the black blood drove him first to the negro cabin. And then the white blood drove him out of there, as it was the black blood which snatched up the pistol and the white blood which would not let him fire it. And it was the white blood which sent him to the minister, which rising in him for the last and final time, sent him against all reason and all reality, into the embrace of a chimaera, a blind faith in something read in a printed Book. Then I believe that the white blood deserted him for

> the moment. Just a second, a flicker, allowing the black to rise in its final moment and make him turn upon that on which he had postulated his hope of salvation. It was the black blood which swept him by his own desire beyond the aid of any man, swept him up into that ecstasy out of a black jungle where life has already ceased before the heart stops and death is desire and fulfillment. And then the black blood failed him again, as it must have in crises all his life. He did not kill the minister. He merely struck him with the pistol and ran on and crouched behind that table and defied the black blood for the last time, as he had been defying it for thirty years. He crouched behind that overturned table and let them shoot him to death, with that loaded and unfired pistol in his hand." (448-49)

Thus in 1932 Faulkner, through the Phi Beta Kappa scholar and European-trained lawyer Gavin Stevens, confirms his own letter to the Memphis *Commercial Appeal* of the previous year by means of the false etymology coined by two anti-abolitionists in 1864. Real myths are perdurable.

I am not saying Faulkner was racist in any easy meaning of that term. I am saying that in his fiction, and often in his life, racial myth was deeply engrained in his thought even when he attempted to exorcise it. His struggles to confront racism and allay it in *Light in August* would continue—in his hard look at the consequences of miscegenation in *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) and *Go Down, Moses* (in 1942), in his powerful portrait of Rider in "Pantaloon in Black" in 1942 and in his return to the mulatto Lucas Beauchamp in *Intruder in the Dust* in 1948. But myths, once formulated to support a culture and once constituent of it, are difficult to eradicate. Near the end of his life, when pressed by the newspaper reporter Russell Warren Howe at an uncustomarily unguarded moment, Faulkner confessed he would kill blacks in the street if they rose up too suddenly for his culture to give them complete equality; nearer the end of his life, in *The Reivers*, putatively a happy tale of childhood for his own grandchildren, Faulkner gives us in Ned one of his most stereotypical portraits of black Sambo.

Myths are perdurable; they die hard if they die at all. I think Faulkner's great legacy is his openness, his unfailing if at times naive honesty. He wanted to capture his own little postage stamp of the world by immortalizing his own Lafayette County in northeastern Mississippi, not far from the Battle of Shiloh and nearer yet to the Battle of Brice's

Crossroads. That he did so indelibly is recorded in the ways in part in which myth appears, bidden and unbidden, in the chronicles of Yoknapatawpha. Among other gifts he has given us a true dimension of myth in American life, with all its glory and ignominy. It remains, even now, a true and accurate measure of his unflinching, his spectacular and instructive, artistry.

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NOTES

[1]This essay, delivered first as a talk at the Cologne symposium, follows my earlier essay in *Connotations* and the discussion that ensued, ending with *Connotations* 5.1.

[2]Bernard W. Bell, "William Faulkner's 'Shining Star': Lucas Beauchamp as a Marginal Man," *Critical Essays on William Faulkner: The McCaslin Family*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1990) 225-26.

[3]William Faulkner, *Flags in the Dust*, ed. Douglas Day (New York: Vintage Books, 1974) 313-14.

[4]Sidney Kaplan, "The Miscegenation Issue in the Election of 1864," *Journal of Negro History*" 34:3 (June 1949) as reprinted in *Critical Essays on William Faulkner: The Sutpen Family* (New York: G. K. Hall, 1996).

[5]William Faulkner, *Sartoris* (New York: New American Library Signet Book, 1953) 44.

[6]William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury: The Corrected Text* (New York: Vintage International, 1990) 294-95.

[7]William Faulkner, "Dry September," *Collected Stories* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977) 177-78.

[8]Reprinted in full in Neil R. McMillen and Noel Polk, "Faulkner on Lynching," *The Faulkner Journal* 8:1 (Fall 1992; published Fall 1994) 3-4.

[9]William Faulkner, *Light in August: The Corrected Text* (New York: Vintage International, 1985) 450-51.

Connotations
Vol. 5.2-3 (1995/96)

Mythic Sex in Mississippi: Eula and Ike Snopes

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Faulkner has long ceased to be the naive genius from the rural South. Instead, critics have turned him into an international modernist, inspired by T. S. Eliot and James Joyce, by cubism and vorticism. However, what has perhaps not been fully understood is that it is as a modernist that Faulkner becomes preoccupied with myth. His myth-making, in instances such as the Eula and Ike Snopes episodes in *The Hamlet*, should be seen in the context of the myth-making by modernists such as Eliot, Joyce, Stravinsky, and Picasso. The inverted and grotesque myths of the modernists appear as attempts to affirm certain values in the face of the international and regional dilemmas captured in works such as *The Waste Land* and *The Sound and the Fury*.

Most readers of *The Hamlet* have been bewildered and put off by both the daring thematics as well as the difficult language of the improbable story of a fourteen-year old Mississippi girl featured as a fertility goddess and the embarrassing case of the sodomitic relationship of an idiot with a cow. However, appreciation of the Eula and Ike stories is facilitated when readers conceive of these unlikely stories or "unerhörte Begebenheiten" as redemptive myths and thematic counterpoints to the stories of sexual anxieties projected into the Labove, Houston, and Mink Snopes plots.

The intellectually and emotionally demanding style of the Eula and Ike Snopes plots involves readers in transfer or metaphorizing operations, and, ultimately, in liminal or mythic experiences. At the same time, the intensely metaphorised style alerts us through ironic signals to the tension between the epiphany of the divine and its mundane, grotesque, and even sordid circumstances. The difficulties, caused by the clash between the naturalistic and the stylized elements of description, between

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the mythic dimensions of a regional story, are unavoidable and aesthetically justified. Indeed, perceptive readers recognize that the mannerisms and tortured abstractness of the language in the Eula and Ike Snopes episodes are not caused by caprice or a fatal decay of style, but by that specific courage to tackle such ultimate and impossible subjects as the incarnation of mythic sex. It is the kind of courage which Faulkner, as he says in *Selected Letters*, had missed in Hemingway: "to get out on a limb, to risk bad taste, overwriting, dullness etc."[1]

At the beginning of Book II, "Eula," Faulkner associates his heroine expressly with the "old Dionysic times" and traditional Dionysian imagery ("honey, grapes, vines, goats"), echoing his earlier use of the faun-motif in the short story "Black Music." However, in *The Hamlet* he affects a new sensuous experience of the venerable contents by overwhelming readers with a crammed pattern of sensuous adjectives and nouns: "honey in sunlight and bursting grapes, the writhen bleeding of the crushed fecundated vine beneath the hard rapacious trampling goat-hoof." This effect is enhanced by syntactical units which impact on readers as much through their blend of the metaphoric with the acoustic and the iconic as through their rational content: "listen in sullen bemusement, with a weary wisdom heired of all mammalian maturity."

Although the stylistic devices comprise synaesthetic units and mythological allusion, remote vocabulary ("integer"), and scientific imagery or observation ("teeming vacuuum"; "soundproof glass"; "enlarging organs"), their aggregate effect is clearly focussed and serves to suggest the universal, and, in that sense, the transcendental dimension of regional reality. In this context, Eula's curious unwillingness to "move" appears not as a trivial idiosyncrasy but as a kind of mythic immobility ("she already knew there was nowhere she wanted to go, nothing new or novel at the end of progression, only place like another anywhere and everywhere"[2]). That this is indeed the author's aim is confirmed by such phrases as "suggested some symbology of the old Dionysic times" (817) and "the drowsing maidenhead symbol's self" (836).

Faulkner's continuing fascination with the Dionysian motif and image-clusters indicates his Puritan urge to project a pagan counter-vision. It is therefore not surprising that the Eula-Labove plot is marked by rich metaphoric variations of a central tension between a regressive but

culturally productive male principle and an unconscious but vitalistically superior female principle. To embody this polarity parodically in the frustrated "infatuation" of a redneck student and schoolmaster with a phlegmatic Mississippi schoolgirl was one of Faulkner's great ironic inventions.

As Faulkner invokes Rabelais in the Varner plot, it comes as no surprise that words such as "buttocks" and "mammalian" with their alliterative echoes are dominant verbal leitmotifs as instanced in the humorous juxtaposition of Eula's overwhelming femininity and her brother Jody's frustrated efforts to contain it:

> . . . the roan horse bearing the *seething and angry man* and the girl of whom, even at nine and ten and eleven, there was *too much—too much* of leg, *too much* of breast, *too much* of buttock; *too much* of mammalian female meat . . . (821-22, my emphasis)

However, Eula's "mammalian" superiority, making "a travesty and paradox of the whole idea of education" (822), is also, as the metaphors used to describe her show, of a monstrous and grotesque kind:

> the invincible abhorrence of straight lines, jigging its component boneless curves against his back. (822)

> . . . the bare section between dress and stocking top looking as gigantically and profoundly naked as the dome of an observatory. (823)

These "grotesque" effects, deriving in the example of the "observatory dome" or in the following metaphor of the "house," from the great distance between imagistic tenor and vehicle, mirror Eula's peculiarly divided nature:

> Even while sitting behind her brother on the horse, the inhabitant of that meat seemed to lead *two separate and distinct lives* as infants in the act of nursing do. There was *one Eula Varner* who supplied blood and nourishment to the buttocks and legs and breasts; there was *the other Eula* who merely inhabited them, . . . as you are *in a house which you did not design but where the furniture is all settled and the rent paid up.* (822, my emphasis)

Labove, too, forces together very heterogeneous images in associating, on the one hand, the eleven-year old girl "eating a cold potato" with

a cat in the sun, and on the other, "with the goddesses in his Homer and Thucydides" (834). Moreover, he allows readers to recognize the philosophical purpose of these grotesque metaphors by making the schoolgirl Eula the *coincidentia oppositorum* of myth and religion: "of being at once corrupt and immaculate, at once virgins and the mothers of warriors and of grown men" (834). The same tendency to mythicize the heroine through unorthodox religious metaphor speaks from the metamorphosis of Jody Varner into "a seething eunuch priest" and the "wooden desks and benches" of the Mississippi schoolhouse "into a grove of Venus" (836).

As Eula appears from both the narrator's and Labove's viewpoints metaphorically elevated, it is not surprising to find Ratliff too envisioning her as an "unscalable sierra, the rosy virginal mother of barricades for no man to conquer scot-free" (877). Apparently, there were, in addition to Faulkner's thematic impulse to embody in Eula the paradox of "the virginal mother," more personal reasons, above all his relation to Maud Falkner, as to why he would be fascinated with such an "avatar" of sexual taboo.[3] In regard to Faulkner's re-application of the mythic *coincidentia oppositorum*, Varner's sale of his daughter to Flem is a particularly sinister aspect of the property theme, and most readers are inclined to accept that this marriage has an enslaving effect on Eula. However, the overall implications of Faulkner's metaphoric rendering of this theme are that Eula is superior to any such enslaving—which is a typical consequence of Faulkner's belief in a vitalistic myth instead of a socio-economic-political model.

There are instances like the final tableau in which Eula is represented with pathos, where she appears "Olympus-tall" and her "gesture immemorial and female and troubling" (1071), but just as characteristic are Faulkner's intense efforts to curtail the pathos of mythicizing Eula by comedy. Against "the moon-blanched dust in the tremulous April night" with its connotations of moon and spring rituals, Eula appears in a white garment and is blank-eyed like a Greek sculpture, "the heavy gold hair, the mask not tragic and perhaps not even doomed: just damned," but this pathos is then counterbalanced, not devalued, by a parodic allusion to opera settings:

> . . . the strong faint lift of breasts beneath marblelike fall of the garment; to those below what Brunhilde, what Rhinemaiden on what spurious river-rock of papier-maché, what Helen returned to what topless and shoddy Argos, waiting for no one. (1017)

The romantic theatricality vanishes straightaway when Ratliff confronts us with regional reality, asking Mrs. Snopes to call her father: "We want Uncle Will. Henry Armstid is hurt at Mrs Littlejohn's" (1017).

In the Ike Snopes episode, too, Faulkner's principal mode of combining myth and reality is through the grotesque. However, there are considerable differences in both the thematic and the stylistic aspects of the Ike and Eula stories. While the Eula plot, through grotesque imagery, establishes an icon of a male ideal of womanhood, the Ike Snopes-plot, blending elaborate rhetoric with travesty, transmits a mythic love story. But the story, in *The Hamlet*, of the love between a human being and an animal is not told in the acceptable style of the love stories of Zeus as bull or swan, Native American stories of the love between bears and humans[4], or that of fairy tales like "Snow-White and Rose-Red." Instead, Faulkner provokes readers by a diction in which the "poetic" and Thirties' realism are manneristically forced together. However, this grotesque combination of the rarified with the rural, and even with the scatological, corresponds with the equally grotesque fact that the love of the mentally handicapped sodomite is the only "true love" in Frenchman's Bend.

Apparently Faulkner, like other artists experiencing the collapse of traditional values (see also John Steinbeck, Djuna Barnes, D. H. Lawrence, and the German Expressionists) felt an urge to *radically* reassess human essence by exploring the liminal, by expressing the humane features of the primitive, the simple-minded and marginalized. As John Steinbeck through Tularecito ("Tularecito," 1932) and Lennie (*Of Mice and Men*, 1937), Faulkner through Benjy (1929) and Ike (1940) explored the anthropological and mythic borderlines of humankind ("the creature" [810]; "pointed faun's ears" [811]) as well as of his art. We should perhaps remind ourselves that these literary assessments of humanity took place at about the same time that Hitler had begun to draw his "borderline" of humankind through his "eugenic mass murders," the

"Vernichtung unwerten Lebens." Part of the greatness of *The Sound and the Fury* and of *The Hamlet*—and this is sometimes ignored in scholarly debate—lies in that both Benjy and Ike are portrayed not as clinical cases but as human beings, feeling affection and receiving human attention.[5]

In contrast to the regressive and antagonistic love-experience of Labove, Houston and Mink, Ike, the idiot, being outside the rationality and morality of societal codes awaits his beloved "indivisible in joy" (883) and at one with nature. In this opening passage of the episode, Faulkner, by carefully orchestrating acoustic and metaphoric effects, has created a nature-setting and a linguistic medium in which realistic features ("smell her," "reeked") and stylizing elements ("malleate hands of mist . . . palped her pearled barrel") are cautiously balanced. The alliterative expression of morning mist, in particular, suggests the harmony of the human being and the animal as integral parts of nature ("the same malleate hands of mist which drew along his prone drenched flanks palped her pearled barrel too and shaped them both somewhere in immediate time, already married" [883]). The miniature drawing of natural details proves an especially effective means of communicating Ike's closeness to nature.

> He would lie *am*id the waking instant of earth's teeming *m*inute life, the *m*otionless fronds of water-heavy grasses stooping into the *m*ist before his face in black, fixed curves, along each parabola of which the *m*arching drops held in *m*inute *m*agnification the dawn's rosy *m*iniatures . . . (883, my emphasis)

How difficult but also how rewarding such an effort can be is instanced by the experience of the fire-scene and the cubist superimposing and blending of Ike and the cow with the horse. Through distortive metaphors, realistic action here assumes a visionary quality:

> For an instant they yelled face to face, the wild eyes, the yellow teeth, the long gullet red with ravening gleeful triumph . . . His voice and that of the horse became one voice, . . . he ran into and through the fire and burst into air, sun, visibility again, shedding flames . . . The air was filled with furious wings and the four crescent-glints of shod hooves as, still screaming, the horse vanished beyond the ravine's lip, sucking first the cow and then himself after it as though by the violent vacuum of its passing. Earth became perpendicular and fled upward . . . (890-91)

Through carefully crafted transitions readers are led here from realist perception to symbolist "insight," as is evidenced by the use of the metaphor of mirroring, contemplation, vision, and the allusion to the myth of "cow-eyed" Juno:

> She stands as he left her, tethered, chewing. Within the mild enormous moist and pupilless globes he sees himself in twin miniature mirrored by the inscrutable abstraction; one with that which Juno might have looked out with he watches himself contemplating what those who looked at Juno saw. (899)

Similarly, through religiously heightened nature-imagery ("It is now bald and forthright day . . . but the cries [of the birds] are no longer the mystery's choral strophe and antistrophe rising vertical among the leafed altars" [900]), the times of the day become occasions for metaphorically linking the lovers' progress with cosmic processes.

> . . . they will advance only as the day itself advances, no faster. They have the same destination: sunset. (900)

Ike Snopes's cow is associated not only with the goddess Juno but through the symbolist imagery from Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* with "Helen and the bishops, the kings and the graceless seraphim" (903); Eula is likened to a filly (820) and her suitors "erupted into her placid orbit like a stampede of wild cattle" (840), she brings into the "harsh functioning of Protestant primary education a moist blast of spring's liquorish corruption, a pagan triumphal prostration before the supreme primal uterus" (836). Clearly, the author is driven to artistically redefine human essence at the borderlines—or at the base—where animalistic, human and divine features fuse. The sordid and loveless world of an insignificant Mississippi hamlet attains a liminal and mythic dimension, the grotesque figures of a schoolgirl and a sodomitic village idiot come to embody the mysteries of love.

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NOTES

[1]*Selected Letters of William Faulkner*, ed. Joseph Blotner (New York: Random House, 1977) 251.

[2]*The Hamlet: William Faulkner, Novels 1936-1940* (New York: The Library of America, 1990) 817. All subsequent references are cited in the text.

[3]Joel Williamson, "Virginity," *William Faulkner and Southern History* (New York and Oxford: OUP, 1993) 393-98.

[4]See also Gary Snyder in "Poetry and the Primitive: Notes on Ecological Survival," *Earth House Hold: Technical Notes to Fellow Dharma Revolutionaries* (New York: New Directions, 1969) 117-29, especially the paragraph with the provocative title, "Making Love with Animals."

