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Noel Polk

In Memoriam

We mourn the death of Noel Polk, an outstanding William Faulkner and Eudora Welty scholar, editor of the *Mississippi Quarterly*. Professor Polk edited the texts of William Faulkner's major novels for the Library of America. He was the author of *Outside the Southern Myth, Children of the Dark House: Texts and Contexts in Faulkner, Eudora Welty: A Bibliography of Her Work*, and many critical studies on the literary and cultural heritage of the American South. A long-standing friend of Polish Americanists, he was a member of the Advisory Board of *Text Matters*. Noel Polk passed away on August 21, 2012.

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Editorial

The third issue of *Text Matters* focuses on eroticism and its representations in literature and film. The authors approach this issue from various theoretical perspectives, often foregrounding in novel ways the preoccupation of the analyzed works with the notion of the erotic and their infusion with the subversive, eruptive and disquieting side of the erotic experience.

The issue consists of four broad sections, organized chronologically as well as according to a thematic key. The first of these, entitled "Eroticism in Medieval and Renaissance Literature," opens with two articles that approach the problem of the erotic by interrogating the immediate associations of the notion with the bodily sphere of human existence. Piotr Spyra's study of the Middle English poem *Pearl* attempts to reconcile the erotic undertone of the dream vision with the parental/filial bond between the two focal characters, positing eroticism as a conceptual framework for understanding the feeling of longing. His engagement with the erotic as a mode of yearning not always entangled in direct sexual somaticism establishes irony as a dominant rhetorical technique in the poem. Following this, Barbara Kowalik provides a fresh outlook on the memorable opening of *The Canterbury Tales* by regarding the famous description of spring as if it were a Shakespearean sonnet, a perspective that allows her to trace and compare Chaucer's and Shakespeare's understanding of pilgrimage and desire.

Chaucer's collection of tales is again taken up by Andrzej Wicher, who devotes his article to the investigation of the cult of eroticism in the context of "The Merchant's Tale" and the anonymous lay of *Sir Orfeo*. The argument of the article centres on the indebtedness of the two texts to the folktale tradition, often reaching out towards the biblical and classical inspirations behind the stories to highlight the analogies and differences

between them. The next contribution, in turn, focuses on the somewhat startling eroticism found in the writings of medieval English female mystics. In his study of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, Władysław Witalisz investigates the medieval female erotic imagination by collating the English mystics' discourse and imagery with that of Hadewijch of Brabant and the affective spirituality of Bernard of Clairvaux, shown to have had a substantial impact on Julian's and Margery's somatic vocabulary. The next two articles are devoted to Renaissance drama. In his reading of *The Faithful Shepherdess* by John Fletcher, Steve Orman studies the early modern understanding of Youth in connection with the erotic excess of the youthful body, subjecting the play to critical scrutiny from the perspective of Galenic theory. The section ends with Urszula Kizelbach's essay on *King Richard III*. Drawing on the thought of Georges Bataille and Greenblatt's notion of self-fashioning, Kizelbach rationalizes the seduction scenes featuring Shakespeare's deformed villain.

"Eroticism in Modern Drama, Film and Prose" is the title of the second section of the issue. It opens with two articles devoted to Irish playwriting, both of which accentuate eroticism as an element attributed to the female characters of the discussed works. Jadwiga Uchman's exploration of Samuel Beckett's early radio drama *All That Fall* focuses on the figure of Mrs Rooney and her quest for the erotic in her life. The article seeks to demonstrate that the protagonist perfectly illustrates Georges Bataille's contention that "Eroticism . . . is assenting to life up to the point of death." Katarzyna Ojrzyńska analyzes Christina Reid's *The Belle of the Belfast City*. Comparing the presentation of the male and female characters of the play, Ojrzyńska provides an insight into the use of eroticism as a means of subverting patriarchal values embedded in Northern Irish society. Ewa Kębłowska-Ławniczak grounds her explorations in contemporary urban studies. Her article offers not only a thought-provoking outlook on the genre of urban drama and on the nexus between theatre and urban space, but also a comprehensive overview of philosophical ideas informing the concept of the eroticism of the city. Another article focused on contemporary British drama, Edyta Lorek-Jezińska's study of Sarah Daniels's *Masterpieces*, uncovers the ways in which categories of the erotic and the sexual are combined in the play. Exploring the notions of the male gaze and female victimization, it engages in the debate over the play's stance in the discussion on pornography. Paulina Mirowska examines Harold Pinter's adaptation of Ian McEwan's novel *The Comfort of Strangers.* Contextualizing Pinter's screenplay in his political playwriting, she points to the ways in which eroticism and death intersect in the text, inducing the audience to ask basic questions about human nature. Mirowska's article connects both with the above studies of drama and with the subject of the next two explorations, which focus on film.

Tony Barker's article investigates changes in the presentation of sexually explicit content in the European cinema of the last four decades. Tackling the issue of pornography in film, Barker's essay is thematically related to Jacek Fabiszak's examination of nudity in stage and screen adaptations of Shakespeare. Emphasizing the effect this element may exert on the viewer, Fabiszak points to the crucial differences in the reception of nudity in film and in stage or television theatre. The section ends with Dana Bădulescu's article, which scrutinizes eroticism in Salman Rushdie's novels. Offering a comprehensive outline of the development of erotic imagination in the last two centuries, the author argues that Rushdie's works represent a new stage in this process.

The theme of the second issue of *Text Matters* is continued in the last two sections of *TM 3*. The first one contains an article by Bernth Lindfors. This time the author focuses on the life of Ira Daniel Aldridge in Australia. The section "Reviews and Interviews" includes Soumitra Chakraborty's review of *Writing as Resistance: Literature of Emancipation* (edited by Jaydeep Sarangi). It is followed by Dorota Filipczak's review of the fifth edition of Cuddon's dictionary, and Wit Pietrzak's review of a new scholarly journal set up in the Institute of Polish Studies at the University of Łódź. The section ends with Michał Lachman's conversation with the British scholar, critic and playwright Dan Rebellato and Dorota Filipczak's interview with Rukmini Bhaya Nair, a critic of postcolonialism, a linguist and a poet from India.