[5]See James G. Watson, *The Snopes Dilemma: Faulkner's Trilogy* (Coral Gables, FL: U of Miami P, 1968) on Ike as "the embodiment of the primordial natural love" (48).

Connotations
Vol. 5.2-3 (1995/96)

The Control Machine: Myth in *The Soft Machine* of W. S. Burroughs[1]

JOHN G. WATTERS

The claim made by William S. Burroughs that he is creating a "mythology for the space age"[2] did not lend me much assistance when writing this paper, however it did raise a question: what are myth and mythology, and what connection do they have with storytelling? This, in turn, led to other questions: Is mythology religion we no longer believe in? That works for Greek or Roman but not Hindu mythology. Or is myth a fundamentally Eurocentric concept referring to our past but not to other, non-European, cultures? What makes myth different from fable? I had to find out first what myth meant, or what it could mean before I went any further. I read through encyclopaedia and dictionary definitions, all of which seemed to link myth with something untrue or at least unproven. Unproven I could accept, however, to state that myths are untrue adds nothing to an understanding of their influence and leads us back to Aristotle's point on poetic truth.[3] However, more than anything, these definitions did not go far enough.

Why is myth so important to society? I moved on to histories of religion and anthropology, where I felt I might find something more useful. Many scraps of information were gleaned on the social importance of myth and its place in the structure of a community, but I did not feel any further forward. Until one afternoon I started re-reading the *L'Ecriture du Désastre* by Maurice Blanchot after a vague remembrance that there were comments on myth somewhere inside. There I found a hesitant definition that satisfied my needs: a definition of myth that took in the unproveability of myth, its link with storytelling, its social power and, at the same time, its flawed nature, perhaps even the futility of myth-making. In *L'Ecriture du Désastre* Blanchot writes:

For debates inspired by this article, please check the Connotations website at <http://www. connotations.de/debwatters00523.htm>.

> Le mythe serait la radicalisation d'une hypothèse, l'hypothèse par laquelle, passant à la limite, la pensée a toujours enveloppé ce qui la désimplifie, la désagrège, la défait, détruisant à son comble la possibilité de se maintenir, fût-ce par le récit fabuleux (retour au dire même).[4]

Blanchot's definition of myth divides the myth-making process into two steps: firstly the hypothesis is founded, and secondly that hypothesis is radicalized. This radicalization takes place when the hypothesis becomes the base for the "fantastic narrative," but at this point the myth undermines itself. This takes place as the "myth" and the thought behind the "myth" attempt to pursue contradictory aims: that of storytelling and explanation (or simplification). The storytelling begs interpretation and as the interpretations multiply so we get further from simplicity. However, it is the "myth's" purpose to instruct and perhaps illuminate. This unmaintainability of the "thought" behind the myth, that thought undoing itself by at once suggesting an explanation of the phenomena that are presented to us in the everyday, and, at the same time, complicating that everyday by adding other narratives to it, gives us a starting point for this discussion of the mythic element within *The Soft Machine* by W. S. Burroughs.[5]

In this paper I wish to show that in *The Soft Machine* Burroughs seeks to invent a myth in this sense of "radicalization of a hypothesis." To illustrate this I will analyse the "myth of control" in *The Soft Machine* and extract the hypothesis from it. The hypothesis which is fundamental to *The Soft Machine* breaks down into three constituent parts: firstly, that language is a means and method of control; secondly, that reality is a construct; and thirdly, that the body itself is in fact a control system. The "fantastic narratives" take the hypothesis and portray vested interests as using language to manipulate the populace at large, by laying down a "word and image track," which is a form of mental programming that moulds behaviour and negates resistance.

I will look at the difficulty raised by the inherent contradiction in *The Soft Machine*: *The Soft Machine* is made up of language but seeks to attack the use of language by institutions. I will, therefore, examine Burroughs' attempts to get round this problem by the use of the cut-up technique and the character of the "technical sergeant."

* * *

The Soft Machine was first published in 1961 and is the first work of William S. Burroughs to incorporate the "cut-up" method of Brion Gysin.[6] It was followed by *The Ticket That Exploded*[7] and *Nova Express*,[8] the two other texts which make up the so-called "cut-up trilogy." This trilogy grew out of the "word hoard" of about one thousand pages of manuscript that were the overflow from the writing of *Naked Lunch*.[9]

In *The Soft Machine* we find a mixture of narrative fragments and cut-up texts. The juxtaposition of, and the play between, "conventional," if fragmentary, narrative and the "meaningless jumble" of the cut-up makes *The Soft Machine* a challenging text to read and, perhaps, even a challenge to reading.

The narratives in *The Soft Machine* expand the idea of addiction from the relation of the addict to drugs, which was first developed in *Naked Lunch*, into an addiction to power and control whereby an elite few can manipulate the action and thought of the mass by way of the "word and image track."

"Track" can be read in many ways but in the works of Burroughs it most often refers to a prerecorded portion of sound or film. Also at the time of writing *The Soft Machine*,[10] Burroughs had a strong interest in the methods of Scientology and it is the interpretation of "track" in its Scientological sense that opens up the widest possibilities.

In the Scientological sense, "track" is again used in the sense of something prerecorded but rather than on magnetic tape this recording is on the "reactive mind."[11] This recording takes place due to indoctrination (through language), or through other forms of conditioning including the "past lives" of the human being: an imprint is left on the individual and this "track" produces predictable, and therefore, controllable, reaction in the viewer/listener much like Pavlovian stimuli. Therefore, in the jargon of Scientology, "the whole track" refers to the accumulated experiences from all past lives and their conditioning effect on the present of the individual. It is through the use of the E-meter, a type of lie detector, that Scientology claims to be able to decondition people from the effects of the "reactive mind." The use of the E-meter and its revealing of hostile intention opened up the possibility of an "exposure therapy" which would decondition through repetition. This therapy took the form of exposure to questions that provoked a hostile

response. The questions would be repeated until the area of "track" was narrowed down by elimination and the hostility eradicated by admission. It was this element of Scientology, the idea of conditioning and its cure by the E-meter, that particularly interested Burroughs. It was by extending this concept of deconditioning that Burroughs envisaged using cut-ups and repetition to decondition people from the "word." The aim being to unencumber the mind: to allow the individual to see clearly without preconditioned reactions to

> Queen, Country, Pope, President, Generalissimo, Allah, Christ, Fidel Castro, The Communist Party, The CIA... When automatic reactions are no longer operative you are in a condition to make up your own mind.[12]

It is by determining the areas in which we are conditioned and those through which conditioning takes place that we are able to sort through the "bombardment of images" and, finally, are able to deal with situations without preconceptions: to deal with facts rather than beliefs.

* * *

The cut-up itself serves as the principal weapon in the fight against the controlling power of the "track." At the core of *The Soft Machine* is the postulation that language itself is a method of control that forces us to perceive the world in a certain, fixed way, and these perceptions, in turn, place limits on our interactions. The "word track" always moves away from plurality towards uniformity, leading us further and further away from the "multi-levelled structure of experience."[13] The cut-up is used in order to expose the "word track" by throwing up unlikely juxta-positions and permutations that force the readers into adjusting their approach to reading and, therefore, to the power and use of language. The technique is similar to montage with the writer cutting his or other authors' texts[14] into pieces and then re-arranging them in a more or less random fashion. After this the results are "processed," that is the "cut-ups" are selected according to their interest to the writer and juxtaposed to make up a larger text. Taking this into account, Feyerabend's comments on the Dadaists can be easily applied to the cut-up:

> Assume you tear language apart, you live for days and weeks in a world of cacophonic sounds, jumbled words, nonsensical events. Then, after this preparation, you sit down and write: 'the cat is on the mat'. This simple sentence which we usually utter without thought, like talking machines (and much of our talk is indeed routine), now seems like the creation of an entire world: God said let there be light, and there was light.[15]

To continue to comment on the cut-up it is necessary to illustrate with an example; here we will take a cut-up from page 8 of *The Soft Machine*:

> He went to Madrid. . . Alarm clock ran for yesterday. . . 'No me hagas caso.' dead on arrival. . . you might say at the Jew Hospital. . . blood spilled over the American. . . trailing lights and water. . . The Sailor went so wrong somewhere in that grey flesh. . . He just sit down on zero. . . I nodded on Nino Perdido his coffee over three hours late. . . They all went away and sent papers. . . The Dead Man write for you like a major. . . Enter vecinos. . . Freight boat smell of rectal mucous went down off England with all dawn smell of distant fingers. . . About this time I went to your Consul. He gave me a Mexican after his death. . . Five times of dust we made it. . . with soap bubbles of withdrawal crossed by a thousand junky nights. . . Soon after the half maps came in by candlelight. . . Occupy. . . Junk lines falling. . . Stay Off. . . Bill Gains in the Yellow Sickness. . . looking at dirty pictures casual as a ceiling fan short-timing the dawn we made it in the corn smell of rectal mucous and carbolic soap. . . familiar face maybe from the vacant lot. . . trailing tubes and wires. . . 'You fucking-can't-wait-hungry-junkies! . . .' burial in the American. 'Quedase con su medicina'. . . on Nino Perdido the girl screaming. . . They all went away through Casbah House. . . 'Couldn't you write me any better than that? Gone away. . . You can look anyplace.'
> No good. No Bueno.17

The size of the quote is necessary in order to illustrate, at least to some extent, the problem of actually reading a cut-up and, indeed, very different approaches can be employed to achieve a "reading." One of these is to reconstruct the text in order to find a sense. Certainly in the text there are identifiable themes: anal sex, a consular visit, a burial, sickness and death, and even literary criticism. These can be sifted through, analysed in relation to preceding pages (from which some of the material used in this cut-up undoubtedly came) and then interpreted in order to fix on the text a specific "meaning." However, the problems with this approach can be pointed out very simply. Take the line: "Freight boat smell of rectal mucous went down off England with all

dawn smell of distant fingers. . ." Do we punctuate the line: "Freight boat, smell of rectal mucous, went down off England with all dawn smell of distant fingers. . ."? Then interpret in the following terms: the smell on the freight boat was of rectal mucous at the time when it sank, the expression "dawn smell of distant fingers" being a lyric substitution for ship's "hands." Alternatively, we could have the smell going down, as in disappearing at sea, off England! Or with the line: "He gave me a Mexican after his death," if we presume the Mexican refers to a person, who is dead, the giver or the gift? Each reading opens up new possibilities, and the rules of grammar do not apply as they are not used. To fix an interpretation on the text seems impossible, and as J. M. Bernstein states: "Fragmentary writing functions through the multiplication of logically distinct perspectives."[16] It is these distinct perspectives in the cut-ups that over-ride the "word track" allowing a plurality of (re)action.

However this, the prose-poem approach to the cut-ups, is only one method of reading them. Another method is to integrate the surroundings into the text. That is, rather than ignore the outside world, to mix it in with the text and then examine the results. This exercise of "intersection reading" is outlined in Burroughs's essay "Creative Reading":

> Just where and under what circumstances did you read? What were you reading when the phone rang or some other interruption occurred. The point at which your stream of consciousness—and when you read of course you are simply borrowing the writer's stream of it, being bored by your own, if indeed you *have* one, isn't it all bits and pieces, shreds and patches? Constantly being cut by *seemingly* random factors which on examination turn out to be significant and important. [. . .] So note down in the margin actual interruptions, which may be frequent if you are riding on a subway. [. . .] I just tried an interesting experiment. I turn on the TV, open an anthology of poems and read a few lines, noting action and words on screen. I throw away some duds but the results are impressive. Just try it.[17]

One could read a cut-up on a train: mix the text in with images that pass the window and with overheard speech. Barry Miles suggests integrating Burroughs's other cut-up experiments, on cassette and film, with the cut-up text in order to get a full cut-up experience:

> Ideally one would read the cut-up trilogy with Burroughs's cut-up tapes playing in the background, taking time off occasionally to examine a photo-collage or play *Towers Open Fire* or *The Cut Ups* on the VCR. To get in the right mood it would be appropriate to eat some majoun first, preferably made to Paul Bowles's recipe.[18]

A third method incorporates the first two but gives more weight to the power of the cut-up to confuse the reader and produce an almost hallucinatory effect due to the frequent changes of images, the repetition and the use of association blocks to refer to texts of Burroughs as well as those of other writers. This method of reading does not look for a meaning in the cut-up, which by reading the cut-ups would seem to be a futile exercise, but rather analyses the effect of that reading: the confusion; the cacophony that makes us aware of the power and function of language.

The cut-up can be seen as an attack on both discourse and narrative with textual shift and dislocation demobilising any move towards a single sense. The process of reading a cut-up therefore entails a fragmentation: the text is fragmented and the reading habit is splintered. The "I," as reader, is caught in the spaces between the words. We have a choice to make when reading a cut-up text: to impose a meaning, despite the difficulties, through the use of interpretatory techniques and by so doing take part in the very power play that the text seeks to undermine, joining in the battle for and about meaning, or we can adjust the very structure of reading and place ourselves in a constant state of shift which does not privilege sense but rather effect, plunging us into a vortex of spinning sense.[19] This vortex has its place not in an understanding of the workings of the text or even in the comprehension of the words and phrases that make it up, but rather in the perception of its effects on oneself as a reader.

In attaching no single, fixed sense to the cut-up the reader undermines power play and opens up the text to multiple readings as his/her environment changes. The reading drifts with the readers through their own geographies: the space of the text unfolds in the minds of the readers. *The Soft Machine* cuts and folds and we are in those lacerations and those shadows. Not being able to read *The Soft Machine* is not being

able to allow it to act on us: to permit loss (of structure) in order to find the zero of meaning. Language insists on meaning, the cut-up tries to defy it. The constant currents, the endless permutations in the cut-ups encourage entry into certain patterns of action while discouraging others, and it is by analysing the effects of these currents and of the textual repetitions, on ourselves as readers of the cut-up, that we renew both our reading and the text. As Burroughs states in the *Paris Review* interview:

> [T]he new techniques such as the cut-up will involve much more of the total capacity of the observer.[20]

The observer/reader is placed in an active relation with the text involving his/her "total capacity." This type of reading pushes us beyond the text and we then pull the text and its effects into our world: where we have relations and interactions with objects and people.

* * *

As stated before the cut-up is combined with short narrative sections which satirize the state or institutional techniques of control. For example, in Chapters 4 and 7 of *The Soft Machine* we find two mediums of control described and the method of their destruction outlined. In chapter 4, "TRAK TRAK TRAK" we are referred to the control system of advertising and the "tie in" techniques of consumer-capitalism. This is accompanied by the repetition and permutation of the company's slogan:

> SMOKE TRAK CIGARETTES. THEY LIKE YOU. TRAK LIKE ANY YOU. ANY TRAK LIKE YOU. SMOKE TRAKS. THEY SERVICE. TRAK TRAK TRAK. [SM 24]

The slogan is for Trak Servicing: the all-purpose, all-you-need company: everything is provided for, sit back and relax: there is no escape! "TRAK" refers us again to "track" and the consumer of Trak products is conditioned by the advertising to buy a product that "is not just another habit forming drug this is the habit forming drug" [SM 27]. The product

itself "takes over all functions from the addict" and finally reduces him to the "helpless condition of a larva" [SM 27].

Dependency can be terminated by acting on the call for self-sufficiency rather than relying on the machinery of consumer capital:

> Cut the sex and Dream Utility Lines//
> Cut The Trak Service Lines//
> [. . .] Trak your own utilities [SM 25]

This sign, nailed to a wall, "was printed on white paper book page size." This connection with print and books suggests that the resistance to Trak comes from a writer: the printed page of the book delivers the message. However, this message is given by someone dependent on the machinery of consumer capital to live: the insider is given the role of bringing down the system. It is by this method, of putting the resister inside the system, that Burroughs attempts to free himself as a writer from the contradiction of writing against the use of language.

In Chapter 7 of *The Soft Machine*, "The Mayan Caper," we witness through the narrator the workings and then the destruction of another control mechanism. "The Mayan control calendar" is operated by a religious elite who control the populace using a time manipulation technique whereby every movement of the members of the society can be predicted.

In this chapter the narrator, Joe Brundige of "The Evening News," is "transferred" into the body of a Mayan peasant in order to infiltrate the society and destroy the control calendar. The system of control can only be destroyed by an insider, and it is for this reason "Joe Brundige" must become a Mayan. Effective resistance can only come from within. Again the "word and image track" are at work:

> I felt the crushing weight of evil insect control forcing my thoughts and feeling into prearranged moulds, squeezing my spirit in a soft invisible vice. [SM 55]

Control is present and acts through a "continuous round of festivals." However, "sacrifices were rare" [SM 55]. While fear of being sacrificed could be seen as an effective means of control, the narrative seems to move the emphasis from sacrifice to ritual in a more general sense. This, along with the means of destruction of the "calendar" by playback of

"control music and festival recordings together with sound and image track of rebellion" [SM 57] confirms that "control" acts through the manipulation of the "word and image track."[21]

The combination of cut-up and short narrative comes together in a clash of images, the aim of which is to have the reader question not only the meaning and power of language but also the meaning and power of all extra-individual systems.

All the "control" systems in *The Soft Machine* reduce the victims to an unconscious, malleable mass to be used and disgarded by an elite at their whim. However, these control systems seem only to be a shadow of a more sinister threat, as Burroughs states in the *Paris Review* Interview:

> *Time, Life, Fortune* applies a more complex, effective control system than the Mayan calendar, but it also is much more vulnerable because it is so vast and mechanized. Not even Henry Luce understands what's going on in the system now. Well, a machine can be redirected. One technical sergeant can fuck up the whole works.[22]

It is this idea of redirection of the machine that dominates the "messages of resistance" in *The Soft Machine*. The machine itself is reprogrammed by the rogue "technical sergeant," and this leads to its destruction. The "technical sergeant" works within the system in order to bring about its downfall. This "technical sergeant" is the "writer" in the section "TRAK TRAK TRAK" and "Joe Brundige" in "The Mayan Caper," and another example is found in the "Movies" section at the end of the chapter "The Case of the Celluloid Kali" [SM 48-49].