Eroticism and Its Discontents: Eroticism in Medieval and Renaissance Literature

Piotr Spyra
University of Łódź

Beyond the Garden: On the Erotic in the Vision of the Middle English *Pearl*

ABSTRACT

The Middle English *Pearl* is known for its mixture of genres, moods and various discourses. The textual journey the readers of the poem embark on is a long and demanding one, leading from elegiac lamentations and the erotic outbursts of courtly love to theological debates and apocalyptic visions. The heterogeneity of the poem has often prompted critics to overlook the continuity of the erotic mode in *Pearl* which emerges already in the poem's first stanza. While it is true that throughout the dream vision the language of the text never eroticizes the relationship between the Dreamer and the Pearl Maiden to the extent that it does in the opening lines, the article argues that eroticism actually underlies the entire structure of the vision proper. Taking recourse to Roland Barthes's distinction between the erotic and the sexual to explain the exact nature of the bond which connects the two characters, the argument posits eroticism as an expression of somatic longing; a careful analysis of *Pearl* through this prism provides a number of ironic insights into the mutual interactions between the Dreamer and the Maiden and highlights the poignancy of their inability to understand each other. Further conclusions are also drawn from comparing *Pearl* with a number of Chaucerian dream visions. Tracing the erotic in both its overt and covert forms and following its transformations in the course of the narrative, the article outlines the poet's creative use of the mechanics of the dream vision, an increasingly popular genre in the period when the poem was written.

ABSTRACT

One of the most contentious issues enlivening the critical debate about the Middle English *Pearl* is the problem of its internal divisions. The dream vision defies most critical attempts to pinpoint the exact character of its narrative structure, and while some scholars see the poem as a diptych, the twofold structure reflecting its Gothic character (Harwood 61–65), others discern a distinctly tripartite structure in the text. The latter view, endorsed by the majority of critics (Chance 31–32), arises quite naturally out of the framing which the scenes in the garden, where the narrator falls asleep, provide for the dream he relates. Whatever their view on the exact number of the text's internal sections, however, most critics acknowledge that a substantial shift in mood and tone occurs in stanza five as the narrator swoons with grief and the vision begins.[1] What sets the first five stanzas of the poem apart from the rest is their distinctly secular character, which is most ostensibly seen in stanza one, the first twelve lines of *Pearl* hinting at nothing of the complexity of the theological debate to follow. Conley notes that "[u]nless we interpret the introduction postpositively, according to data transposed from the vision, we surely must acknowledge that the imagery of this crucial stanza has neither an ethical nor a theological tinge and is, in fact, markedly secular" (57–58). This distinctly secular quality of the poem's opening is mostly achieved by the text through eroticizing the imagery of the pearl and thus engaging the medieval tradition of love allegory, perhaps even specifically alluding to the *Roman de la Rose* (cf. Pilch 168–69). What is difficult to explain in the context of what the readers learn later is that the language of this key stanza seems to imply that the woman the narrator lost was for him not so much a daughter as a lover. While some critics dismiss "the dreamer's lack of explicitness" in making clear who exactly he is talking about as a symptom of his confusion and grief (Anderson 21), others prefer to see the eroticism of stanza one as a by-product of the linguistic contrast between the earthly discourse of the dreamer and the heavenly-inspired words of the Pearl Maiden (cf. Gross). Attempting to re-evaluate and underline the role of eroticism in the poem, this article takes issue with the common assumption that the erotic can only be found in *Pearl* in the initial garden setting or that its nature is predominantly verbal; by following the narrator from the garden into the vision he experiences, the argument aims to expose the transformation of

[1] The one obvious set of divisions that cannot be dismissed is the formal pattern of stanza sets, twenty altogether, produced through concatenation, which allows for the thematic shift in question to be built into the poem's formal structure.

the erotic as the narrative proceeds and posits eroticism as a foundational principle which, intertwined with the oneiric quality of the vision, provides much of the tension which informs the Dreamer's encounter with the Pearl Maiden.

To outline the secular quality of the poem's first stanza, it is necessary to quote it in its entirety:

> Perle, plesaunte to prynces paye
> To clanly clos in gold so clere:
> Oute of orient, I hardyly saye,
> Ne proved I never her precios pere.
> So rounde, so reken in uche araye,
> So small, so smothe her sydes were,
> Quere-so-ever I jugged gemmes gaye,
> I sette hyr sengeley in synglere.
> Allas! I leste hyr in on erbere;
> Thurgh gresse to grounde hit fro me yot.
> I dewyne, fordolked of luf-daungere
> Of that privy perle wythouten spot. (ll. 1–12)

The narrator's relationship with the pearl is immediately established as physical and intimate: the stanza focuses on the way the pearl feels to the touch, and the readers follow the speaker in relating how his hands move around her perfect roundness in a gesture reminiscent of bodily caress. The erotic tension produced by the sense of somatic familiarity and closeness is also heightened by the reference to the Orient, a place which functioned in the medieval imagination as a realm of forbidden pleasures and carnal delights (cf. Heng 242–46). Andrew and Waldron rightly note that in employing the imagery of lines five and six, "the Poet draws on stock epithets used in courtly literature to describe beautiful women" (53), and it is, indeed, difficult to see the pearl in this stanza as a metaphor for anything other than the female body. The act of losing the pearl, which, as the readers later learn, has an elegiac overtone to it, can also easily be subordinated to this reading and seen as an expression of erotic dejection on the part of the abandoned, or rejected, lover. Though the following stanzas quickly subvert the mood and tone of the poem's opening, the first twelve lines of *Pearl* quite consistently orient the narrative in the direction of the traditional love allegory; the impression is strengthened by the vocabulary of line 11, which, in showing the speaker pining for love ("I dewyne, fordolked of luf-daungere"), clearly engages the discourse of *amour courtois*. Pilch, who translates the line as "I languish, grievously wounded by the love-dominion," finds in the language used by the poet a direct reference to the character of Daunger from the French *Roman de la Rose* (167–68).

Whatever the true nature of this particular allusion may be, there is little in stanza one that would provide clues to the way in which the poem later develops.

Though with each stanza the elegiac mode becomes stronger and stronger, the garden setting of the opening section of *Pearl* makes it impossible for the reader to abandon the association with love allegory altogether. The place where the narrator finds himself is, after all, a version of the traditional *locus amoenus*. The text indicates that he enters the garden "In Augoste in a high seysoun" (l. 39), presumably August 15th (Stern 76), which marks the feast of the Assumption. Providing a degree of specificity about the date of the dream experience is common among medieval dream visions,[2] but the choice of August, the time of harvest and the dwindling of summer, signifies a substantial departure from the mood of the opening stanza and heralds the fact that this is more of a garden of sorrow than of love. Far from being literally enclosed, the place nonetheless functions as a *hortus conclusus* of a sort, for the numbing grief of the narrator forcefully binds him to the flowery mound where he falls to the ground and makes it impossible for him to abandon the presumed grave of his pearl, locking him within the desolate inner landscape of his sorrow. Challenging the genre with its interplay of the narrator's erotic longings and dirge-like lamentations, *Pearl* seems to be a good example of "reinventing the dream vision," a process which Brown sees operating in England in the second half of the fourteenth century, when "the long-existing and familiar literary currents expressed through the dream vision became revitalized, charged with new possibilities, and the stimulus to original compositions" (23).

To outline the originality of the way in which *Pearl* uses eroticism to structure its narrative, one needs, however, to clarify the nature of the concept. More than any other understanding of eroticism, it is the conceptualization of the erotic as a form of absence and longing that seems to capture the spirit of the poem. In her study of eroticism on the Renaissance stage, Daileader points to two possible ways of seeing absence as the epitome of the erotic (28–29). On the one hand, there is the psychological experience investigated by Jacques Derrida in his analysis of Rousseau's *Confessions*,

[2] The *Roman de la Rose* begins in May, the "tyme of love and jollity" in Chaucer's translation (l. 52), thus establishing May as the season of love, a convention that other dream visions would follow. Among dream visions that begin in May one finds the Middle English *The Book of Cupid* (cf. Olson 572), as well as, for instance, the Middle Scots "Quhen Merche wes with variand windis past" by William Dunbar, where the dreamer "is summoned from his bed by a personified month of May as if he were a lover who has failed to do her honour" (Burrow 136). One of the most notable exceptions to invoking May in this manner is Chaucer's *House of Fame*, which begins on December 10th.

wherein "the absence of the beloved stimulates the . . . imagination, with the result that peripheral objects become central, are endowed with signification based on their past contact with the desired body" (Daileader 29):

> How often have I kissed my bed, since she had slept in it; my curtains, all the furniture of my room, since they belonged to her, and her beautiful hand had touched them; even the floor, on which I had prostrated myself, since she had walked upon it! (Rousseau qtd. in Derrida 152)

The sense of the erotic not only arises thus from the absence of the object of desire but is also heightened by the vestiges of its former presence, by the various paraphernalia of the object's prior proximity which remain and animate the longing. This is clearly the case in *Pearl*, for it was precisely the narrator's almost fetish-like preoccupation with the flowery mound at which the readers find him in the garden that prompted the critics to suggest that the place could actually be the Pearl Maiden's grave, even though the text never overtly suggested so.

On the other hand, absence endows the notion of the erotic with its key distinctive features which differentiate it from the sexual. Daileader's reference to Roland Barthes's treatise on the nature of photography neatly illustrates this point, for trying to distinguish between eroticism and pornography, Barthes observes that pornography, which represents the sexual principle,

> ordinarily represents the sexual organs. . . . The erotic photograph, on the contrary (and this is its very condition), does not make the sexual organs into a central object; it may well not show them at all; it takes the spectator outside its frame[.] (57–59)

The contrast between the sexual and the erotic, which holds for photography, also holds for the Middle English *Pearl* and can help explain the enigma of the narrator's relationship to the deceased girl. There is little critical disagreement among scholars about the Pearl Maiden being the Dreamer's daughter, for not only does the text indicate that she died before she reached the age of two[3] and was "nerre [to him] then aunt or nece" (l. 233), but the form of the blessing in the final stanza has also been identified as typical of a parental benediction (Davis 325–44). In this context the erotic language of the first stanza may seem an aberration difficult to reconcile with the filial nature of their connection. Yet, as Barthes makes clear, the erotic operates by engaging the imagination to go beyond what is immediately available to the senses and need not involve the sexual at all,

[3] "Thou lyfed not two yer in oure thede" (l. 483).

being only vaguely suggestive of it. As a form of longing predicated upon a vacuum that the narrator desperately wants to fill (cf. Daileader 29), the erotic mode can successfully be applied in *Pearl* to convey the father's feelings for his little daughter without implying any kind of improper relationship, for the true ground of his grief and sorrow is precisely his desire to be reunited with the girl.