* * *

The narrator at this point in the text is Clem Snide, the "Private Ass Hole" who is also known as "Lee the Agent." The chapter opens with a monologue by the "Survival Artist," who relates the techniques used to survive three thousand years "of showbusiness" in an extension of the theme "wouldn't you." That is, in the situation of absolute need the individual returns to a survival instinct: in those conditions, wouldn't you do the same?

Towards the end of the chapter Clem/Lee joins the "guests" at the villa of the Countess di Vile. From the entrance of Clem to his abrupt departure a control system is described and then attacked. After being introduced to the Countess, Clem is shown the naked boys at the bar "and their cocks jumped up one after another—And I did the polite thing too when my turn came—" [SM 48]. This parody of polite behaviour and the function of social etiquette points us to the rule of the "normal," however bizarre that "normal" may be, and the controlling power of the fear of being "other."

The eager boys begin chanting for the movies: "The movies!—The movies!—We want the movies!—" [SM 48]. There follows the screening of movies depicting hangings in which the victims ejaculate on the point of death. The boys watching the film come "right with him spurt for spurt" [SM 48]. The direct physical and mental control exercised by the movies is illustrated by the slowing down of the film and the consequences of this on the "boys." As the film is slowed the effects of the recording on the viewers changes also: the boys' ejaculations take one, then two hours, then become "geologic."

This fragment of narrative links us with a second element in the Burroughsian hypothesis: the postulation that reality is a construct. This is portrayed here by the distortion of the line between the action that takes place within the movie and that of the boys in the villa. This distortion can take place because both the movie and the boys are contained in the larger frame of the "reality film" or "reality con."

The main elements that constitute the "reality film" are the notion of reality as a construct and, its collateral, the mechanisms by which the individual is made to act in the film. Both in interviews and in the "cut-up trilogy," "reality" is stated to be a construct: a film that links us to the body and, therefore, to time and space:

> [W]hat we call reality is actually a movie. It's a film. What I call a biological film.[23]

and again

> The whole human film was pre-recorded.[24]

Exclusion from the "reality film" means having no role to fill in the theatre of existence:

> [P]eople will go to any lengths to get in the film to cover themselves with any old film scrap . . junky. . narcotics agent. . thief. . informer. . anything to avoid the hopeless dead-end horror of being just who and where you all are: dying animals on a doomed planet.[25]

This horror of "seeing what we see" binds us to our pre-recorded roles, another "track," following the old, worn out script of

> birth and death and the human condition—always been that way and always will—Besides you can't do anything—Don't stick out your neck—Don't get ulcers.[26]

The horror alone, however, is not enough to keep the character playing in the "reality film," and so other techniques are used by those with a vested interest in keeping the "tired old show on the road." These techniques include sublimination.

In 1957 Vance Packard's exposure of the techniques used by the advertising industry in *The Hidden Persuaders* was heralded as revealing the process known as "subliminal stimulation." He states in the 1981 edition of the work:

> This technique involves getting visual or whispered messages to us below our level of conscious awareness. Visually they can be split-second flashes, or fixed but dimly-lit messages that stay on the screen for longer periods.[27]

For example a toy advertisement would contain the subliminated message "Get it!" flashing on screen several times. While this "tucking" of messages caused a storm for a time, interest soon waned, with the result that only a few radio and television channels decided to take any action. In 1981 Packard could state that the practice continued but its effect on sales was unknown.[28]

In "The Case of the Celluloid Kali" the boys are shown a slow-motion film and this produces a synchronised response. The image causes direct biological effects. Accordingly, in the "theory" section of *The Ticket That Exploded* "Let Them See,"[29] playback at "subliminal slow motion" will

build an image into the flesh of the viewer.[30] Returning to "The Case of the Celluloid Kali," the sound/image track of the film produces precise reactions in the viewers and, as the interval between events in the track becomes longer, so does the time between the actions in the "physical" space. In this we have perfect correlation between the cause and effect. The combination of these two elements leads us back to the concept of the "pre-recorded universe," or what Burroughs calls, referring to Castaneda, the "tonal universe":

> The tonal universe is the every day cause-and-effect universe, which is predictable because it is pre-recorded.[31]

Therefore, the movie scene becomes a parody of the doctrine of predestination with the fate of the viewer, the "orgasm-death," being imprinted on the body.

The causality machine (the film) is speeded up, by Snide, in order to reach a critical point where the word/image track must be abandoned or lead to mental or physical destruction. However, the "guests" are locked into a perception/action cycle that controls them, and they have no choice but to follow their destiny. It is only by the insertion of a random factor that the "causal" or "tonal" universe can be broken away from in order to reach beyond control into the magical or "nagual" universe:

> The nagual is the unknown, the unpredictable, the uncontrollable.[32]

The action of the character Clem breaks through to this level and allows for his escape, but the process of "nagual" action is also exemplified by the cut-up technique:

> For the nagual to gain access, the door of chance must be open. There must be a random factor [. . .].[33]

Unpredictable and unauthorised behaviour of "wised up" characters, the technical sergeant, along with the scissors of the cut-up break the bonds that keep us tied to the illusion of an objective reality:

> Better than the "real thing?"—There is no real thing—Maya—Maya—It's all show business—[34]

"The Case of the Celluloid Kali," and the Burroughsian "myth of control" in general, do not point to some absolute reality beyond the physical world, but rather point out that there is no objective reality at all. One can compare this to the simile of the cave in *The Republic* of Plato. The fate of the "boys" resembles that of the cave-dwellers, whose life is dominated by the shadows and who would rather kill than venture into the light. However, the "boys" are the victims in "The Case of the Celluloid Kali," not the philosopher: the simple dupes, the "marks," fall victim to the "con" and they pay with their lives. More importantly, in *The Republic* the reality which exists outside the cave, beyond the film, is the goal, whereas in Burroughs's texts survival is the name of the game, and reality appears as a flux that is a

> more or less constant scanning pattern—The scanning pattern we accept as "reality" has been imposed by the controlling power on this planet, a power primarily oriented towards total control.[35]

If, therefore, we place reality within language, then language forms and confines that which we can interact with while using it as a tool. Likewise, if reality is based on our relationships with institutions, those institutions determine the parameters of acceptable behaviour. However, we are still bound to this planet and, as the narrator states in *Nova Express*, "To live is to collaborate."[36]

* * *

The first two elements that make up Burroughs's myth of control are, therefore, the postulations that, firstly, language is a means of manipulation that functions to protect the power of both secular (Trak advertising) and religious (the Mayan priests) institutions, and secondly, that (objective) reality is a fabrication, this being conveyed through the image of the meshing of the action in the "movies" with that of the "boys."

The third element in the hypothesis is that the body itself is a form of control. In "The Case of the Celluloid Kali" the reaction of the Countess Di Vile when Clem speeds up the movie is violent. The acceleration of the movie causes the boys to come "like machine guns":

> Half the guests explode straightaway [. . .] The others are flopping around the floor like beeched idiots [SM 49]

At this point the Countess steps in to curb this desecration of the control machine, and, invoking the Hindu goddess Kali, kills the boys: the narrator, Snide, the private asshole, escapes in an "aqualung" to fight another day.

From the chapter title we are placed immediately in relation to myth—that of the Hindu goddess Kali—and to the displacing of that myth, by the use of the word "celluloid." The second time "Kali" is used is as invocation and dedication of the murder of the "guests" to that goddess.

While the name of the goddess is used, the reasons for this are not at first evident. Kali is the goddess of the "Omnipotence of Time" depicted in the *Kali Tantra,* verse 496, as

> Most fearful, her laughter shows her dreadful teeth. She stands upon a corpse. She has four arms. Her hands hold a sword and a head and show the gestures of removing fear and granting boons. She is the auspicious divinity of sleep, the consort of Siva. Naked clad only in space, the goddess is resplendent. Her tongue hangs out. She wears a garland of heads. Such is the form worthy of meditation of the Power of Time, Kali, who dwells near funeral pyres.

Kali is linked both with destruction and the end of the world and, therefore, an assumption can be made from the title, that destruction is going to take place through the medium of film, which is to some extent what happens. However, it is only in following the "cut-up trilogy" and by questioning the reference to Kali in *The Ticket That Exploded* that the full import of the reference becomes clear. In *The Ticket That Exploded* at page 85 we have a parenthesis:

> The noose is a weapon—the weapon of Kali

The weapon of Kali, the Goddess, is a sword; however, the weapon of the thugees was the noose. The thugees, a Hindu confraternity of ritual murderers, killed solely by strangulation and dedicated the last gasp of their victims to the terrible blood-smeared goddess.[37] This shifts the reading of the title from an emphasis on destruction through the means of film; to the content of the film itself: ritual murder in the form of hanging and the "orgasm-death" thereby produced. This in turn is dedicated to the goddess of the final destruction of the world through the power-of-time-over-all-things.[38] Therefore, the reference to Kali, linked with the "orgasm-death," underlines the facts of biology: birth, aging through time and death.

In the "myth of control," the "orgasm-death" is the human condition as we are forced to accept it. The beginning and the end are linked by the inescapeable power of time. The bringing together of these two fundamentals of human existence, male orgasm and death, highlights the "deadly impasse" in which we are held. The main device of this confinement is the human body in which freedom cannot exist due to the constraints placed on the individual by biological necessity:[39] the ultimate system of control is the nervous system.

* * *

The Soft Machine combines the cut-up, narrative fragments and reference to myth in order to postulate a fundamental explanation of the control systems of language and institution, both religious and secular, all of which are bound together in biology; in the body. This radical hypothesis challenges the reader of the text as well as the reader after-text, taking the reading off the page and into the world of action.

The Soft Machine presents us with a myth of control that challenges the concept of discourse as it is linked to the power of institutions. That very discourse confines and manipulates action, hijacking the individual's power to "think" beyond the parameters it lays out and, therefore, to question the existence of both the institution and the related discourse, and, at its limit, of the body and language. *The Soft Machine* itself fixes on an anti-discourse of textual folds. It attempts to explain the systems of control by way of fantastic narrative fragments, but at the same time

these fragments further confuse our relation with the world, beyond *The Soft Machine*, by adding other narratives to it. However, anti-narrative is provided by the cut-up, and the mutual negation, of cut-up alongside narrative fragment, provides the reader with the perfect zero of meaning.[40] In this textual confusion each thought becomes unmaintainable: the technical sergeant has served his purpose as far as our (nervous) system is concerned.

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NOTES

[1]For Salvina D'Anna and Louis. "Hands up . . . ."—Thanks to Didier Ober and Peter Gaines for all their help.—This article is the revised version of a paper presented on "The Presence of Mythology in American Literature" at the Fachhochschule Köln in July 1995.

[2]Jennie Skerle traces the first use of this expression back to an interview with Burroughs conducted by Eric Mottram for the BBC in 1965. See *William S. Burroughs* (Boston: Hall, 1985) 50, 105.

[3]See Aristotle, "Poetic Truth and Historical Truth," *Poetics*, chapter 9 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965).

[4]"Myth would seem to be the radicalization of a hypothesis, the hypothesis whereby, going to the limit, thought has always included what desimplifies, disjoins, and undoes it, what destroys at its strongest point the possibility of its maintaining itself even through fantastic narrative (a return to telling)." M. Blanchot, *L'Ecriture du Désastre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980) 136. Translation based on that of Anne Smock, *The Writing of the Disaster* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1986) 86.

While I have chosen this particular approach to myth other starting points are possible when discussing the presence of myth in *The Soft Machine*. If one perceives myth as based on a creation or foundation theme then a suitable example can be found in the final chapter of *The Soft Machine*, "Cross The Wounded Galaxies" (127-29), which depicts the evolution of the human species from apes as the evolution of the "muttering sickness," also known as "the spoken word."

[5]W. S. Burroughs, *The Soft Machine* (Paris: Olympia, 1961; New York: Grove, 1962; London: Calder & Boyars, 1968 [revised]).

[6]For Burroughs's account of the discovery of the method and its application, see *The Third Mind* (New York: Viking, 1978); "The Cut-up Method of Brion Gysin," *Re/search* 4/5 (San Francisco, 1982) 35-36; "The Name is Burroughs," *The Adding Machine* 12-14; "It Belongs To The Cucumbers," *The Adding Machine* 53-60; *The Job* 27-32. For examples of the texts produced, see "The Cut-up trilogy" and *The Burroughs File* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1984). For examples of criticism of the technique, see: D. Lodge, "Objections to Burroughs"; A. Friedberg, "'Cut-Ups': A Synema of

the Text"; O. Harris, "Cut-Up Closure," all in *William S. Burroughs at the Front*, ed. J. Skerle and B. Lydenberg (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1991).

[7]W. S. Burroughs, *The Ticket That Exploded* (Paris: Olympia, 1962; New York: Grove, 1967; London: Paladin, 1985).

[8]W. S. Burroughs, *Nova Express* (New York: Grove, 1964).

[9]W. S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* (Paris: Olympia, 1959; New York: Grove, 1962; London: Flamingo, 1993).

[10]Or perhaps we should say at the time of the rewriting of *The Soft Machine*, as here I am working from the 1968 edition which was considerably re-edited. This makes the comments in *The Job* especially relevant as it was produced at roughly the same time as the rewrite of *The Soft Machine*, being first published in France under the title *Entretien avec William Burroughs* in 1969. W. S. Burroughs and D. Odier, *The Job* (New York: Grove, 1974).

[11]See Burroughs, *The Job* 38-48.

[12]Burroughs, *The Job* 21.

[13]Burroughs, *The Job* 199.

[14]Burroughs has cut-up and incorporated texts from Shakespeare, Rimbaud, Eliot, Conrad, Kafka and Fitzgerald among others, in his work. On this aspect of the cut-up technique, see "Les Voleurs," *The Adding Machine* (London: Calder, 1985) 19-21.

[15]P. Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London: New Left Books, 1975; London: Verso, 1988) 265-66. One must handle carefully the links between Burroughs's work and the Dadaists. Burroughs, while acknowledging his debt to the Dadaists, criticises vehemently the efforts of the Dadaists to bring about political change. His criticism seems to rest on two points. Firstly, that the Dadaists remained on the outside of the organs of political power and were therefore powerless, and secondly, their criticisms were too frivolous. In *Nova Express* Burroughs writes: "those dumb rubes playing around with photomontage—Like charging a regiment of tanks with a defective slingshot." In the later work *The Western Lands* he is just as abusive: "*Jeder Mann sein eigener Fussball.* (Every man his own football.) They deserved to lose for such vapid nonsense." *Jedermann sein eigner Fussball* was a Dadaist periodical launched by a group including George Grosz and John Heartfield in February 1919. See *John Heartfield*, ed. Peter Pachnike and Klaus Honnef (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992) 123.

[16]J. M. Bernstein, "The Culture Industry," in T. W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1991) 21.

[17]W. S. Burroughs, "Creative Reading," *The Adding Machine* 43-44.

[18]Barry Miles, *El Hombre Invisible* (London: Virgin, 1992) 140. Burroughs used tape recorders to construct cut-ups by inserting random, in the temporal sense, interruptions and also by inching and splicing tapes. See *Break on through to the grey room* (Brussels: SubRosa, 1986), which includes early tape experiments. *Towers Open Fire, The Cut-Ups*, and *Bill and Tony*, made between 1962 and 1965, were directed by Antony Balch and extended the cut-up to film. These films along with other "cut-up" films are included on the video *Three Films* (Brighton: Temple Press).

[19]Vortex is used in the light of "A Descent into the Maelström" by Poe (*The Complete Poems and Tales of Edgar Allan Poe* [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982] 127-40) where the (scientific) explanation of the workings of the whirlpool are altogether insufficient in describing the torrents and their effect. However, science does come in useful

as a tool for escaping the downward pull of that "abyss." Similarly, attempts to "understand" *The Soft Machine* in the analysis of forms is altogether insufficient and could do nothing but distract the reader from plunging into the textual depths.

However, if the reader wishes to avoid such distasteful events, as being sucked in, there is no easier way than by a study of forms. As Artaud puts it in *Le Théâtre et son Double* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964) 20:

"Et s'il est encore quelque chose d'infernal et de véritablement maudit dans ce temps, c'est de s'attarder artistiquement sur des formes, au lieu d'être comme des suppliciés que l'on brûle et qui font des signes sur leurs bûchers." ["And if there is still one hellish, truly accursed thing in our time, it is our artistic dallying with forms, instead of being like victims burnt at the stake, signalling through the flames."]

The reader of the cut-up becomes the victim of torture, but a delicious one that he calls others to take part in. The protection of "examination of forms" or "critical distance" is pushed aside in order to become victim of the text. We abandon ourselves to the textual attractions, to the geography of the text, its spacings and holes, the folds and juxtapositions, and the encounters, not looking for but stumbling across the witches' house of ourselves in the textual terrain. In this way the motives of reading are in themselves questioned: what do we search for when we read a text: looking for meaning (based on what); looking for story; plot; characters; answers?

The "old man," in "The Descent into the Maelström," experienced the vortex but the cost of that suffering was that "the whole expression of [his] countenance had changed" (139), he came back but he was forever altered. Likewise we can use interpretation to come back into "the" world, but after the vortex nothing seems quite the same.

[20]"Writers at Work: interview with Conrad Knickerbocker," *Paris Review* 35 (1965) 27.

[21]In *The Job* Scientology, the Mayan Control Calendar and advertising are linked. Scientology provides the template for all methods of dismantling control systems, while the mass media "of newspapers, radio, television, magazines form a ceremonial calendar to which all citizens are subjected." Burroughs, *The Job* 44.

[22]Burroughs, *Paris Review* 35 (19654) 48.

[23]Burroughs, *Paris Review* 35 (1965) 30.

[24]Burroughs, "The Beginning is Also the End," *The Burroughs File* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1984) 62.

[25]Burroughs, *The Ticket That Exploded* (Paris: Olympia, 1962; New York: Grove, 1967; London: Paladin, 1985) 113.

[26]Burroughs, *The Ticket That Exploded* 115.