Indeed, what emerges from the first five stanzas of the poem is exactly this kind of possessiveness on the part of the narrator, betraying both his pain at the separation which took place and his craving that this estrangement be undone. The metaphor of the pearl slipping away from the narrator's hands (l. 10: "Thurgh gresse to grounde hit fro me yot") would thus justify the language of stanza one with its focus on the smoothness of the pearl's sides described as if the Dreamer had the experience of holding her in his palm or caressing her body with his hands. The text may trigger associations of a sexual nature, but what it really communicates is a sense of somatic memory, the feeling of a painful vacuum, and that is what ultimately makes the passage erotic. The emptiness of the palm, the burning absence of what was once readily available to the Dreamer's touch, is what structures his every word and thought. Hence the haunting repetition of the possessive pronoun throughout the first stanza set, which reveals the narrator's obsessive longing for "my privy perle" (cf. ll. 24, 48, 53). Hence also the irony of juxtaposing the metaphor of the pearl with that of the jeweller. Unlike precious gems, pearls are not made by jewellers, who can only trade rather than fashion or shape them. Presenting the narrator as a jeweller by introducing the metaphor of the pearl and having the Maiden address him in these terms, the narrative not only reveals his ignorance of the fact that the girl he lost belongs to her true Maker and Jeweller, i.e. God, but also reinforces the sense of tactile privation, for as a jeweller he had the privilege of handling the pearl's body, an experience he now sorely misses.

Within the framework of seeing absence as a paradigm for the erotic, the moment in which the narrator swoons and the dream begins does not appear to have any particular significance other than that of transforming the way in which the Dreamer's longing is expressed in the text. This transformation, however, has nothing to do with lessening the pain, which remains as strong as ever. Admittedly, the very moment the Dreamer finds himself in the crystalline landscape he is so overwhelmed that he forgets for a moment about his tragic loss:

> The dubbement dere of doun and dales,
> Of wod and water and wlonk playnes,
> Bylde in me blys, abated my bales,
> Forbidden my stresses, dystryed my paynes. (ll. 121–24)

This sense of relief does not last long, however, for when he sees the Pearl Maiden it returns to him with even greater force. This effect is the result of a number of factors. First of all, the girl quickly undermines his initial elation by pronouncing firmly that there is no way he could join her and live with her in this otherworldly landscape. Secondly, there is the river, which successfully conveys their sense of separation, for throughout the debate they engage in the Dreamer and the Maiden remain on its opposite banks. Thirdly, the language the girl uses establishes a powerful new barrier, for whereas the Dreamer's words desperately try to re-establish the familial connection he and the Maiden once shared, her discourse is markedly impersonal and distanced:

'O perle,' quod I, 'in perles pyght,
Art thou my perle that I haf playned,
Regretted by myn one on nyghte?
Much longeyng haf I for the layned,
Sythen into gresse thou me aglyghte.
Pensyf, payred, I am forpayned,
And thou in a lyf of lykyng lyghte,
In Paradys erde, of stryf unstrayned.
What wyrde has hyder my juel vayned,
And don me in thys del and gret daunger?
Fro we in twynne wern towen and twayned,
I haf ben a joyless juelere.'

'Sir, ye haf your tale mysetente,
To say your perle is al awaye,
That is in cofer so comly clente
As in this gardyn gracios gaye,
Hereinne to lenge for ever and play,
Ther mys nee morning com never nere.
Her were a forser for the, in faye,
If thou were a gentyl jueler. (ll. 241–52, 257–64)

While he tries to appeal to the girl's emotions and pity by mentioning long plaintive nights and addressing her with the familial "thou," she only calls him "Sir" and, instead of responding to his pleas, delivers an overtly metaphorical explanation of why he is wrong to see her the way he does. There are thus two barriers separating the Dreamer from the Maiden, one topographical and the other linguistic, and the Dreamer finds himself in a situation even more painful than the one he experienced in the earthly garden, for his beloved is so close, and yet there is no way for him to reach her.

Doomed to failure, he nonetheless keeps trying to reunite with his lost pearl, and this is where the erotic manifests itself most openly within

the dream vision, tying in with its oneiric character. Its nature is no longer linguistic in the way it functioned in the initial stanza set, for nowhere except the poem's opening stanzas do the readers find any passages that may suggest they should see the girl as the man's lover. Instead, the erotic emerges from the uneasy interactions of the narrator and the Maiden, where, though obliquely, it underlies the whole of the conversation. This is very well exemplified by the way the presence of the water barrier affects the mood and behaviour of the Dreamer. In an obvious sense, the barrier provides the foundation for the expression of the erotic, for despite the girl's appearance before the eyes of her father, he still finds himself at a distance from her. Yet the true tenor of eroticism emerges only if one looks closely at the sequence of events in the vision. The moment the Dreamer sees the river he wishes to cross to the other side. As he walks by the bank, this longing increasingly challenges his mental stability, for he can find no safe place to wade across, and, what is important, with each step it seems to him more and more unlikely that a suitable ford could actually be found at all: "Bot wothes mo iwysse ther ware / The fyrre I stalked by the stronde" (ll. 151–52). Though this never emerges clearly on the verbal level of their interactions, one can easily appreciate that noticing his beloved pearl on the other side of the river immediately after realizing that there is virtually no way to reach the place must be shattering for the Dreamer. His only hope is that the girl can safely get him across. His expectations must be running high at this point: her radiant clothes and figure make her seem one with the crystalline landscape to the eye of the beholder, which may suggest a fair degree of familiarity with it on her part, thus heralding a promise of imminent reunion. Yet all the girl does is reiterate in various paraphrases the simple message of "Sir, you cannot." All this heightens the sense of erotic longing and conjoins absence and the vestiges of presence in a single extended scene, with the girl simultaneously being so close to the Dreamer and yet in a sense still absent from his world.

Equally dramatic is the sense of paralysis the Dreamer experiences upon seeing the Maiden for the first time. When he notices her on the other bank he is so overwhelmed with both fear and joy that he can neither speak nor even beckon to the girl: "I stod ful style and dorste not calle; / Wyth yyen open and mouth ful clos" (ll. 182–83). His inability to move resembles the typical dreamlike experience of being paralyzed in the face of great danger and desire. The use of actual dream mechanics or imagery within the medieval visions is not unusual (cf. Russell 117–18), and the anguish felt by the Dreamer, who is unable to move towards what is most precious for him, further intensifies the sense of erotic longing. This longing, it is worth reiterating, is predicated upon an absence which captivates the Dreamer with the semblance of the immediacy of presence, with the

Maiden being both by his side and, in a way, in an altogether different and unreachable realm, beyond the river. The implication of erotic desire is also suggested by another factor: the Dreamer's quasi-bodily presence in the crystalline land. Admittedly, this is a vision of the spirit, and the narrator himself, immediately prior to launching himself into the description of his dream, states that while "Fro spot my spyryt ther sprang in space; / My body on balke ther bod in sweven" (ll. 61–62). Yet though his body remains at the spot where he mourned his pearl in the earthly garden, he clearly behaves as if he were by the river in more than just his spirit, as the realistic detail of his search for a suitable ford to wade across proves. The fact that he fears for his life looking at the waters of the river, or that he actually attempts to swim across it, imply his physical presence there. So does his enquiry about the Maiden's lodgings: in what is perhaps the most ironic moment within their debate, proving how earth-bound in his thoughts the Dreamer still is, he asks her if she has any shelter nearby (ll. 929–36), genuinely alarmed at her being at the mercy of the elements (ll. 929–31: "So cumly a pake of joly juele / Were evel don schulde lyy theroute"). This question may also betray his desire to join her there, and it is likely that by raising this issue he is actually attempting to make her change her mind and let him join her on the other bank. The entire middle part of the poem, consisting of the first part of the dream, may thus be seen as a dramatic expression of erotic longing.

The dream, however, also consists of the miraculous "syght" of New Jerusalem (cf. ll. 965–72), and a comparison of the structure of the poem with other medieval dream visions once again points to a high level of suggestive eroticism at work in *Pearl*. On the one hand, this section of the poem may be seen as a form of a vision within a vision, similar to the technique of embedding minor dreams within the major one that was used in *Piers Plowman*. On the other hand, it is preferable for several reasons to see the New Jerusalem as the second part of the dream rather than something nested in it in the manner of a Chinese box. Juxtaposing the structure of *Pearl* with contemporaneous Chaucerian dream visions reveals a number of striking parallels. In both *The Book of the Duchess* and *The House of Fame* one finds a similar twofold division within the dream. The former work introduces a scheme that the latter follows: the narrator falls asleep and finds himself in a beautiful chamber with exquisite stained glass windows, sculptures or paintings. In *The Book of the Duchess* this is the poet's own room, though transformed, while in *The House of Fame* the narrator realizes he is in some sort of a temple in the midst of a desert. Chaucer, who can be identified with both narrators, leaves these chambers and with the help of guides, a little dog in the former case and an eagle in the latter, finds his way to a different stage of events where the vision proper begins.

Not much different in this respect, *The Parliament of Fowls* also shows two distinct places, both of which could be classified as a form of the classical *locus amoenus*: before he reaches the place where the birds are to hold their parliament, Geoffrey the narrator moves through the court of Venus, described in such detail that the place acquires substantial significance in the text even though nothing that would directly involve Geoffrey actually happens there. With *Pearl*, it is not immediately obvious how it relates to the structure of Chaucer's poems, for it is unclear whether one should see the earthly garden as the equivalent of the first stage of the Chaucerian visions, or whether that function is performed by the crystalline landscape, with the New Jerusalem functioning as the vision proper. However, the latter definitely seems more likely if one considers the role of guides. A brief recourse to Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls* can illustrate this point.

One can quite easily discern three parts in Dante's masterpiece, concomitant with the narrator's journeys through Hell, Purgatory and Heaven. This division is not so obvious, however, if one considers the narrator's guides, for while Virgil leads Dante through the first two realms, Beatrice is his guide in the heavens. One may find a similar, asymmetrical model of introducing two guide figures in Chaucer. First of all, there are the dog and the Man in Black in *The Book of the Duchess*, with the former appearing only for a brief moment in order to lead Geoffrey to the latter's forest glade. Then, in *The House of Fame*, there is the eagle, developed in great detail, as well as the mysterious man who takes Geoffrey from the Hall of Fame to the House of Fame, with the eagle making a final cameo appearance towards the very end of the poem. In *The Parliament of Fowls*, in turn, there is only one guide, Scipio Africanus, who shoves Geoffrey through the gate which leads to the paradisiacal landscape where the vision unfolds, and at that point disappears from the text. Regardless of the exact structure of each particular vision, they can all be divided into two parts, with the guide either changing at some point or altogether disappearing, just as the Pearl Maiden vanishes from the Dreamer's sight the moment the vision of the city begins. That is why the passages about the New Jerusalem in *Pearl* are more likely to be the vision's continuation than another dream embedded in it.

For a guide figure, the Maiden has quite peculiar interactions with the Dreamer. She does not lead him anywhere physically, and the only interaction they have is verbal. This is particularly conspicuous in the fact that she does not take him to the New Jerusalem, nor does he go there on his own. In fact, he remains motionless on the river bank while God sends him the vision, at which point the girl seems to abandon him, just like Scipio Africanus abandons Chaucer in *The Parliament of Fowls*: though she probably

remains on the opposite bank, she disappears from his sight as his eyes begin to focus on the distant heavenly city. The comparison of the Maiden and Scipio yields yet another insight, strongly suggestive of intertextual irony. The role of the guide is to lead the Dreamer onwards, which is not an easy task given the sort of wonders, as well as dangers, the character usually encounters and becomes captivated by, and in *The Parliament of Fowls* Scipio literally needs to give Chaucer a shove to help him find the courage to pass the gate they find on their way: "Affrycan, my gide, / Me hente and shof in at the gates wide" (ll. 153–54). He even holds his hand for a moment to comfort him, which is exactly the sort of detail missing from the text of *Pearl*, where, ironically, the guide figure cannot even stand within arm's length of the Dreamer, let alone touch him. Furthermore, the sort of paralysis Chaucer encounters in front of the gate and the Pearl Dreamer's motionless posture when he sees the girl appear to occupy analogous positions in the respective structures of the two texts. Where a push to the other side would be most welcome, all the Dreamer receives is the Maiden's castigations. The poet seems to be engaging here the mechanics of dream visions and reshaping them creatively to stress the immensity of erotic longing and the unbridgeable gulf that separates the spiritual existence of the girl from the bodily preoccupations of her father.