[27]V. Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (New York: McKay, 1957; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981) 232.

[28]Packard 232.

[29]Burroughs, *The Ticket That Exploded* 133-36.

[30]Sublimination is described, though not named, in *The Job* 45. Another notable reference to sublimination in the "cut-up trilogy" is the "Subliminal Kid" who is a character in the Nova police/Nova mob sections of *The Ticket That Exploded* and *Nova Express*.

[31]From the catalogue for an exhibition of Burroughs paintings at Cleto Polcina, Rome, May 1989; quoted in B. Miles, *William S Burroughs: el hombre invisible* (London: Virgin, 1992) 213.

[32]Miles 213. For a discussion of "nagualism," a religious practice based on relations with a familiar, see L. Spence, *The Magic and Mysteries of Mexico* (North Holywood: Newcastle, 1994) 159-71.

[33]From the catalogue for an exhibition of Burroughs paintings at Cleto Polcina, Rome, May 1989; quoted in Miles 213.

[34]Burroughs, *The Ticket That Exploded* 62. Here is another example of the use of Hindu myth, "Maya" being magic illusion, an aspect of the goddess.

[35]Burroughs, *Nova Express* 53.

[36]Burroughs, *Nova Express* 7.

[37]This interpretation of the use of Kali is underlined if one refers to *Cities of the Red Night* (London: Calder, 1981; London: Picador, 1982) where the methods of the thugees are condoned but their alliance to Kali is not, see 117.

[38]Whatever the benevolent side of Kali may be, Burroughs states clearly in his latest work that this is outweighed by her use of the threat of total destruction: "So God had to play his trump card. The Atom Bomb. But was it not Satan who enticed Eve into eating Adam's apple and got them both evicted? Satan miscalculated, or he would not have lost the battle. And now God, like Kali, must resort to Satan's weapon of total destruction." *My Education: A Book of Dreams* (London: Picador, 1995) 181.

[39]See, for example, *The Soft Machine* 13-14, where the establishing of a "protection racket" is made necessary due to the "grocery problem," that is the biological necessity for nutrition.

[40]Unless, of course, negation unto zero can be said to have a meaning.

Connotations
Vol. 5.2-3 (1995/96)

The Myth of the American Adam in Late Mailer

JOHN WHALEN-BRIDGE

Let us begin with the problem of Adam. Lewis's 1955 study, *The American Adam*, explored a variety of nineteenth-century American writings to show that "the American dialogue" has largely been about notions of American innocence, about whether the American self is Adamically new, fallen into the corruption of history, or fortunately fallen. This notion of innocence has been much criticized for its political effects. American identity has long been predicated on the absence of class-conflict. Cultural myths such as the American Adam have been blamed for the specifically American refusal to examine class-conflict that is sometimes called "American Exceptionalism." The American self-concept, the argument goes, masks over class-conflict, since "the simple genuine self against the whole world," to use Emerson's phrase, is by definition a being without class affiliation. Critics of Lewis (and of similar theorists of American culture and identity) have insisted that myths of American innocence function to narrow the American horizon of expectation, specifically excluding political conflict, such as when Russell Reising accuses Lewis of segregating politics from literature in *The Unusable Past: Theory and the Study of American Literature*.

Lewis is faulted for being "ahistorical," since his study of the American dialogue pays no attention to nineteenth-century controversies such as the slavery debates.[1] Whether or not we would agree that Lewis is guilty as charged, the literary criticism his seminal work fostered certainly acquired a sharply ahistorical rhetoric one generation later. In *Radical Innocence* Ihab Hassan discusses some versions of the American Adam as he is reincarnated in an existentialist, alienated, A-bomb afflicted postwar world. Refiguring the opposition between Emerson's "Plain old Adam, the simple genuine self" and "the whole world" against which

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that opposing self was defined, Hassan sees the oppositional nature of the American protagonist as essentially "radical":

> His innocence . . . is a property of the mythic American self, perhaps of every anarchic Self. It is the innocence of a Self that refuses to accept the immitigable rule of reality, including death, an aboriginal Self the radical imperatives of whose freedom cannot be stifled. (6)

This radicalism has nothing to do with political radicalism, however. The word radical in Hassan's usage means something like "profound," and the imperatives driving Hassan's neo-innocent are rooted entirely in psychological rather than social or political self-definition. An "aboriginal Self" claims an identity prior to law and politics.

The radically innocent Adamic character, remaking himself or herself on a daily basis in a proper existential fashion, can be interpreted as a Self from which to develop a political intelligence, since the American Adam is a social outsider. His, or her, status as one beyond the pale makes this apparition uniquely qualified to comprehend the society within.[2] Thus, Adam is an anarchic self, not one governed by party affiliation or any other sense of communal debt. But at the same time, this Adam is most definitely on the outside looking in, an apparently ideal culture critic. For Hassan radical innocence is an indispensable political credential precisely because it offers transcendence of traditional styles of political engagement (those styles that became an embarrassment during the Cold War, it so happens).

The "noble but illusory myth of the American as Adam" functions as a kind of "false consciousness" in the skeptical criticism that follows that of Lewis and Hassan. The image of the American Outsider has in recent years lost authority for those who charge that the tendency to "transcend" quotidian history is "one of the major political effects that the work of American ideology as a whole helps to reinforce" (Kavanagh 313). Leo Marx begins *The Machine in the Garden* with criticisms of American ideologies such as that of the American Adam and cites Richard Hofstadter and Henry Nash Smith to demonstrate ways in which "this ideal has appeared with increasing frequency in the service of a reactionary or false ideology, thereby helping to mask the real problems of an industrial civilization" (7). The pastoral fantasy has of course been

a common mode of escape from the pressures of the real world, and Marx goes on to point out how American Renaissance writers employed the mode as a springboard to escape social and political conflicts that endangered their sense of artistic detachment:

> Our writers, instead of being concerned with social verisimilitude, with manners and customs, have fashioned their own kind of melodramatic, Manichean, all-questioning fable, romance, or idyll, in which they carry us, in a bold leap, beyond everyday social experience into an abstract realm of morality and metaphysics. (343)

American literary mythology, in sum, has often been used as an escape from the clash of the world. It directs our attention to the problems of the individual rather than toward the obligations of the individual to the community, and Ihab Hassan's identification of Lewis's Adamic self with the "Anarchic self" certainly suggests the sort of individual entitlement that American literary myths can be made to support.

With these charges in mind, it may be a surprise to remember that Lewis called for a kind of Adamic resistance to Cold War containment: "Ours is an age of containment; we huddle together and shore up defenses; both our literature and our public conduct suggest that exposure to experience is certain to be fatal" (Lewis 196). Lewis's epilogue, "Adam in the Age of Containment," is an explicit consideration of the relationship between American literary myths and political culture. While it is certainly true that some writers "light out for the territory" to escape political conflict in their work, there is also a political strain within the Adamic tradition.

Postwar critics and novelists alike have celebrated the freedom of the individual over any sense of group affiliation that individual might feel. Unlike the Popular Front writers of the 1930s, postwar writers who have used fiction as a mode of political resistance have tended to fashion "parties of one," and Norman Mailer's Left Conservatism of the mid-1960s, like Henry Adams's earlier "Conservative Christian Anarchism," can hardly be said to have broken the "one man, one party" rule.[3] No postwar fiction was more committed to a group political action than Mailer's *Armies of the Night*—even though that book expends half of its energy distancing its author from the social movement with which it

is inextricably linked! Mailer's career exemplifies the ways in which the postwar American Adam is very much a divided self.

It is a commonplace of Mailer criticism to note that he follows in the Adamic tradition as defined by Lewis.[4] Readers of Mailer's work have noted his tendency to regenerate typically American voices in a book-by-book fashion, but so far there has not been a satisfactory theory to explain what this tendency means when regarded as an overall design.[5] If we note that Mailer consistently takes ahistorical American selves and transfers them to explicitly political situations, we recognize that there is a method to his stylistic derangements.

In *Harlot's Ghost*, Mailer reworks the supposedly apolitical Adamic mythos to reveal the "invisible government" of the CIA. Adamic ideology, it has been argued, stands between American novelists and political fiction of the first rank. Whether it is referred to as Adamic ideology, American individualism, or pastoralism, the argument is that the American insistence on the primacy of the individual experience and the measurement of that experience in terms of "innocence" will inhibit or thwart the creation of political novels.[6]

The American narrative in its cruder forms has often expressed the belief that we Americans are somehow not to blame for the fallenness and impurity of history.[7] There is always a time, further back, when there was entitlement without condition and when one could name the world with assurance.[8] It is currently fashionable to condemn authors who uncritically reflect this belief, and Donald Pease has recently accused Mailer of presenting "official American history" in his novels rather than something subversive like New Historicism (Pease 1990). This is a fairly odd claim, since in Mailer's writings there is never a clear line between the fictions and myths with which we construct our national identity and the political ideologies that struggle for prevalence in our society. In this way Mailer is often doing what Richard Slotkin has said the literary critic must do: "We can only demystify our history by historicizing our myths—that is, by treating them as human creations, produced in a specific historical time and place, in response to the contingencies of social and personal life" (80).

It would be a mistake simply to read Harry Hubbard as Adam-before-the-Fall, and the CIA as the fallen world, strewn with apple cores,

although Harry Hubbard does begin his career as a spy from a position of *naïveté*. At the beginning of his autobiographical narrative Hubbard knows little or nothing about the inner workings of the CIA, and in this sense he is Adamic, but this phase is very brief. When he quickly gets caught in an internecine bureaucratic struggle, his patron Harlot gets him out of trouble by changing his code-name so rapidly that Harry's antagonized superior officer will never know who to blame. Harry Hubbard's introduction to CIA life is, then, an inversion of the simple, referential language of Adam before Apple. Agency life trains Hubbard to suspect every memo, every individual word, of falsehood or indirection. In complicating his Adamic protagonist's innocence, Mailer has moved beyond the fictions of pure opposition, of narcissistic antipathy toward the fallen world of political reality.

In placing his American Adam within "the Company," Mailer reveals the ideological similarities between the myth of the American Adam and that of the American Century: both are organized groups of ideas that entitle and empower *American* activity. Both sets of ideas necessarily conceal the self-interest behind this activity, instead creating the belief that an "unfallen" motive underlies the endeavor. On the individual level, the self-concept of Adamic innocence promotes individualistic activity by freeing the simple genuine individual from the consequences of social corruption: the individual is an exception to social rules. On the national level a similar idea is at work: the American nation is capable of its greatest political debauchery when it believes itself to be the simple genuine democracy against the whole world (Steel 5). As Noam Chomsky and other radical critics of American foreign policy have pointed out repeatedly, the American media will always depict American invasions of other countries (Nicaragua and Grenada are recent examples) as a *defense* of an American value rather than an offensive attack (59-82). The cameras will focus on a simple American self (a medical student from Grenada, a lone soldier drinking coffee), rather than the enemy dead. Adamic ideology is typically used to portray the American agent as underdog, and Mailer is short-circuiting just such an ideological construction when he makes his latest American Adam a CIA agent.

During the Cold War, it has sometimes seemed that the American Adam is a double-agent in the garden. The degree to which a protagonist has individual freedom determines how much "agency" that character has, and thus how much a character may represent a general resistance to institutions that threaten individual freedom such as the Central Intelligence Agency. The individual is political agency in its most decentralized form. At the same time, the containment of dissent within the Adamic individual insures that no collective resistance to institutions such as the CIA may form. Mailer has attempted to comprehend this figure, the harlot in the garden. His fictional interpretation of American intelligence work does more than any other work of literature to help readers gain access to "the imagination of the State."[9]

In *Harlot's Ghost* ends and beginnings become indistinguishable, confounding the simple myths of origins on which the American national identity is founded. Two manuscripts form *Harlot's Ghost*, and of course Omega precedes Alpha. The Omega manuscript has a gothic urgency that accelerates until a mansion actually burns down in romantic fashion. The narrative which ends up in the land of Poe begins in the Garden of Eden: "Even guidebooks for tourists seek to describe this virtue: 'The island of Mount Desert, fifteen miles in diameter, rises like a fabled city from the sea. The natives call it Acadia, beautiful and awesome'" (4). Harry parodies the language of guidebooks in this tongue-in-cheek description to demonstrate his own complex attitude: America is at once a land where great purity can be seen and experienced, but it is also a cultural landscape that sustains almost invincible dreams of innocence in spite of great evidence to the contrary—a land where almost any wrong can be forgotten. The island under Hubbard's Keep is haunted by the memory of the Abnaki Indians of the Algonquin tribe, reminders in the first pages of *Harlot's Ghost* that the Adamic myth can be a cloak of innocence to hide a more sinister history: "The ghosts of these Indians may no longer pass through our woods, but something of their old sorrows and pleasures join the air. Mount Desert is more luminous than the rest of Maine" (4). The opening pages of the novel, so reminiscent of the travel guide's tone of innocent enjoyment, is troubled by ghosts, specifically ghosts that precede Adam, be he American or Hebrew.

Ancient Evenings and *Harlot's Ghost* both travel back to a time before Adam to indicate the historicity of the Adamic mythos.

Just when it seems that Mailer's narrator is going to see the CIA through Acadia-shaded glasses, the chapter ends with an italicized passage in which Harry Hubbard, in March of 1984, is fleeing from the United States to Moscow, where he hopes to find a still living Harlot: *"Due for arrival in London in another few hours, I felt obliged to read the rest of Omega, all of one hundred and sixty-six pages of typescript, after which I would tear up the sheets and flush away as many of them as the limited means of the British Airways crapper on this aircraft would be able to gulp into itself"* (11). The stylistic shift (reminiscent of the shift from the well-cured style of the first book of *Ancient Evenings* to the obscene gravy of the second book) conditions our reading of any Adamic or otherwise idealized perceptions in the manuscripts that follow.

By carefully separating earlier and later perspectives in this way, Mailer's CIA novel introduces the Adamic self into Cold War America. The Adamic myth must of course be adapted to the realities of CIA life. "'Oh, darling, I love giving people names. At least, people I care about. That's the only way we're allowed to be promiscuous. Give each other hordes of names'" (21). Kittredge, Harry Hubbard's wife, comments on the penchant for nicknames, acronyms, and code-names in Agency life. Naming is, for Kittredge, a compensation for the sexual power she has given up to obtain her position in society and in the CIA. This sublimation of sex into language is one of many reflections of the Protestant ethos that shapes life in the Agency.

The Adamic power to name is the privilege of agents in general, but higher ranking namers approach the Biblical power of the original Adam: "It was Allen Dulles who first christened him thus" (21). In naming each other, Mailer's characters partially manifest the Adamic entitlement of the Garden of Eden. They are people who presume they have political power: "Did people in Intelligence shift names about the way others move furniture around a room?" (22).

R. W. B. Lewis described the Parties of Hope, Despair, and Irony as the choices available to the American writer who wished to take a position in the American dialogue, but Adamic entitlement in the CIA is a more slippery affair. When Harry Hubbard, who has just spun out

on an icy road, calls home to his wife Kittredge, she says "'Are you really all right? Your voice sounds as if you just shaved off your Adam's apple'" (24). Unbeknownst to Kittredge, Harry has betrayed her sexually and is returning from a visit to his mistress. Just after Harry's car went into a skid and then mysteriously righted itself, Harry quotes *Paradise Lost* to himself, as if to say Adamic entitlement and paradise lost exist side-by-side in the CIA. The ideology of American innocence is precisely what underwrites American transgression.

The coexistence and interdependence of good and evil runs through Mailer's work but receive supreme expression in *Harlot's Ghost*. Mailer begins this theme with the name of the novel, as we note from "Harlot." The word apparently has nothing to do with the "innocence" that we usually associate with American Adamicism, but if we track it to its root, we see that Mailer's Harlot and Lewis's American Adam have some rough similarities. The word harlot descends from the Middle English *herlot*, meaning "rogue" or "vagabond." In this sense, the harlot has a freedom from ethical, economic, or other kinds of historical constraints, and in this freedom the harlot resembles the adventurous Adam whose absence Lewis laments in the final pages of *The American Adam*.

The coexistence of Adam-before-the-Fall and Adam-Fallen is a puzzling theme in Mailer's work, since to understand it we must fuse Adamic linguistic confidence and existential dread. Mailer insists that our moral action is predicated on a Kierkegaardian uncertainty, and his novels develop this moral insight in a variety of ways.[10] As uncertainty is the defining condition of the individual, Mailer shows it to be the formative condition of the CIA; it is certainly at the heart of *Harlot's Ghost*, a thirteen-hundred page novel that ends with the words "TO BE CONTINUED." This is a shocking way to end the novel. The reader confronts a formal uncertainty, since we do not know if the narrative is over, if Mailer is pulling our collective leg, if he is in fact continuing and planning to finish the trilogy he began with *Ancient Evenings*, or if he will simply write a sequel to *Harlot's Ghost* that will take us from the Kennedy assassination, through Watergate, and up to the Iran/Contra scandal and beyond. The formal uncertainty reverberates throughout the novel, since, at the novel's inconclusive conclusion, Harry wonders from inside his Moscow hotel room if he will find Harlot alive or not.

Has Harry Hubbard defected? The novel denies us all the assurance provided by the insider-formulas and neat conclusions of spy thrillers. Mailer maintains uncertainty after Harry becomes a fully-initiated member of the organization, which is the only way Harry can still be a "simple genuine self against the whole world" after he has been an integral part of attempts to assassinate a head of state.

Uncertainty is one way to keep the idea of innocence alive; the problems of writing and interpretation are another. That is, he can fashion an innocent self, though that self is clearly guilty of crimes against civil liberty, if he becomes a writer. On the written page he can deploy selves at will. He can begin in youth (as he does in the Alpha manuscript) and approach the complex world of the CIA as a beginner. Despite prohibitions, Harry has written about the CIA. Thus, the prohibition against writing about the CIA becomes another source of innocence, since it pits Harry (simple genuine self) against the CIA (Harry's whole world):

> I had navigated my way across half of a large space (my past) and if I put it in that fashion, it is because I did not see how I could publish the manuscript, this Alpha manuscript as I called it—working title: *The Game*. Of course, it did not matter how it was christened. By the pledge I had taken on entering the Agency, it was simply not publishable. The legal office of the Agency would never permit this work to find a public audience. Nonetheless, I wished *The Game* to shine in a bookstore window. I had simple literary desires. (35)

Simple literary desires. The simple, genuine writer against the legal office does not even claim power to name (christen) the manuscript. He resigns himself to the fact that he must be a secret writer, that is, one whose discourse can be neatly divided into public and private. Writing is the perfect expression of Harry's double-consciousness, since the individualistic and defiant act of writing gives him claim to innocence even as he writes the story of his own complicity in matters such as political assassination. Mailer at once engages in and subverts Adamic ideology.

However cynical it may seem to speak of American innocence in the midst of the CIA, Mailer's choices are guided by his belief in a far worse alternative to this semi-cynical situation. The best argument for the Adamic viewpoint that Mailer offers the postwar world is that it is an alternative to cynicism. Cynicism as a world-view is ultimately

contemptuous of history, and this is especially true of political fiction. For this reason Mailer rejects cynicism, the absurd, and other broadly ironic world views. Mailer's literary and political choices may be understood in part as a life-long refusal to accede to the postmodern condition that Mailer refers to as "the Absurd." This refusal is the key to any understanding of Mailer's uncertain influence on contemporary American literature, his fluctuating political attitudes, and his sometimes startling artistic choices. To postmodern critics Mailer often seems naive precisely because he refuses the ironic pleasures that are, say, Nabokov's main harvest, but Mailer has given much thought to the philosophical implications of authorial irony. While his position has altered over the years, it has always been consistent with his literary and political aims. That is to say, Mailer has always resisted the temptations of irony as a full-blown world view for reasons that are inherently political.

The thoroughly cynical political novel offers an imaginary stairway to transcendence. Because it results so frequently in a morally crude vision of history, Robert Alter dismissed the cynical tendency of recent American political fiction:

> If the conventional political novel tends to assume that, despite troubling agitations of the surface, all's well with the Republic, what the adversary political novel of the past two decades has generally assumed is that the Republic is rotten to the core. (Alter, *Motives* 39)

If one *knows* that government is "rotten to the core," why detain oneself with the messy details of history or the delicacies of art? Alter's complaint suggests a new meaning to Adorno's notion that poetry after the Holocaust is barbaric. We can understand the comment aesthetically rather than ethically if we believe, after the death camps and the totalitarian organization of modern societies, that History has revealed its apocalyptic face. If we *know* the meaning of history in an absolute sense, fine distinctions, formerly the poet's province, have become outdated. The only appropriate poetry in this barbaric age will be barbaric poetry.

In the days of "apocalypse now," the argument continues, artistic subtlety is a form of nostalgia. In the days of Moloch, poets may howl. Mailer evokes Nazi genocide to justify the excesses of the hipster in the

first sentence of "The White Negro," and he howls against Cold War conformity when he writes, in *Advertisements for Myself*, that "the shits are killing us." Mailer's collection of essay, short story, semi-poetry, and less classifiable forms of self-awareness is a "Howl" in prose. Like Ginsberg's early poetry, Mailer in the 1950s adopted the attitude of the outraged outsider.[11] It can be considered true that the writer's barbaric yelp from the rooftops is the sweet and fitting response to the age if and only if the historical backgrounds of which we speak can properly be called "apocalyptic." In America, where we have economic slumps, periodic foreign wars, and above-average scores in terms of old age, sickness, and death, we see writers oddly scrambling for personal affliction. We all know that "writers need to suffer," and this notion follows directly from the entitlement granted to the Storyteller who has suffered. We pause to hear the story of the car accident or the dramatic fall. Catastrophe confers authority.

In the post-war period the apocalyptic mood has received its greatest support from the revelations of Auschwitz. Against such horrors, what can a writer *not* say? Totalitarianism has, in the same manner, been the source of power for many Cold War era political novelists.[12] Willie Stark, ominously, has a forelock in *All the King's Men*. General Cummings predicts an Americanized version of Fascism in *The Naked and the Dead*, and Lieutenant Hearn is proven to be short-sighted in his belief that Liberals will band together to form an adequate response. William Burroughs's anti-heroes are chased across the galaxy by fascistical Divisionists and innumerable other political forces dedicated to exterminating whatever is eccentric or individual. Billy Pilgrim finds a "world elsewhere" in Trafalmador. American versions of the Holocaust and of totalitarian oppression have been adapted to American themes, particularly to the myth of the American Adam. We see this especially in "The White Negro," an essay that justifies the murder of an innocent man by contextualizing an act of violence as an act against corrupt society. The binary logic operating in the essay and many postwar fictions recreates innocence in opposition to corrupt society: the corruption of the world empowers "Adam" to act, and an insane world entitles the opposing self *completely*. Thus, Adamic individualism is, in many 1960s texts, converted into a Faustian hunger for power.

This kind of post-war Adamic entitlement does not sit well with Alter. He expresses irritation with American political fiction in the days after Vietnam and Watergate not because the literary form is a spring of protest, but rather because it is a kind of protest that will settle for nothing less than pure opposition: by casting the Republic in an absolutely diabolical light (Alter argues that Coover does this in *The Public Burning*), the novelist forsakes the moral variegations of history. The aesthetic result is often somewhat melodramatic, a chiaroscuro of good and evil in which the authorial voice is conveniently identified with the forces of Good.[13] Almost never, complains Alter, does the writer have to measure politically offensive policies or practices against more palatable ones. The writer is most content, and most empowered, on the outside. But to judge politics from the outside, to judge without ever taking a positive stand that can itself be subject to criticism, is cynical. Those who agree with Alter's demand that political writers be historically responsible will want to avoid being charmed by the sirens of Cynicism.

Mailer picks up American politics by the "affirmative" handle, though the nature of this affirmation becomes increasingly qualified throughout his work. In strictly political terms, his novels can be shown to profess a belief in the "balance of powers," which is perhaps the most intellectually defensible tenet of American civil religion. Nonetheless, his books hardly suggest that all is right with the republic. Mailer agrees that everything has two handles, one good and one evil, but for Mailer there is no Emersonian confidence about our ability to choose properly between them. Mailer's novels put into play the most unlikely Manichean scenarios—he can find gods battling in the sexual act as well as in a grain of sand—but it is important to realize that the greatest failure of human life is not to enlist on the "wrong side" of the vast moral battle, but rather to refuse to face the Kierkegaardian uncertainties that are the painful foundation of human existence.

Despite his assorted comments about "American schizophrenia" over the years, Mailer's obsession with the self-division in *An American Dream*, *Why Are We in Vietnam?*, and *Armies of the Night*, and more recently in *Ancient Evenings* and *Harlot's Ghost*, does not merely attempt to reflect a multitude of American voices. Mailer is concerned, as Lewis suggested

the artist must be, to capture the dialogue of American life. Mailer not only tries to imagine conversations that matter politically, but he also tries to enter into these dialogues. Critics such as Richard Poirier have long ago suggested that we see Mailer's writing as a huge work in progress. This work is a democratic fantasy in which individual citizens engage in a dialogue with power, and this huge, sprawling work is, even now, quite possibly, "TO BE CONTINUED." As the line between life and death is intentionally unclear in novels like *Ancient Evenings* and *Harlot's Ghost*, there is also great uncertainty about the continued health of American democracy. Has the CIA established itself as a power unto itself, free of other governmental checks and balances? Maybe.

Mailer has attempted to communicate with political powers directly, and his imaginary personas have petitioned God, gods, pharaohs, presidents. Thrones, powers, dominions: the Satanic machinery of *Paradise Lost* also has a necessary place in this essentially mysterious world. The puritan division of good from evil is a condition that Mailer has worked through, and his late novels are built on the interdependence of Heaven and slime.

We see this interdependence in that moment in the Omega manuscript where Harry Hubbard almost dies—or may have died. Having almost driven over a cliff—he is not certain that he is still alive—on the way home from his earthy mistress' trailer, Harry Hubbard realizes in great fright that

> "*Millions of creatures*," I said aloud to the empty car—actually said it aloud!—"*walk the earth unseen, both when we wake and when we sleep*," after which, trundling along at thirty miles an hour, too weak and exhilarated to stop, I added in salute to the lines just recited, "Milton, *Paradise Lost*," and thought of how Chloe and I had gotten up from bed in her trailer on the outskirts of Bath a couple of hours ago and had gone for a farewell drink to a cocktail lounge with holes in the stuffing of the red leatherette booths.

Millions of creatures . . . Manichean battles. Intolerable to Mailer is the separation of gods and devils, of the high and the low, of the heavenly from the red leatherette. His whole career has been a struggle to discover the meeting place of God and the Devil, to get Ishmael and Ahab to sit at the same table, to get readers to talk back to the "electronic

malignity" of the television set. Each one of these conflicts could serve as a metaphor for the others in Mailer's work. His work declares the futility of any search for "a virgin land" or "a world elsewhere" beyond political consequences—even if that world elsewhere is understood only as the private individual in opposition to society.

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NOTES

[1]In *The Unusable Past* Russell Reising discusses Lewis as one of the "founding fathers" of American literary studies who excludes social and political reality from canonical American literature (107-22).

[2]In Carolyn Porter's formulation, Emerson initiates a mode of *detached* pragmatism: "when Emerson becomes a 'transparent eyeball,' joyfully announcing 'I am nothing; I see all,' he articulates the position of both the transcendent visionary poet (to whose role he himself aspires) and the neutral scientific observer (whose role he wishes to counteract). That is, the detached observer, like the visionary seer, appears to himself to occupy a position outside the world he confronts" (xii).

[3]Frank Lentricchia makes the generalization that in America "parties of one" have flourished in *Criticism and Social Change* (6).

[4]See especially Laura Adams's *Existential Battles: The Growth of Norman Mailer* and Joseph Wenke's *Mailer's America*.

[5]Barry Leeds's *The Structured Vision of Norman Mailer*; Michael Cowan's "The Americanness of Norman Mailer"; and Gordon O. Taylor's "Of Adams and Aquarius." Laura Adams argues in *Existential Battles* that Mailer is *not* part of the American tradition as defined by Lewis (13).

[6]On the common ground of critics such as R. W. B. Lewis, Leo Marx, Edwin Fussell, and Leslie Fiedler, see Gerald Graff, "American Criticism Left and Right" in *Ideology and Classic American Literature*: "In one way or another, all these theories tend to see American literature in terms of some form of escape from social categories. . . . . these theories of the American element in literature actually make many of the same points in different vocabularies. (Roughly, Adamic innocence equals pastoral equals frontier equals evasion of heterosexual love, over and against which are the machine, coextensive with genteel society, coextensive with women and domestic love, etc. The collision results in tragedy, symbolism, etc.)" (106-107).

[7]Consider the mythical American hero in the form of popular culture's most famous Vietnam War veteran, John Rambo. He is a war veteran and has killed many, but he exemplifies what might be called "relative innocence." In one of the *Rambo* film sequels, the hero tricks Vietnamese soldiers into following him into a tall, dry field,

which Rambo then torches. The men are burned to death, but since we are watching the lone individual as he defends himself against an angry, superior force, the action of burning the Vietnamese is far more "innocent" than, say, the action of dropping napalm on Vietnamese civilians. When President Bush referred to "the Vietnam Syndrome" during his 1992 re-election attempt, he was calling for a reinvention of American innocence of a similar sort. Relative innocence, like Hassan's radical innocence, is non-innocence given an imaginary form of social sanction.

[8]American writing, as distinguished from the songs of this continent before the first contact with Europe, begins with and is characterized by Adamic entitlement. The power to name and political dominion are each assumed by the same poetic flourish: Columbus renamed the rivers without concern that the native peoples called them by different names. See Bartolomé de Las Casas's "Journal of the First Voyage to America" (70-80).

[9]"The imagination of the state" is Mailer's main concern in *Harlot's Ghost*. It is the title of narrator Harry Hubbard's unfinished work within the fictional world of the novel, and it was also the subject of an international conference organized by Mailer during his term as PEN president. While writers such as Donald Barthelme responded positively to the topic, saying that the imagination of the state and that of the writer "are in radical conflict all over the world," the South African novelist Nadine Gordimer objected that the state had no imagination since imagination is "private and individual." But if the writer is alienated from the state precisely because the state is certain "it is always right," as Gordimer claimed, then the state is in some sense an entity with an imagination. For details on the conference and its various controversies, see Rollyson (338-49).

[10]George Alfred Schrader has a much more disparaging view of Mailer's Kierkegaardian aspect. His essay "Norman Mailer and the Despair of Defiance" (in Braudy, 82-95) is highly critical of Mailer's existentialism, but I would argue that Schrader's essay describes the early Mailer. First published in 1961, it renders the philosophical corollaries to Mailer's immature Adamicism: "He identifies with the hipster both because the White Negro is in full-scale rebellion against civilization (defiant) and unleashes the life-giving force of primitive emotion. The very notion of the White Negro symbolizes the opposition between civilization (White) and instinctual passion (Negro). It is not only a dialectical but a *contradictory* idea in that rage and rebellion derive their force and meaning from civilized passion and can by no act of violence gain reentry into the innocence of immediacy. Mailer refuses to accept original sin as a fact of human life and would undo the Fall of mankind. He will, if need be, carry the human race back to the Garden of Eden on his own shoulders—even if he must tread upon all the edifices of civilization to do it. The courage he wants is heroic, epic, Promethean, but, also, futile." In later work such as *Ancient Evenings* (1983) and *Harlot's Ghost*, Mailer becomes increasingly aware of the insufficiency of the absolute Adamic separation of individual and society, but this realization does not lead him to abandon the Adamic metaphors through which the specifics of American identity have been constructed.

[11]To some readers he seemed to exploit the Holocaust, fifties conformity, and literary gentility for the sense of entitlement he can garner. In his critical yet essentially sympathetic essay (Baldwin calls it a "love letter"), Baldwin points out that Mailer very often plays the "bad boy." By pretending to be an outsider, a "hipster," the misbehaving insider gives other insiders a sense that they know the "real world"

of the outside. See "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy" in Braudy 66-81. Our judgment of Mailer's work as a whole will likely hinge on whether we are convinced that he has gathered power from various sources for ethically honorable or for spurious reasons.

[12]For a discussion of totalitarianism as the theoretical anchor of Cold War discourse, see William Pietz's "The 'Post-Colonialism' of Cold War Discourse."

[13]Novelists such as E. L. Doctorow have answered Alter's criticism by charging that his (neo-conservative) complaint stems from an inability to tolerate political criticism or dissent when it comes from American authors (Doctorow 85-86).

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Connotations
Vol. 5.2-3 (1995/96)

Myths of Identity in Derek Walcott's "The Schooner *Flight*"

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1.

The protagonist of "The Schooner *Flight*" describes himself, in a passage which has become well-known, as

> a rusty head sailor with sea-green eyes
> that they nickname Shabine, the patois for
> any red nigger . . .
> I'm just a red nigger who love the sea,
> I had a sound colonial education,
> I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,
> and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation.[1]

Perhaps more than any other of Walcott's poems, "The Schooner *Flight*" has provided critics and reviewers with phrases to characterize larger pieces of the poet's work, or even his project overall. Rita Dove titles her review of Walcott's *Collected Poems 1948-1984*, "'Either I'm Nobody or I'm a Nation'"; Paul Breslin's review takes its title from a later part of the poem: "'I Met History Once, But He Ain't Recognize Me': The Poetry of Derek Walcott." Rei Terada finds a chapter title for her book on Walcott: "The Pain of History Words Contain."[2] This poem has come to serve as a representative or even defining moment in the *corpus* of Walcott's work, articulating central preoccupations and methods. As Shabine's self-description suggests, the poem's protagonist claims a kind of representative status as well. Either "nobody" or "a nation," in a single phrase he suggests identification with Odysseus, the primal sailor of the Mediterranean who also named himself as "nobody", and stakes out a claim for his particular Caribbean identity (Dutch, English, African) *as* a nation, one without borders or a name other than the vernacular

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nickname he shares with its citizens. Terada comments, Shabine "in his famous formulation . . . is at once 'any red nigger,' a 'nobody,' and an Aeneas who contains his country's future" (113).

"The Schooner *Flight*" folds together local history (the collision of European and African in the Caribbean, the aftermath of a racially mixed colonial society) and mythic history—Homer's and Vergil's myths of national origin, of the voyage as shaping, redemptive ordeal. To put it differently, the poem is negotiating between local history as such and a local history—of the Caribbean or the Mediterranean—claiming universal shape, meaning, and importance. History, narratives and understandings of the past, is the method, the topic, and the crux of this poem. *SF* begins in *medias res*, and doubles back repeatedly (the first section ends, "let me tell you how this business begin"). The voyage forward is punctuated with memories or visions of the past. Walcott constructs his long lyric on the model of an epic (as he was to do at greater length in *Omeros*, more recently), marshaling the resources of a tradition, and this is true both of the poem's recursive structure and its passages of densely allusive language. Topically, the poem is profoundly concerned with the ways the present encodes the past: in social arrangements, in language, in genetic inheritance, however occulted. It is because Shabine is of mixed descent that he has no place in a society in which black pride follows white power, and must go wander on the sea; the descent which denies him a conventional identity (ancestors who acknowledge him, a place in one society or another) by that denial leaves him virtually anonymous, with all the advantages as symbol and disadvantages for life so entailed. The landscape and seascape through which Shabine and the *Flight* travel are layered with a history of violence across racial and national lines, and the obtrusion of that history into Shabine's consciousness forms a good deal of the narrative.

If Shabine is the product of history, the weight given to him suggests that he is something for the future as well, in that he first names an identity shared by many. In giving *a* name, "Shabine," to that nation as yet nameless and outside of history, the poem offers itself as a founding myth of Caribbean identity, a myth for the hybrid self now made to know, possess and give voice to his own history. The project

is not a small one. What kind of myth, then, does this poem make? What kind of Shabine does it give us?