Another ironic element in the way the story of *Pearl* is constructed is the fact that although it draws on traditional love allegories and even refers to the French *Roman de la Rose* directly, it allows the Dreamer no sense of consummation whatsoever, for he never gets anywhere or reaches any place other than that where he spotted his daughter. The two parts of the vision, one taking place by the river bank, and the other in the New Jerusalem, actually happen at the exact same place, and the sense of movement is only illusory. Whereas in most other dream visions, ranging from the *Roman* and the *Divine Comedy* to Chaucer's works, the Dreamer embarks on some sort of adventure that takes him somewhere, the Pearl Dreamer stays right where he was from the very beginning. This fundamental denial not only of consummation but also of any opportunity for attaining it is yet another factor that intensifies the sense of the eroticized insatiability of the Dreamer's desire. The fact that the Maiden is the only person the narrator encounters in his dream may also be seen as quite ironic, for it naturally focuses his attention on her even more than the sheer fact of seeing his dead daughter would.

At the very end of the vision the Dreamer's language once again begins to hint at him being overwhelmed with erotic longing, just as in the first stanza set, though by no means implying that the two were lovers as suggestively as the poem's opening does. The narrator admits that he attempted to cross the river "For luf-longyng in gret delyt" (l. 1152), and

this reappearance of the vocabulary of courtly love and the Dreamer's sudden awakening has often been taken by critics as a sure sign that the Dreamer failed to understand the lesson of the Maiden and woke up just as earthly-minded and ignorant of spiritual reality as he was when he lost consciousness in the first place.[4] Indeed, the readers may be tempted to see the narrator mentioning "luf-longyng" as evidence for the re-emergence of erotic desire within the Dreamer, for on the verbal level the sense of the erotic was clearly subdued during the debate between the two characters. One ought to realize, nonetheless, that throughout the vision the erotic is always present, but, instead of being communicated by verbal means, it finds its expression in the way the vision is structured: it is by intensifying the Dreamer's longing and ironically underscoring how close and yet how distant the Maiden and her father really are that the text of *Pearl* introduces the element of the erotic into the story with far greater force than any suggestive vocabulary could. That there can be no talk of any sudden re-emergence of the erotic at the point when the Dreamer tries to cross the stream is evident given the immediate reason for this attempt. It is when the Dreamer sees his little girl once again among the throng of virgins in the New Jerusalem that he can withhold himself no more and dashes into the water. Clearly what happens is that seeing the girl even farther away than he did during their conversation, he begins to feel that he is losing her again and that there is no chance of reuniting with her whatsoever, and this is what prompts him to make this last desperate attempt.

One may conclude that the beginning of the vision changes little with respect to the presence of the erotic in the poem. It obviously alters its form of expression, which is no longer verbal within the dream, but as for its intensity, the confrontation of the Dreamer's desire and the Maiden's endeavour to edify her father, or the topography of the crystalline landscape and the structure of the vision itself, only heighten the sense of the Dreamer's longing. The way the erotic mode functions in the poem substantiates Brown's observation that in some medieval dream visions the dream barrier is lacking altogether with little effect on the nature of the vision, which is still dream-like and operates as if the barrier were there (39): *Pearl* would in this context occupy the middle ground, with the dream threshold still there but not as consequential for the narrative, at least with regard to the erotic, as it may initially appear to be. One may say that, while the convention of a dream allows the Pearl-Poet to justify the otherworldly character of the Dreamer's adventure and to explore the

[4] For a detailed exposition of this point of view, see Prior 40–44. Cf. Hoffman, who claims that at the end of the poem "the narrator still laments his loss, the same loss, in the same tone" (90).

differences between the material and the spiritual world, it does not signal a fundamental change, or rift, in the poem's consistently erotic presentation of the Dreamer's longing. Recognizing the role of the dream threshold in eroticising the Dreamer's relationship with his Pearl, one may call for a re-evaluation of the current notions of the poem's internal divisions, for while the moment the narrator swoons and falls to the ground clearly changes a lot, the investigation of the exact nature of this change may still yield fruitful insights into the way the poet fashioned his masterpiece.

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Eros and Pilgrimage in Chaucer's and Shakespeare's Poetry

ABSTRACT

The paper discusses erotic desire and the motif of going on pilgrimage in the opening of Geoffrey Chaucer's General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* and in William Shakespeare's sonnets. What connects most of the texts chosen for consideration in the paper is their diptych-like composition, corresponding to the dual theme of *eros* and pilgrimage. At the outset, I read the first eighteen lines of Chaucer's Prologue and demonstrate how the passage attempts to balance and reconcile the eroticism underlying the description of nature at springtime with Christian devotion and the spirit of compunction. I support the view that the passage is the first wing of a diptych-like construction opening the General Prologue. The second part of the paper focuses on the motif of pilgrimage, particularly erotic pilgrimage, in Shakespeare's sonnets. I observe that most of the sonnets that exploit the conceit of travel to the beloved form lyrical diptychs. Shakespeare reverses the medieval hierarchy of pilgrimage and desire espoused by Chaucer. Both poets explore and use to their own ends the tensions inherent in the juxtaposition of sacred and profane love. Their compositions encode deeper emotional patterns of desire: Chaucer's narrator channels sexual drives into the route of communal national penance, whereas the Shakespearean persona employs religious sentiments in the service of private erotic infatuations.