2.

"The Schooner *Flight*" begins with expulsion and weeping. A hint of leaving Paradise behind ("I . . . watch the sky burn / above Laventille pink as the gown / in which the woman I left was sleeping")—more clearly, though, a sense of Shabine shaking the dust from off his feet, the just man separating himself from the unrighteous: "They had started to poison my soul." If the landscape of line 1 ("idle August, while the sea soft") sounds idyllic, its *otium* translates into a lethal stasis: Shabine "stood like a stone," and his "dry neighbour . . . look through me like I was dead." In the landscape so surveyed, even nature looks man-made and tacky, the sea "rippling like galvanize," the stars "nail holes . . . in the sky roof." Nature is not only reified but divided: the wind "interfere with the trees."

If the poem's early landscapes are stagnant, we are evidently meant to connect this stasis to the overwhelming pressure of the past. Shabine dives for salvage through a sea

> . . . so choke with the dead
> that when I would melt in emerald water,
> whose ceiling rippled like a silk tent,
> I saw them corals: brain, fire, sea-fans,
> dead-men's-fingers, and then, the dead men.
> I saw that the powdery sand was their bones
> ground white from Senegal to San Salvador (349).

The dead choke the water in which the living try to swim. This is a sea which holds the past thickly in suspension; yet despite or because of this density or pressure of the suspended dead, the sea is also a place of visionary insight. Here, in the first of the poem's hallucinations of history, Shabine "sees" that what appear to be bits of sand or coral are really bones, spread along the sea-lanes between the Caribbean and Africa: he sees the traces of the Middle Passage.

The sea contains a human past, which becomes visible here to Shabine; yet the dead suspended in Walcott's ocean are not only Shabine's

predecessors as Caribbean man but also his predecessors as poet. The passage echoes Ariel's song in *The Tempest*: "Of his bones are coral made, / Those are pearls which were his eyes, / Nothing of him that doth fade, / But doth suffer a sea-change, / Into something rich and strange." Shabine reverses the Shakespearean transformation, recognizing sand and coral (no pearls here) as the bones of the dead. In *The Tempest*, Ariel's song mocks Alonso's grief for his son, believed drowned, with the proffer of a mere body made "rich and strange" in its dying. Here, drowning is deaestheticized and de-particularized: these bones are the traces of a long history. The passage both echoes and turns Shakespeare, playing on ideas of mourning and fetishistic attachment to the body which the poem engages elsewhere—and in its context, it registers the pressure, if not unequivocally the oppression, of literary ancestors on Shabine's effort to salvage something of value from the past.

In this visionary sea, with its intense clarity and density, manifests along with the traces of a larger past a personal history divided and incapable of moving forward.

> The pain in my heart for Maria Concepcion,
> the hurt I had done to my wife and children,
> was worse than the bends. In the rapturous deep
> there was no cleft rock where my soul could hide
> like the boobies each sunset, no sandbar of light
> where I could rest, like the pelicans know . . . (349).

The dilemma set up for Shabine in the opening sections of the poem is a curious one. Diving, he has a vision of God, and a "far voice" tells him, "If you leave her, I shall give you the morning star." The imperative, however, is simply to "leave her," not to return to married life; it is voiced against what appears less an inability to *choose* (between Maria Concepcion, the wife and children) than an inability to *release*, to let go. Indeed, Shabine's attempt to comply simply replaces Maria Concepcion with other lovers: "when I left the madhouse I tried other women but, once they stripped naked, their spiky cunts bristled like sea-eggs and I couldn't dive" (350). He is pressed to abandon this love which has divided him "from my children, flesh of my flesh," not for integration but for a further division from that body which he mourns just as body:

> I ain't want her
> dressed in the sexless light of a seraph,
> I want those round brown eyes like a marmoset, and
> till the day when I can lean back and laugh,
> those claws that tickled my back on sweating
> Sunday afternoons, like a crab on wet sand (347).

Shabine's sin, or his failure, is not infidelity, or not only infidelity; rather, it is unbreakable attachment to what must be left behind. That attachment is articulated as a form of failed mourning. As the *Flight* sails at the poem's opening, Shabine laments that

> . . . Maria Concepcion was all my thought
> watching the sea heaving up and down
> as the port side of dories, schooners, and yachts
> was painted afresh by the strokes of the sun
> signing her name with every reflection;
> I knew when dark-haired evening put on
> her bright silk at sunset, and, folding the sea,
> sidled under the sheet with her starry laugh,
> that there'd be no rest, there'd be no forgetting.
> Is like telling mourners round the graveside
> about resurrection, they want the dead back . . . (346).

As lover, Shabine imagines himself bound to a dead past, immune to the promise of a regenerate future; he looks back to Maria Concepcion like a mourner fixed at graveside, grieving for a body which will not be glorified.

For my reading of the poem, preoccupied with its historical and mythic dimensions, Shabine's engagement with Maria Concepcion is most crucial as symptom. She reappears briefly in section 9 as the proponent of a cyclopean fortune-telling system whose dream predicts the poem's climactic storm and its imagery ("whales and a storm") but can't interpret his deeply archetypal dream of "three old women featureless as silkworms stitching my fate" (357)—in the poem's concluding section, we see her at the vanishing point, "drifting away" to marry the ocean, "till she was gone." Something gets worked out between these points of attachment and release, and evidently it is worked out not *with* Maria Concepcion but elsewhere, on a voyage where in order to be freed from

destructive loves, from the body, from memory Shabine is brought to encounter the whole of a national past, to meet over and over again with history.

Shabine's departure, however fortuitous for the project of leaving Maria Concepcion, is motivated in lines which take us back to the poem's ambitions as a kind of national epic.

> I had no nation now but the imagination.
> After the white man, the niggers didn't want me
> when the power swing to their side.
> The first chain my hands and apologize "History";
> the next said I wasn't black enough for their pride (350).

"History" is proposed as another name for stasis and repetition, what immobilizes Shabine and what makes alternatives to chaining his hands impossible or invisible. Only a few lines further, that laconic apology, "History," is personified as an occulted ancestor; if history is the problem for Shabine, it is also evidently the source.

> I met History once, but he ain't recognize me.
> . . . .
> I confront him and shout, 'Sir, is Shabine!
> They say I'se your grandson. You remember Grandma,
> your black cook, at all?' The bitch hawk and spat.
> A spit like that worth any number of words.
> But's all them bastards have left us: words (350).

Shabine insistently claims an *affiliation* with History. But this history turns out to be not so much the narrative he seeks (why you are chained, or the story of my black cook) as a silence. History refuses to perform its function: will not remember, will not speak, will not deliver a narrative of origins or trace the linkage of the present to the past. It is at this moment—disavowed by History—that Shabine voices the double loss of faith which seems to be at the center of the poem. "I no longer believed in the revolution./ I was losing faith in the love of my woman." Under the malevolent gaze of History, the hopes for communal or individual renewal wither. Yet even here, Shabine's rebuff by History leads not to a repudiation of the past, or a turn towards creating more

viable futures, but to a renewed desire for history, and for narratives more true and/or less enervating than those of the spaghetti Westerns which play at the close of this section, "Shabine Leaves the Republic."

Shabine wants and even needs a narrative about the past, yet History itself won't give him one. What happens next speaks tellingly to the poem's strategies overall: Shabine's desire for ancestral history finds spectacular fulfillment in the vision of a whole flotilla of ghost ships reenacting the collective past. Yet the passage which ushers in the vision of history is one of the poem's most purely lyrical, and *least* historical, moments, brief enough to quote in full.

> Dusk. The *Flight* passing Blanchisseuse.
> Gulls wheel like from a gun again,
> and foam gone amber that was white,
> lighthouse and star start making friends,
> down every beach the long day ends,
> and there, on that last stretch of sand,
> on a beach bare of all but light,
> dark hands start pulling in the seine
> of the dark sea, deep, deep inland (351-2).

The voice of "The *Flight* passing Blanchisseuse" gives us a context of harmony and repetition. The gulls wheel "again," day ends, as night falls you see the stars. The star and the lighthouse agree, nature and man in harmony. For all the passage's generality, we feel we know where we are, in this landscape virtually stripped of referents but oriented around the order of land and water, light and dark, punctuated by the seamarks of lighthouse and star. The passage's one geographical referent, Blanchisseuse, places the *Flight* off the northern coast of Trinidad, about to leave it for the open sea, and clearly this is where Shabine's renewing "sea-bath" (346) begins; the poem's conclusion invokes some cosmic laundress (*une blanchisseuse*) as the agent of cleansing and renewal.

> Fall gently, rain, on the sea's upturned face
> like a girl showering; make these islands fresh
> As Shabine once knew them! Let every trace,
> every hot road, smell like clothes she just press
> and sprinkle with drizzle (360).

At this liminal moment, leaving coast for ocean, night falling, "on that last stretch of sand," something more is visible, something uncanny and undefinable. What are these hands, and what are they doing with the sea?

Perhaps the easiest explanation of those last lines is to say that the "dark hands" represent visually the act of recollection whose results we see in the section which follows, seining the sea for sunken ships. That is, we see what amounts to the poet (Shabine, Walcott) exerting the power to make the sea surrender the past, not as ground up bones but as coherent images, virtually to turn time back to before dissolution, as if "this round world was some cranked water wheel." That power emerges—or, at least, is represented—through a brief recourse to lyric, the general, the timeless, the natural; the detour out of narrative replenishes its energies from another source.

Thus, in "Shabine Encounters the Middle Passage" the bones spread as coral and sand "from Senegal to San Salvador" are reassembled into their living form and context, appearing as an armada of ghost ships assembled out of the dawn fog:

> frigates, barkentines,
> the backward-moving current swept them on,
> and high on their decks I saw great admirals,
> Rodney, Nelson, de Grasse . . . .
> slowly they heaved past from east to west
> like this round world was some cranked water wheel,
> every ship pouring like a wooden bucket
> dredged from the deep (352).

Shabine sees these men-o'war in some detail—names, the men's "rusty eyeholes like cannons"—and hears "the hoarse orders / they gave those Shabines," "the hissing weeds they trailed." As the ghost ships sail through and past the *Flight*, he casts his mind back to the past he shares with them: "my memory revolve on all sailors before me." When the sun comes over the horizon, the war ships vanish, and a second vision follows.

> Next we pass slave ships. Flags of all nations,
> our fathers below deck too deep, I suppose,

> to hear us shouting. So we stop shouting. Who knows
> who his grandfather is, much less his name?
> Tomorrow our landfall will be the Barbados (353).

As the voice shifts from "I" to "we," the vision becomes at once more substantial and less distinct. The slave ships appear in full light, the light which turned the war-ships into mist. At the same time, less can be known from their appearance. Here, there are no names, either for slaves or for captains, merely an anonymous commerce by "flags of all nations." While the sailors on the frigates were not only visible but even transparent, the denizens of the slave ships remain buried, unseen, unnamed. The anonymity of these forebears contrasts with the sensory detail of the war-ship passage or even with the particularized description of grandfather History ("a parchment Creole with warts like an old sea-bottle, crawling like a crab . . . cream linen, cream hat"). What makes the slave fathers invisible and uncommunicative, though—"below deck too deep, I suppose, to hear us"—also allies them by the repetition of key words with that earlier moment of lyric power when the reeling back of time begins: "dark hands start pulling in the seine of the dark sea, deep, deep inland" (352). That verbal rhyming works against the curt, almost anti-climactic brevity of the slave-ship passage to suggest that the decks which bar vision and communication should also be read in terms of depth, darkness, inwardness, less as barriers than as signs for what cannot be directly manifested. Thus Shabine's inability to see those below decks becomes evidence that, unlike the transparent English admirals, they are profound and substantial.

When Shabine asks for history, nothing is there, but his lyric voice is able to generate narrative out of that nothing: the fathers are unseen and silent, but everything around them indicates their presence, "too deep" to see or hear. (This deep, oceanic place looks much like the one Shabine will claim and occupy, *not* silently, at the end of the poem.) "Shabine Encounters the Middle Passage" testifies to Shabine's ability to have access to the past despite History's denial, by way of a vision which in turn is catalyzed by the abstract power of lyric. He succeeds not in learning the name of his grandfather, but in envisioning a history which does not require names to figure paternity.

This history decouples Shabine from grandfather History, "the bitch," in favor of an unseen father (closer in affiliation but further in the past), who is guiltless, profound, hidden not by choice but by compulsion. Yet the satisfying vision tells its own tale: the silence here, of sons falling silent because the silent fathers cannot hear them, is not utterly unlike History's earlier silence, and Shabine's desire for recognition, for *information*, comes no closer to being satisfied by his spectacular vision. Rather than being answered, his question is rewritten as a rhetorical one: "Who knows who his grandfather is, much less his name?" The shift from "I" to "we" suggests that that very absence of knowledge becomes the grounds of a shared communal identity. Thus, even history's bastard children acquire a story, albeit a story about silence and namelessness.

Walcott stakes a claim for the power of lyric to repeal the passage of time, and permit construction of a past in shapes we can live with and understand—in other words, poetry's power to reproduce history as myth. These middle sections of the poem make the claim good, though not innocently. In the section which follows ("The Sailor Sings Back to the Casuarinas"), a melancholy and cultivated voice laments that history, particularly colonial history, can never be evacuated from poetry, which will always be haunted by "the pain of history words contain" (354). Even the casuarinas bend with grief in the wind, mourning another of the drowned sailors who in this poem seem to mark history's killing power; the power of images to console is never total.

Shabine, too, is not quite done with the past. At the climax of the storm which takes up the poem's penultimate section, "Out of the Depths," the ghost ships of "The Middle Passage" return: not as signs of a buried ancestry but as harbingers of death.

> . . . sky water drench us, and I hear myself cry,
> "I'm the drowned sailor in her *Book of Dreams*."
> I remembered them ghost ships, I saw me corkscrewing
> to the sea-bed of sea-worms, fathom pass fathom,
> my jaw clench like a fist, and only one thing
> hold me, trembling, how my family safe home.
> Then a strength like it seize me and the strength said:
> "I from backward people who still fear God."

> Let Him, in his might, heave Leviathan upward
> by the winch of His will, the beast pouring lace
> from his sea-bottom bed; and that was the faith
> that had fade from a child in the Methodist chapel
> in Chisel Street, Castries, when the whale-bell
> sang service and, in hard pews ribbed like the whale,
> proud with despair, we sang how our race
> survive the sea's maw, our history, our peril,
> and now I was ready for whatever death will (359).

When peace comes after this storm, it comes not only to air and water but to virtually all the storms the poem has evoked; rage and desire ebb. One looks to this passage, then, for resolution of a great deal, and it seems particularly pressing to understand the work it does, and how that work gets done.

"Out of the Depths" begins with a quotation from the Bible in its title, taken from *Psalms*: "Out of the depths I cry to thee, O Lord! Lord, hear my voice! Let thy ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications" (*Ps.* 130: 1-2). What follows as implicit answer seems to point repeatedly to the story of Jonah (suggested earlier by Maria Concepcion's prophetic dream of "whales and a storm"): a story about how one may be swallowed up by the sea's maw and yet survive. Or, one might say after reading the Gospels, a version of the resurrection adapted for sailors and reluctant prophets. Jesus tells the Pharisees, "'For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth'" (*Matt.* 12: 40). Ghost ships and drowned sailors may sink, then, but Shabine is not bound to share their fate.

The strength which "seizes" Shabine suggests a second allusion to *Matthew*, one where drowning figures a lack of faith:

> So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus; but when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, 'Lord, save me.' Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'O man of little faith, why did you doubt?' (*Matthew* 14:29-31)

The faith Shabine lost was in "the revolution" and "the love of my woman"; what seizes him now is not *that* faith but an earlier one, the rediscovered faith in a God who can lift sinking bodies, "heave Leviathan

upward by the winch of his will." (Milton also hovers here, in his invocation of a God who acts in defiance of water: "So Lycidas, sunk low but mounted high, through the dear might of him that walked the waves.")[3]

Finding this faith, Shabine also finds the place in which it originated. In his recuperation of the faith "that had fade from a child" Shabine reidentifies himself with a community which sings its own history, a sustaining version of the past not as misfortune but as endurance: "we sang how our race/ survive the sea's maw, our history, our peril." What is recuperated as faith is remarkably local ("in the Methodist chapel / in Chisel Street, Castries"), and grounded not so much in an inward experience (conviction of sin, experience of grace) as in a communal worship which seeks to understand its own past in the terms of a Biblical narrative about election, exile, survival. This, I think, is the logic of Walcott's storm-scene, and the method of Shabine's redemption. Shabine imagines himself as a drowned sailor, bound to the fate of "them ghost-ships," but in an instant recognizes that he need not die or resemble the dead. Rather, he finds a belief that he may live, and that belief that living may be possible makes it possible. In his recognition of that faith as coming from a community, he finds a history which locates and makes sense of this moment, both in terms of his personal past and in terms of a shared, communal narrative.

At the same time, "Out of the Depths" has its incoherences when taken with the rest of the poem. These are perhaps best identified by asking whether the "re-" of "rediscovered," "reidentifies," "recuperation" indicates recursion or renewal. The poem anticipates and subsequently claims the second; yet the passage, in some measure, suggests the first. Symptomatically, this pivotal moment in the poem carries a particularly dense inhabitation of antecedent voices, from the section title's direct quotation of Psalm 130 to the more or less explicit echoes of *Jonah*, *Matthew*, "Lycidas," and "The Wasteland" ("Here, said she, / Is your card, the drowned Phoenician sailor";[4] "'I'm the drowned sailor in her *Book of Dreams*!'"). The echoes these allusions set in motion open the storm to a mythic dimension where Shabine's near-drowning participates in an archetypal narrative of death and rebirth. Echoes of a poem like "The Wasteland" italicize Shabine's similarities to figures like the Fisher

King; to the extent that he is a figure symbolic of a nation, for Shabine to survive his ordeal by storm means good fortune not for him only but for the people of whom he is a symbol. It is not clear, though, that Shabine is a mythic figure in quite that way, removed from time and contingency; to the extent that this is still a poem about the imaginative coming to terms with history, the profusion of antecedent texts also signals a resurgence of the past's pressure.

In this narrative otherwise concerned with breaking free of the past, coming to terms with the past, releasing the past, salvation comes at a moment described in the language of regression: "Then a strength like it seize me and the strength said: / 'I from backward people who still fear God.' / . . . that was the faith that had fade from a child in the Methodist chapel . . . ." Shabine embraces as literally salvific "backwardness," belatedness, a return to childhood. This backward turn, moreover, embraces an unreformed past, a childhood faith of fear, pride, and despair as well as survival. It reckons with the crises of corruption and division in the poem's earlier sections ("Raptures of the Deep," "Shabine Leaves the Republic") by forgetting them, returning to a moment before these things took place: "like this round world was some cranked waterwheel," time again moving backward.

If the crisis of the poem in "Out of the Depths" undoes the earlier work of leaving the past behind, its conclusion, "After the Storm," is less than firmly committed to the communal context the previous section has reconstituted; arguably, its undeniable lyric power comes with the move away from that context. The final stretch of the poem is strangely depopulated. It begins with the end of desire, as Shabine sees "the veiled face of Maria Concepcion marrying the ocean, then drifting away. . . I wanted nothing after that day." After the storm, both the local "we" of "Shabine Encounters the Middle Passage" and the communal "we" of "Out of the Depths" vanish—only the first person singular remains. Though Shabine is still aboard the *Flight*, no one else appears with him. Lovers, shipmates, churchgoers have been subsumed by the sea itself—"the sea my first friend; now, my last"—and this line signals a turn towards nature which becomes a merging, first figurative ("the moon open/ a cloud like a door") and then almost literal: "Shabine sang to you from the depths of the sea."

The evocative last line echoes endings by Milton and Eliot, both the final, framing turn to the third person in "Lycidas" ("So sang the uncouth swain to th'oaks and rills") and the uncanny, drowned voice which concludes "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock": "We have lingered in the chambers of the sea/ By sea girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown/ Till human voices wake us and we drown" (*Collected Poems*, 7). Each of these two great antecedent poems ends with an ironizing disclaimer. "This was an uncouth song, not *my* song." Or, in "Prufrock," I am excluded from the song, it is not my song, not addressed to me, and I cannot linger in the place of its singing and live. Walcott's turn towards the third person, by contrast, does not seem to disavow the poem which precedes it; the song is claimed by or for the speaker, as well as the power to inhabit the deep place it comes from (Prufrock's "chambers of the sea") and to own it as a *native* place. In that sense, this poem attempts to trump Milton and Eliot both; it also deironizes them, asserting that drowned sailors may survive, that one may sing from beneath the sea, that a poem may be written without being framed and disavowed by the authorial voice.

If as a *living* voice Shabine sings "from the depths of the sea," it can no longer be said that he has everything in common with other islanders. In "After the Storm" Terada sees Shabine pulling "his perspective as far back as it can go," to a "nearly posthumous distance" (114). It is from that distance that Shabine speaks his blessing on the islands left behind, a distance from which those islands, if "all different size," begin to share generic features, even to look alike.

> Open the map. More islands there, man,
> than peas on a tin plate, all different size,
> one thousand in the Bahamas alone,
> from mountains to low scrub with coral keys,
> and from this bowsprit, I bless every town,
> the blue smell of smoke in hills behind them,
> and the one small road winding down them like twine
> to the roofs below . . . (360)

With the turn from local detail and a contextualized personal history to a more general, Romantic nature, the poem's ending abandons the

"we" it has worked towards earlier in favor of an isolate vatic self whose power to bless comes with distance.

Shabine is no Aeneas. More a descendant than a father, he has left his own children behind, and renounces desire more for peace than duty. It's instructive to compare the end of this poem with *Omeros*, in which the fisherman Achille considers a Virgilian project before finding it impossible.

> He might have to leave the village for good, its hotels and marinas,
> the ice-packed shrimps of pink tourists, and find someplace,
> some cove he could settle like another Aeneas,
> founding not Rome but home, to survive in its peace
> far from the discos, the transports, the greed, the noise.[5]

Like Shabine, Achille is disgusted with his fallen world, imagines a fresh start; yet he ends by returning home, not finding or founding a new one, because there was "no cove he liked as much as his own village . . . no bay parted its mouth under him like Helen." Aeneas' project of a new foundation is untenable for Achille because he can accept no substitute for what he has. Home and woman are to be repossessed in the knowledge of loss and imperfection. For Shabine, the notion of home itself exists only in a metaphysical sense which makes it practically unlocatable, a "vain search" for an Eden before guilt: "one island that heals with its harbour/ and a guiltless horizon, where the almond's shadow/ doesn't injure the sand." Unlike Achille's canoe, the schooner *Flight* has no landfall in prospect.

The imaginative work performed on history in the middle sections of the poem is aimed in part at the rediscovery of community and lineage, yet "The Schooner *Flight*"'s protagonist keeps moving past the points of potential reintegration he locates—signaled by shifts from "I" to "we"—and the imagined communities they offer. In retrospect, Shabine's statement "I had no nation now but the imagination" looks like a final shift of commitment from nation *to* imagination, an imagination whose typical mode is movement, sublimation, flight:

> I have only one theme:
> The bowsprit, the arrow, the longing, the lunging heart—

> the flight to a target whose aim we'll never know,
> vain search for one island that heals with its harbour
> and guiltless horizon (361).

If Shabine begins as "any red nigger," in an anonymity which makes him legion, his final apotheosis as the "genius of the shore," or as a voice singing from the caves of the sea, operates on different terms, replacing representative man with representing man, epic with an artistic *bildungsroman* in which to gain a voice, one loses the body, and with it the body's world.

In this concluding piece of the poem, Shabine is virtually only a voice ("voice to one people's grief"). Rather than a myth for the hybrid self, this is a myth for the poet; yet Shabine's *primary* identification as poet, hand, voice, comes late enough that it serves as conclusion rather than as topic. The case is different in Walcott's later, longer poem *Omeros*. There, Shabine's identities as poet, historian, fisher/voyager precipitate as the three distinct characters of "I," Major Plunkett, and Achille, only to subject that "I" to a thorough-going critique. *Omeros*' "I," a Caribbean poet, indicts himself for a "literature as guilty as History," guilty of a remorse which insists on hearing in the present only the echoes of the past, guilty of nostalgia for "the myth of rustic manners," of a privileged detachment which falsifies.

> Why hallow that pretence
> of preserving what they left, the hypocrisy
> of loving them from hotels, a biscuit-tin fence
>
> smothered in love-vines, scenes to which I was attached
> as blindly as Plunkett with his remorseful research?
> Art is History's nostalgia . . . (228)

The narrator and Plunkett, the poet and the historian, are faulted for the same tendencies: an attachment like Shabine's to what is history, over and done with, but also a detachment from those who endure that history's consequences in the present. The *Omeros*-poet regards the fisherman Achille, who sometimes becomes Homer's Achilles, with a complicated and wounded love recorded in "this book, which will remain unknown and unread by him" (320). Virgil and Homer give the poem

a clear and celebratory statement of theme—"I sang of quiet Achille, Afolabe's son" (320)—but the poem meditates over and over on the torsions of that project, how to write for or about Achille, or Helen.

The long poem represents its own project as virtually impossible, or impossible to perform with integrity; *Omeros* leads its poet through the circle of hell where selfish poets suffer, and he scarcely escapes "falling towards the shit they stewed in" (293). By contrast, "The Schooner *Flight*" gives us a Shabine for whom poetry is still the solution, rather than an intricate dilemma. As a man, he is disappointed, scapegoated, sickened by his life; as a poet, he suffers no more challenge than a moment of ridicule and a knife fight, which he wins. In the last lines of the poem, Shabine sails down a "road in white moonlight" secure in the double identity of singer and protagonist, Shabine the poet singing Shabine the fisherman individual and collective. But the end is not untroubled. The absence of happiness from this solitary peace, the fruitless search for an island which will heal and remove guilt, look forward to the more self-critical or self-conscious programme of *Omeros*, and suggest that the poet's story is only now beginning.

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NOTES

[1]"The Schooner *Flight*," Derek Walcott, *Collected Poems 1948-1984* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986) 346.

[2]Rita Dove, "'Either I'm Nobody or I'm a Nation'" (review of *Collected Poems 1948-1984*), *Parnassus* 14 (1987): 49-76; Paul Breslin, "'I Met History Once, But He Ain't Recognize Me': The Poetry of Derek Walcott" (review of *Collected Poems 1948-1984*), *TriQuarterly* 68 (1987): 168-83; Rei Terada, *Derek Walcott's Poetry: American Mimicry* (Boston: Northeastern UP, 1992), chapter title: "The Pain of History Words Contain."

[3]"Lycidas," in *John Milton*, ed. S. Orgel and J. Goldberg (Oxford: OUP, 1991).

[4]T. S. Eliot, "The Wasteland," ll. 46-7, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963) 64.

[5]Derek Walcott, *Omeros* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990) 301.

Connotations
Vol. 5.2-3 (1995/96)

The Woods, the West, and Icarus's Mother: Myth in the Contemporary American Theatre

JOHN RUSSELL BROWN

In the youthful days of modern Europe, a mythology inherited from the Greek and Roman empires offered a sportive freedom to the mind among pagan gods and goddesses, fabulous creatures and unnatural marvels. A resort to myth enabled writers and other artists to escape from practical problems of everyday life and from the strict patterns of thought which were imposed by religious and political authorities. The early Europeans wrote about the world which they inhabited in ways were expected and prescribed and, in another vein, indulged themselves in another world, reaching for a more personal and private satisfaction. In their fantasies, they aligned themselves with mythical persons through whom they might inhabit a lost civilization, the ruins of which could still be seen.

At the end of the fifteenth century, the fresco painters who adorned the Salone dei Mesi in the Palazzo di Schifanoia in Ferrara, depicted at ground level the powerful d'Este family and the daily life of the city and the farmsteads of the Po basin. They created a series of tableaux, one for each of the various months of a year, and arranged them anticlockwise, starting on the west end of the southern wall: here they depicted the giving and taking of wealth, laboring peasants and attentive lackeys, and the rich and famous, powerful as they sat in thrones or astride great horses. The painters used a second level for the comparatively simple, demonstrative signs of the zodiac, but reserved the topmost and most extensive level for the triumphs of pagan gods. Here they painted fantastic creatures, bridled swans and nibbling rabbits, the delights of Venus and of springtime, vistas of pellucid seas and impossible mountains, dancing, music, and timeless stillness. Here young lovers touch and arouse each other, and share half-dazed and tender

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looks; Mars kisses Venus, their discarded clothes at the bedside; the Graces pose naked, unselfconsciously for all to see. By depicting the gods known only in pagan myth, the painters were able to show a world both intimate and sensual, and beyond reality.

At the end of the sixteenth century, Shakespeare and his fellow poets in England also used myth to allow a freedom to the mind and to express immediate sensation. This was a means of escaping the boundaries of everyday experience and of prescribed thought. They used words and not paint, and so they did not have to segregate the real from the mythological on separate levels of depiction, or tangible experience from high flights of thought, or dangerous ideas from acceptable dogma. For writers all levels were available at the same time.

Shakespeare's King Richard the Second is keenly aware of the political reasons why he must descend from the top of the castle walls and yet, even in that moment, as he imagines himself feeling his way down a spiral of stone steps in some dark turret, he also sees himself as Phaethon, the sun-god, and feels the horses pulling his chariot as if they were so many restless carthorses:

> Down, down I come, like glist'ring Phaeton,
> Wanting the manage of unruly jades. (*Richard II*, III.iii.178-79)

What are Richard's "unruly jades," but his turbulent, irresistible, frightened thoughts, unmanageably dangerous, unprecedented, and experienced with an absolute immediacy? They come to his mind, and so to his spoken words, together with the more fantastic, dazzling, sun-god.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, waiting to see if the good-looking Bassanio has the intelligence or instinct to choose the right casket and so win her hand in marriage, Shakespeare's helpless Portia thinks instinctively of the sacrificed virgin, Hesione, not naming the victim, but identifying her suitor as "young Alcides" and her attendants as married women with tears and harrowed faces:

> I stand for sacrifice;
> The rest aloof are the Dardanian wives,
> With blearèd visages come forth to view
> The issue of th'exploit. (*Merchant*, III.ii.57-60)

In the back of Portia's mind, there is the "sea-monster" which threatens to devour her, the rock on which she is chained, and the heartless sea, reaching into the distance like her own future at which she is compelled to look. She may also remember that Alcides did not rescue Hesione for love, but merely to win some horses which her father had offered as reward.

It might be argued that classical allusions such as these in Shakespeare's work are the product of a little learning which decorated a moment's dialogue with a small pedantic flourish. In the earliest plays this may sometimes be true, but there the effect is not so poised as in more mature works, the words not so simple, and the effect not so passionate or sensuous.

Modern scholarship can fill out the details of each individual myth, define them, trace their ancestry, and compare one "usage" with another, but this was not the way of the poets of that time. Myth offered them both freedom and immediate sensation, relaxation and adventure, a relief from bracing or restricted thought.

Despite being common in Greek and Latin, the dictionaries tell us that the identifying word *myth* is not found in English until the eighteen-thirties. In the seventeenth century, Walter Raleigh's *History of the World* (1614) has *mythological*, while *mythology* and *mythologize* had arrived a few years earlier (cf. *OED*); the classical myths were present then in many minds, but only as a general attitude of mind, not as a way of thought that could be singular and specific. Other derivatives from *myth* soon arrived upon the scene: *mythic* and *mythical* early on, and then *mythographer* and *mythologic*; by the nineteenth century, these were joined by *mythoclast* and *mythomaniac*. But in Shakespeare's day, myths had still not earned a word by which to make themselves known individually, one from another: they were malleable and indefinite; only occasionally precise, for a special purpose and moment, as each writer pleased. The "mythical" was anyone's territory, in which creative writers could please themselves.

For the poets, myths were pluralist and fragmentary, vivid as the most intimate of experiences or fantasies, and usable in whatever way they chose. Any mythologic person or place could become a personal treasure, individually experienced, user-friendly, and neither remote nor

constrained by rules and demarcations. When Ben Jonson wanted to explain how a poet's imagination could soar to great heights and yet remain in touch with personal experience, he used a trio of myths: a poet, he wrote, has a divine instinct or rapture which

> contemns common and known conceptions. It utters somewhat above a mortal mouth. . . it gets aloft, and flies away with his rider, whither before it was doubtful to ascend. This the poets understood by their Helicon, Pegasus, or Parnassus.[1]

* * *

In early modern Europe, the myths of Greece and Rome were an amazing other world, almost out of the reach of thinkers who tried to define everything by Christian doctrine and not easily controlled by the powerful censors of art in all its forms, and especially those of the printed book and performed play. When another new world began to establish itself in North America, artists found it was less easy to use memories of the ancient, "classical" world; the necessary books and learning were not generally available, and the physical remains of that civilization were outside the bounds of most people's mental journeys. Artists had to find some other place in which their imaginations could be at ease and live with heroes and exemplars that would suit their own dissatisfactions and aspirations.

They did not have to look far, because they lived in the midst of an unknowable world of huge trees in woods and forests uncropped by man; and if they did not live within sight of broad rivers, greater in size than any known from earlier days in Europe, they might well be within the sound of them or have heard their fathers and strangers speak of crossing them. Here was a world that they could people with myths of their own making, and as the settlers moved out of the woods, travelling towards the West, the strange otherness of the vast prairie and desert would serve the same need. These were kingdoms fit for imagined heroes and monsters; and they are still territories of the mind in North America. Dramatists enter such other worlds more than other writers perhaps, because they must strive all the time to give substance to their thoughts in persons and in action, rather than in words alone,

arranged in sentences for readers: they *need* mythical heroes and exploits when they wish to place on stage what cannot be seen in ordinary life.

The snag was—and it still is—that these other worlds of woods and wild west had very few gods or heroes associated with them, no earlier literature or portraiture, no ruins of palaces or populous cities. Writers had to invent their own mythological creatures, and these have not proved to be a strong breed, seldom lasting for more than a generation of writers except as nameless types or shadowy projections of real-life persons. So while Phaethon does not whip his steeds and Hesione does not stand ready for sacrifice in recent American theatre, there are new myths, as they are made and then forgotten or cheapened, and used in much the same way as those of the Renaissance.

In David Mamet's *The Woods* (1977) Nick brings Ruth to a cabin in northern Michigan for a weekend and the play begins with the two sitting on the porch. Here myth-making starts playfully, and even comically, as Ruth does her best to fill the sky with heroes:

> These seagulls they were up there, one of them was up there by himself.
> He didn't want the other ones.
> They came, he'd flap and get them off.
> He let this one guy stay up there a minute.
> NICK Tell me.
> RUTH They flew off.
> *Pause.*
> NICK We have a lot of them. And herons.[2]

Nick and Ruth cannot share each other's stories for long: practicalities and differences intrude. However, Nick has been to these woods many times before and has developed for himself more frightening, less ordinary myths, inaccessible to other persons. There is Herman Waltz, a fellow soldier with his father in the second World War:

> He thought his head was a radio.
> He had had dental work and said that Hitler told him things about his wife.
> Things he should do to her.
> He later killed himself. (25)

Nick's mind is full of persons who are strange and separable from life, more demanding and more giving. He imagined that some one would

say to him "Let us be lovers. . . . I know who you are. . . . I know what you are" (94). This event would take place outside the city, in the woods where he and Ruth now sit together.