ABSTRACT

(1) Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
(2) The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
(3) And bathed every veyne in swich licour
(4) Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
(5) Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth
(6) Inspired hath in every holt and heath
(7) The tendre croppes; and the yonge sonne
(8) Hath in the Ram his half cours yronne,
(9) And smale foweles maken melodye,
(10) That slepen al the nyght with open ye
(11) (So priketh hem nature in hir corages),
(12) Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,
(13) And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,
(14) To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;
(15) And specially from every shires ende
(16) Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,
(17) The hooly blisful martir for to seke,
(18) That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.
(Chaucer 23)

Chaucer's famous hymn to spring at the beginning of the General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* can be read as a self-contained text, even though it constitutes an integral part of the collection, being a chronographia employed as a preface to a longer work. The first eighteen lines introducing the renowned story collection are marked off as a separate unit in the Ellesmere manuscript, where the coloured, decorated capitals are used in lines 1 and 19: the scribe has thus divided the passage from the following text, recognizing the author's intention signalled by the *rime riche* (Wilcockson 345) that binds the ninth couplet (ll. 17–18) and falls decisively like the hymn's final note. The brilliant lines certainly draw attention to themselves. The multiple long vowels and diphthongs along with liquid and nasal consonants underscore the melodic quality, which rivals the evoked "melodye" made by the "smale foweles." The musical effect is strengthened by a particularly satisfying proportion of foreign to native English diction: words like *licour*, *engendred*, *inspired*, *nature*, *melodye*, *corages*— polysyllables of Franco-Latin origin, exotic-sounding and elevating the style, contrast with and diversify the dominant homely, native English sonority. The poetic melody is sustained by the use of enjambment, which creates the effect of flowing: the passage constitutes one long sentence, an expanded "when" clause, ultimately completed only at the end of line 18, the closure being reinforced by the perfect rhyme *seke/seeke*, which brings under the same sound different meanings and parts of speech.

This distinctness of sound makes one think in the context of Chaucer's lines of a sonnet (Italian *sonetto*, diminutive of *suono*, sound). Most sonnets consist of fourteen lines, though—at least such is the classroom dictum. Let us, nevertheless, toy for a moment with the idea of the first fourteen lines of the General Prologue being a sonnet, for it may help us understand the working of the text. The lines would be a sonnet of the English or so-called Shakespearean type, for Chaucer's five-stress lines closely approach the latter's characteristic iambic pentameter, and his division of thought readily falls into the pattern of three four-line segments and a final couplet. Like Chaucer, Shakespeare also uses "when…when… when."[1] The *volta*, so crucial in a sonnet, could be identified in Chaucer's passage in the word "pilgrimages" closing line 12, an important juncture leading to the couplet that rounds up the argument in lines 13–14. And although Chaucer writes in couplets throughout, it seems that this is not a major obstacle for viewing his text as a Shakespearean sonnet, since Shakespeare himself actually wrote one sonnet, number 126, in couplets. The only problem with this reading would seem to be that it is the eighteen, not just fourteen, lines that constitute a seamless entity in Chaucer's work.

But what is a sonnet? And must all sonnets consist of fourteen lines? In a recent article, Amanda Holton questions "the distinctiveness and modernity of the sonnet" and its "otherness" in relation to pre-Renaissance English poetry (373, 392). She points out that the sonnet's origin is not known for certain and that the form was established already in the 1230s, at the court of Frederick II, ruler of Sicily and southern Italy. As to medieval England, Holton finds there different examples of fourteen-line poems, derived from French poetry, which preceded the sonnet. She further demonstrates that certain features apparently inescapably associated with the sonnet, such as a clear formal division into octave and sestet, are in fact optional. In addition, while critics consider the sonnet to be particularly suitable to the development of a thought, some early sonnets in English are static and lack a driving argument, which shows that sonnets can be "non-argumentative poems" (Holton 375). Nor are they always connected, as critics would like them to be, with "deep contradictions," with "subjectivity and frustrated desire," or with "the foregrounding of the poetic persona" (Holton 375). In short, there are few constant traits that define the sonnet. One may add that even the fourteen lines is not an absolute must, for in the modern, post-Shakespearean tradition of sonnet

[1] Many of Shakespeare's sonnets begin with "when," for example: "When to the sessions of sweet silent thought" (sonnet 30) or "When in the chronicle of wasted time" (sonnet 106), and in sonnet 64 all three quatrains begin with "when."

writing there is George Meredith's Victorian sequence of sixteen-line sonnets, *Modern Love*, whose form has in turn been adopted by the twentieth-century poet Tony Harrison (Łączyńska 281–82). Apparently, the sonnet is a more flexible form than we have been accustomed to think.

Although Chaucer's translation in *Troilus and Criseyde* of Petrarch's sonnet 88 in rhyme royal stanzas is often quoted as evidence of the English poet's unfamiliarity with the sonnet, many of the features usually attached to sonnets can be attested in the opening lines of the General Prologue. The passage is extraordinarily dynamic, if only by virtue of dealing with natural energies and movements and not of an inherent argument. It is organized around a subterranean opposition between sexual drives and metaphysical longings, which it manages to harness to its own purposes. And as to the number of lines, Chaucer's text could be construed in the likeness of Italian "Sonnets with a Tail," or so-called caudated sonnets (Going 102), the *cauda*, tail, consisting in this case of the last four lines (15–18), added after the concluding couplet.

In the passage under consideration Chaucer realizes the invocation of nature *topos*, though he not so much invokes nature as enumerates its various elements, not as a random catalogue but by way of unified images. Thus, the first four lines unfold the image of spring showers piercing the dry soil and providing water necessary for chemical reactions that ultimately lead to the germination of flowers. The quatrain is unified by its focus on underground processes and organic growth. The next four lines concentrate on the sphere of the air: the operation and effects of the wind and the movement of the sun. The third quatrain is unified by its concern with animate creatures endowed with hearts, "corages," thus preparing a transition to humans. The division into three quatrains is enhanced by semantic and syntactic parallelisms and lexical repetitions.