Some of his inventions are Vikings and Martians; others are nameless creatures, more demanding and frightening, and associated with a black hole and with fire:

> I see the window, and the shades are blowing. There has come a breeze, and all the curtains blow. They are on fire.
> It laps around the window. On all sides.
> Someone is calling my name. Nicholas.
> I swear to you.
> I hear them in a voice unlike a man or woman. When I look, I do not want to know. I know that there is something there. I look I see a bear. A bear has come back. At the window. Do you hear me, Ruth?
> Do you know what this *is*? To crawl beneath my house. This house is *mine* now. In its hole it calls me. In the Earth. (*Pause.*) Nicholas.
> He's standing upright. On his legs. He has a huge erection. I am singed. He speaks a human language, Ruth. I know. He has these thoughts and they are trapped inside his mouth. His jaw cannot move. (96-97)

David Mamet has studied ancient drama at university and so, as he peoples the woods for his character's sake, he reaches back to classical myths of Orestes and Oedipus, even though he does not use their names; his myths are, however, the same stories of inheritance, darkness, dynasties, fire, and mysteries. Ruth tells Nick "You read too many books" (94), as if Mamet felt a need to apologize for the literary sources for these stories of the Woods invented for his mythologizer or mythomaniac.

Myth from the classics and renaissance drama is given a wider function in this play as its very action takes on the shape of earlier stories, by Sophocles and Shakespeare. Nick at the edge of the water, having forced himself on Ruth during a thunderstorm—perhaps having tried to kill her—and now feeling totally alone and ready to take his own life, asks with Lear "Am I insane?" and with Orestes he cries out "I have seen it all come back." His utterance comes close to screaming:

> What are we *doing* here? What are we *doing* here?
> *Pause.*

What will *happen* to us? We can't know ourselves. . . . How can we *know* ourselves?
I have to leave. (99)

Nicholas becomes his author's mythical hero, experiencing in the freedom of mythic invention an alienation from the world and his own actions.

In contrast, Mamet's *American Buffalo* (1975) is set firmly in the city away from the forests and the myths awakened by its strangeness. Don's Resale Shop is grounded in the world from which all its junk has come, and it is occupied by three persons who are at home in the city. The action of the play involves routines of daily life, together with crime, cheating, and the lure of wealth. However, the play's title is the name of a rare nickel coin, long since out of circulation, and alludes unmistakably to a magnificent indigenous creature once common in the West. It suggests a mythological escape which most of the time is unregarded by those who try to obtain possession of the coin and cash in on its rareity, and that of other coins they think are hoarded somewhere in the city. It is the means whereby, at moments of extreme drama, the myths of early America come to the surface of consciousness to be expressed in dialogue and action, attracting attention and defining thoughts which are otherwise dismissed or not registered at all.

Thinking of the wealth the American Buffalo might bring if they can steal it, Teach starts talking about earlier times and the "wilderness" of the West:

TEACH You know what is free enterprize?
DON No. What?
TEACH The freedom . . . .
DON . . . yeah?
TEACH Of the *Individual* . .
DON . . . yeah?
TEACH To Embark on Any Fucking Course that he sees fit.
[The capitalized "Embark" might indicate a mythic value for this word.]
DON Uh-huh . . .
TEACH In order to secure his honest chance to make a profit. Am I so out of line on this?
DON No.
TEACH Does this make me a Commie?
DON No.

TEACH The country's *founded* on this, Don. You know this.
[Now the myths of pioneer days are more strongly in mind, and Don backs away.]
DON Did you get a chance to take a nap?
TEACH Nap nap nap nap nap. Big deal.
DON (*Pause*) Yeah.
TEACH Without this we're just savage shitheads in the wilderness.
DON Yeah.
TEACH Sitting around some vicious campfire.[3]

The men in the wilderness of the early West can be savage and vicious, as well as heroes embarking on a course to claim a well-founded freedom: for Teach, a mythic world has polarized thought and quickened passion beyond his ordinary abilities.

Other objects amongst the junk force consciousness back to this primitive and distant way of life. When a "pig iron" is found, Don identifies it as "a thing that they stick in dead pigs keep their legs apart all the blood runs out" (35). This stops the conversation for no more than a nod of recognition but, some time later in the following Act, an attempt to talk about a dream of freedom shows that thought, in that short silence, did indeed go back to brutality in the rural West. At the end of the play, Teach trashes the junk shop with this same pig iron. As he does so he mourns in savage rage for a powerful myth of trust and friendship, a lost world from the days of the buffalo, and of a still earlier world of "cavemen": "The Whole Entire World. / There Is No Law. / There Is No Right And Wrong. / The World Is Lies. / There Is No Friendship. / Every Fucking Thing. / *Pause.* / Every God-Forsaken Thing. . . . We all live like cavemen" (103). Soon Teach is speaking of himself as the heroic cowboy in some endless, lonely shoot-out: "I went out on a limb for you. . . . I go out there. I'm out there every day." But the old myth does not hold any longer; for him it is a hopeless confrontation, as Teach knows to his own loss: "There is nothing out there. . . I fuck myself" (103-04).

In *American Buffalo*, as in *The Woods*, David Mamet has used myths taken from the Woods and West for plays which are in all other ways grounded in the present time. The myths are not remembered casually or incidentally; they are used to define the central theme and the most

powerful moments of dramatic action, and to take his play into far reaches of his mind.

* * *

Of the same generation as Mamet, Sam Shepard is a dramatist who has moved more openly into a mythic world, as if aware that only its terrain could offer the kind of life he wished to affirm. The West is where his characters feel strongest or, at least, most sure of their feelings: it is not surprizing to hear from a friend that Sam had sat and "watched six straight hours of silent cowboy reruns."[4]

True West (1980) is set in present-day reality, in southern California, close to the desert. Two brothers, Lee and Austin, are soon talking of "The Forefathers," seeing them in a mythic world, with "Candlelight burning into the night" as they take their rest in "Cabins in the wilderness" (6). They become engaged in writing an old-style Western, even though they accept that few have been made since "Lonely Are the Brave," with Kirk Douglas. Austin, the younger brother, despises their movie, even as he is writing it:

> It's a bullshit story! It's idioic. Two Lamebrains chasing each other across Texas! Are you kidding? Who do you think's going to go see a film like that?[5]

Yet they do write it and it is to the desert wilderness that they both instinctively want to go to "think" and to recover some sanity and peace.

"There's no such thing as the West any more!" Austin tells Saul, the movie director: "It's a dead issue! It's dried up, Saul, and so are you" (35). But nevertheless the mythical idea of it sustains their deepest thoughts and passions. Eventually the two brothers wreck the home and fight in rivalry as their astonished mother makes off to check into a motel. Their struggle is violent and savage, leading, it seems, to Lee being strangled to death with a telephone cord. But that is not the end: he was shamming death, and the play moves at last into the mode of the now mythic West. The playscript ends with a stage direction drawn from a silent cowboy movie:

They square off to each other, keeping a distance between them. Pause, a single coyote heard in distance, lights fade softly into moonlight, the figures of the brothers now appear to be caught in a vast desert-like landscape, they are very still but watchful for the next move, lights go slowly to black as the after-image of the brothers pulses in the dark, coyote fades.

Shepard takes to myths as if needing to breathe their freer air. While the West recurs in many plays, he is by no means restricted in choice. He searches out new myths and even, in a bookish way, ransacks classical and renaissance stories for heroes and marvels to hold attention and give his imagination scope. *Angel City* (1976) uses the modern way of life associated with the name of L. A., and Hollywood films and their stars; but into this world, enters Rabbit, the medicine-man with various Indian charms, a cross between Marlowe's Faustus and Mephostophilis. In fact, Rabbit Brown has no special powers but, because others seem to believe in them, he seldom questions that he can do what is required of him. Merely by talking about what he will do, he offers visions to his potential paymasters which show the nature of their desires, just as Christopher Marlowe's Faustus did:

> Yeah, but what if we could come up with a character that nobody's ever seen before. Something in flesh and blood. Not just an idea but something so incredible that as soon as they came in contact with it they'd pass out or go into convulsions or something. That's what they're looking for.[6]

In a much earlier play,[7] Shepard started the action by bringing on stage a bunch of apparently unremarkable people intent on having a barbecue picnic near a beach, but when they see a vapor-trailing, acrobatic jet airplane, which might be skywriting, they are taken up with the pilot's other-worldly exploits. Bill yells, "Get our of our area!" but soon the two women try to establish contact with him, both claiming to be his wife:

> PAT Come on, sweetie! Where have you been?
> JILL We've been waiting and waiting! (31)

The pilot flies off and the party breaks up. But the pilot still holds attention and takes the picnickers out of their usual world. Howard and

Bill, left alone, effect some smoke signals from the barbecue as if trying to bring the pilot back to their base-camp in a desert. The women return with wild tales of the pilot's new exploits which they assume to have been for their gratification. Frank returns, as "*in a daze*," and announces that he has seen the pilot crashing his machine into the water with a sound and splash of gigantic dimensions:

> The water goes up to fifteen hundred feet and smashes the trees, and the firemen come. . . . And the pilot bobbing in the very centre of a ring of fire that's closing in. His white helmet bobbing up and bobbing down. . . . (44-46)

The noise of an off-stage crowd becomes deafening, showing that the strangest action is taking place off-stage; soon only Howard and Bill are left, standing very still, as Jill goes off again, calling out "you guys are missing out" (45).

Shepard has used an ancient myth to reflect upon the very ordinary occasion of a picnic. By providing an equivalent of Icarus's flight towards the sun, he has provoked not only wonder, but also a concern about the nature of what is ordinary and unexamined. The title of the play, *Icarus's Mother*, alerts the audience to ask questions: this person never appears on stage and no one speaks of her. Perhaps this trick title owes something to Jan Breughel who composed his well-known painting of Icarus with attention drawn to the foregrounded figure of a ploughman, absorbed in earth-bound toil. As W. H. Auden wrote, a viewer will inevitably consider that:

> the ploughman may
> Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
> But for him it was not an important failure.[8]

Shepard has retold the myth and repositioned it in the consciousness of his audience by leaving Icarus offstage and by choosing a title that positively makes an audience think about a long chain of events and choices leading up to this incident. The myth is used for its own sake, as a story of aspiration, and also to show the nature of its fall-out among apparently ordinary persons. Everyone, except perhaps the two competitive and secretive men, has found, in the horror of the pilot's

death, an object of awe which is beautiful, pure, and invincible; and so his exploits expose the picnickers in their less daring lives and smaller aspirations.

Shepard has not used the myth in a pedantic way, setting it down as he might have found it in books or paintings. In his play, a new Icarus is present with the excitement and flush of a new disovery, not incidental to the dramatist's purpose, but seeming rather to direct it. The ancient myth has lifted Shepard out of "common and known conceptions," so that he rises aloft and seems to be flying, as if on Pegasus, and taking his audience with him.

The title of Shepard's latest play, *Simpatico* (1995), suggests no mythic tale, but a focus on intimate and unforced personal relations. Realistically set in a world of horse-racing, betting, cheating, blackmail, marital tensions, and financial success and failure, it is enlivened not by heroes and amazing exploits, but by drunkness, petty crime, and a shameful sexual act, photographed some years before the play's action begins. Here myth is used in the more incidental manner which was common in Renaissance plays; but nevertheless it is crucial in the development of the drama, highlighting and illuminating the moment when the two most honest characters come to trust each other in a tarnished and sinister world.

Cecilia tries to explain why she loves the Kentucky Derby, a race she has never attended:

> Yes. It was foolish to get suckered in by something like that but—I love the Derby. I've always—I—I remember being in London. It rained all the time. Always raining. And I—I would stay in and watch the races. I remember watching that big red horse—That magnificient red horse. What was his name? He was on the news. Everybody knew his name.
>
> SIMMS Secretariat.
>
> CECILIA Yes! That's the one. Secretariat. And he won by miles that day. Twenty lengths or something.
>
> SIMMS Thirty-one.
>
> CECILIA Yes. Thirty-one lengths. It was incredible. I've never seen an animal like that. As though he was flying.
>
> SIMMS He was.
>
> CECILIA He was like that winged horse they used to have on the gas stations, you know—That red, winged horse.

SIMMS Pegasus.
CECILIA Yes! Just like Pegasus. Ever since then I've dreamed of going to the Derby.
SIMMS That wasn't the Derby you were watching. That was the Belmont.[9]

The classical myth is not introduced to make a learned point: the play is too up-front and irregular in form to support such an idea. Rather Pegasus opens up a moment of sympathy and trust by insisting on the marvellous and on a shared moment of recognition: seen on Mobil gas stations, Pegasus is like an illumination in the sky, out of this world and yet a matter of everyday familiarity.

Shepard does not consider myths to be remote from ordinary life and the product of bookish learning. Rather they provide a way of sustaining and presenting the most intense and charged personal feelings. In *Motel Chronicles* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1982) he collected a series of short autobiographical memoirs, and in this very personal book, myth repeatedly makes an entrance. The very first item is the narrator's recollection of suffering from toothache as a child and being carried at night by his mother to a place in the prairie where huge plaster dinosaurs were "standing around in a circle." He tells how he was carried around these giant statues, through their legs and under their bellies, and found himself "Staring up at the teeth of Tyranosaurus Rex." Except for the little blue lights that they had for eyes, it was the king of them all, the huge tyrant, that was the culminating image still living from this moment of past time. Among the photographs of family groups, favourite cars, and familiar places, that were provided for this book by Shepard's friend Johnny Dark, is one different from all the rest, simpler and overtly dramatic: it is of the Mobil Gas Pegasus, rearing off towards the right of the page against a glowing sky (113).

Later in *Motel Chronicles*, in an item dated November 23, 1981, Shepard tells in the third person of being in a truck almost exactly halfway between San Francisco and L. A. The driver stopped and, crawling under a fence, went to the middle of a field to sit cross-legged while the "raw smell of cattle filled his chest" and the sun was setting with clouds "like giant hawk wings." The narrator is very close to this person because he knows that he wanted to talk to himself, but was stopped by "the stillness of space." Thinking of the two great cities lying to north and

south made him want to stay there, but already "things were pulling him in two directions." It was just then that an impossible levitation seemed to occur:

> A huge hand grabbed him from behind. A hand without a body. It carried him up, miles above the highway. He didn't fight. He'd lost the fear of falling. The hand went straight through his back and grabbed his heart. It didn't squeeze. It was a grip of pure love. He let his body drop and watched it tumble without hope. His heart stayed high, tucked in the knuckles of a giant fist. (121)

A myth is here being re-formed in the mind, stemming directly out of immediate sensation.

* * *

Shepard and Mamet are not alone in the acceptance of myth as a means of engaging ambitiously in a theatre that is more often grounded in the presentation of the here and now. Shepard tells a story in *Motel Chronicles* of acting in a film for which he had to get up at 5:30 a.m. and be driven to a trailer home in open country where he changed into clothes very like his own—"Maybe a little bit stiffer. Cleaner maybe too"—so that he "wondered if he was supposed to be playing himself." He stared out at the highway on which he would be filmed as he drove a motorcycle behind the camera car and, in this world of make-believe, Shepard notices two people who were entirely caught up in a world of myth: as he "slid into the back seat of a grey Cadillac," he became fascinated by two actors who were "talking feverishly about Greek Drama. They kept it up for miles" (10). This was not casual talk: these people, Shepard realized, spoke about Greek myths to "indicate to each other their deep convictions," trying perhaps to share the farthest reaches their minds could go.

Occasionally the use of myth in American Theatre is unmistakable, usually when a classic story is borrowed or characters are formed along clearly defined lines. So it is in Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931) or Elizabeth Egloff's *The Swan* (1987), which retells the story of Jupiter's arrival as a swan. But even the more literary borrowings usually

work more covertly, as with the "unmotivated" appearances of the Boatman who is Charon in Len Jenkin's *Poor Folk's Pleasure* (1989) and, in the same play, with Frankie the Finn whose message is repeated in a language no one can understand. Sometimes historical events are remembered with only the faintest reference to actual facts, but with a mythological resonance: as for example, in the singing of the "British Grenadiers" and the end of Richard Nelson's *New England* (1994) or the repeated allusion to the attainment of freedom for Columbia in the same author's *Life Sentences* (1993). In some plays, such as Eric Overmeyer's *On the Verge* or Paula Vogel's *Baltimore Waltz* (1991), a multitude of mythological wonders follow each other in quick succession, showing the bewilderment arising from extraordinary feeling rather than an achievement of it.

In all this, American dramatists use myths as their predecessors have done, but what is perhaps new is a consciousness of the transience of these devices. They sometimes have a single classical basis, but they also come from an environment that is peculiarly American: the Woods and the West, and an estrangement from the classical inheritance even while being fascinated by it. Some writers approach myths with great caution and share that caution with their audiences; others approach with mockery or with daring; some cannot manage without pomposity or solemn seriousness. The common feature is a desire to share intuitions about the nature and the possibilities of the world about them, and of themselves. Myths are not a reassuring bedrock of a shared imagination; they are used for occasional forays into the unusual, the unknown, the extravagant thoughts which demand recognition, the intensely personal reaction, and the personal reaction that in some way suggests a more than isolated resonance. The use of myths is not the most notable feature of American theatre, but attention to their occurrence will often lead a critic to the imaginative centre of a play and reveal to directors, designers, and actors how a production should move beyond a reflection of the ordinary.

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NOTES

[1]*Discoveries, Ben Jonson*, ed. Ian Donaldson (Oxford; OUP, 1985) 584.

[2]David Mamet, *The Woods* (New York: Grove Press, 1979) 1.

[3]David Mamet, *American Buffalo* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1976) 72-73.

[4]Patti Smith, "Sam Shepard 9 Random Years [7+2]," (1970); in *Angel city, . . . & Other Plays* (1976; London: Faber, 1978) 245.

[5]Sam Shepard, *Seven Plays* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981) 30.

[6]Shepard, *Angel City & Other Plays* 20.

[7]*Icarus's Mother* (1965), in Sam Shepard, *Five Plays* (London: Faber, 1969).

[8]"Musée des Beaux Arts," *Collected Shorter Poems* (London: Faber, 1950) 19.

[9]Sam Shepard, *Simpatico* (London: Methuen Drama, 1995) 115.

Connotations

A Journal for Critical Debate

Contents of Volume 5 (1995/96)