Characteristically, Chaucer's principal theme of religious devotion is introduced only at the end of line 12, where the word "pilgrimages" initiates a twist from the description of nature to the subject of penance. This shift is reinforced in the next two lines through the words "palmeres" (professional pilgrims who went on pilgrimages on behalf of other people) and "halwes" (shrines). The point of this couplet is extended over another four lines, focusing on a particular pilgrimage and specifying its circumstances. The entire passage constitutes one long sentence which unfolds a story, where the first eleven lines build up suspense, line 12 reaches the culminating point, and the last six lines bring resolution.

The initial description of nature brings out the power of universal sexual attraction. Sexuality is strongly implied in this longest part of the passage, where the natural elements and processes are personified and imbued with volition and passion. In the first quatrain, the union of rains and earth

gives birth to flowers. In the second, the gentle west wind personified as Zephyrus generates new shoots and buds on trees, while the young sun, representing male fecundity and compared to a ruddy champion running or riding along the arch of the sky, brings to mind heroic lovers of chivalric romances. In the third quatrain the birds making their melodies and staying awake all night are an even more obvious figure of a courtly lover (a bit later in the General Prologue the Squire is likened to one such bird: "So hoote he lovede that by nyghtertale / He sleep namoore than dooth a nyghtengale," ll. 97–98; Chaucer 25) and there may be a sexual word-play on the verb "priketh" (Wilcockson 347). Chaucer's mention of the Ram, and his dating of the pilgrimage some time between the zodiacal signs of Aries and Taurus, evokes animals traditionally associated with male fecundity. The overall image of the generative forces underlying biological life may be envisaged as that of organic coitus, where the male rains, wind and sun, the former gods such as Sol, make contact with the female land, Mother Earth, and produce new life, and goddess Natura arouses sexually the avian and by extension human creatures.

The poetic conventions utilized in the passage (cf. Eckhardt 190) further underline what may be called its deliberately raised amorous horizon of expectations. Thus, the depiction of springtime, also known as the *reverdie*, raises the possibility of a love lyric. The fragrant breezes, fecund earth and twittering birds suggest the latent theme of love and desire. The description of springtime resembles introductions to dream vision poems, particularly *Le Roman de la rose*, where a landscape of flowers and birdsong introduces the theme of secular love. Not to mention the fact that in real life "a pilgrimage held a venal appeal to some" as "the anonymity of people enjoyed away from home brought opportunities for sex" (Westrem 200). Although latent eroticism definitely dominates in the first twelve lines of the passage, some spiritual connotations are evoked as well. The verb "inspireth," for instance, derived from the Latin *inspirare*, implies "infusion of a divine presence," while the image of the rebirth of nature may be read as a figure of the Creation of the world (Wilcockson 347).

Against the dominant, erotically charged atmosphere, reaching its climax in the noun "corages," which in this context signifies erotic love, Chaucer introduces, somewhat unexpectedly, the idea of going on "pilgrimages," and along with it the thoughts of penance and religious devotion. After this point the text moves increasingly away from the profane, towards the sacred. The opposition between these two spheres is pinpointed by the rhyme "corages/pilgrimages" (ll. 11–12), which charts the shift from the erotic to the spiritual. It is noteworthy that a similar rhyme is repeated within a few lines but in the reversed order, "pilgrimage/corage" (ll. 21–22). Apart from the meaningful reversal, the word "corage" is now

said to be "devout," losing its association with erotic desire, and a revaluation, a turning away from the allure of nature to heavenly thoughts and pursuits, is therefore implied. The new focus on holy "pilgrimage(s)" is suggested also by the centrality of this word in the passage and by a possible numerical device: the lines in which the word occurs are numbered 12 and 21, numbers which reverse and mirror each other. In terms of medieval number symbolism, both numbers may be read as juxtaposing unity (1) against division (2) and suggesting a higher unity through the sum of their ciphers (3), which may bring to mind the concept of the Holy Trinity.

The surprising aspect of the Chaucerian text is the way it precedes and mingles the introduction of a pious occasion with a skilful gradation of erotic desire. Here lies the power of the passage, but the poet's mastery shows itself also in reconciling the underlying *eros* with religious sensibility and in being able to avoid a clash between these seemingly irreconcilable spheres. The mediating role is fulfilled by the verb "longen" in central line 12. The idea of longing embraces both the sexual drives evoked in the preceding lines and the pilgrimages described in what follows. As a result, the pilgrimages are invested with ambiguity at this point of the poem: they are viewed, on the one hand, as a search for spiritual and physical healing but, on the other hand, are imbued with vague yearnings for novel experiences in distant and exotic lands and shores. The verb "seken," implying a quest, possibly of an errant type, reinforces the multiple, indefinite significance of "longen." Longing, which distinguishes human beings in the hierarchy of creation, is therefore implied to be both physical and metaphysical; it is synonymous with desire, curiosity, crossing the borders of the familiar world, and penetration of unknown territories. Though in the end going on pilgrimage is narrowed down to visiting the tomb of St. Thomas à Becket, the preceding context renders pilgrimage a much more ambivalent and dangerous enterprise. Finally, the presence of death at the end of Chaucer's passage, through the references to the Archbishop's martyrdom and human sickness, completes the poet's extraordinary, multidimensional description of April, which is reminiscent of T. S. Eliot's image of the same month at the outset of *The Waste Land* as "breeding lilacs out of the dead land, mixing / Memory and desire, stirring / Dull roots with spring rain" (ll. 1–4; 51).

Thus, in the first part of his introductory passage Chaucer is a pilgrim "to nature," anticipating thereby Romantic poet-pilgrims,[2] though nature is for him strongly underwritten with *eros*. In the end, however, the medieval poet-pilgrim gathers up the diverse erotic emotions dispersed over

[2] Robin Jarvis distinguishes the pilgrim to nature among the principal categories of Romantic travellers. However, unlike Chaucer and Shakespeare in the poems discussed here, Wordsworth and Coleridge travelled mostly on foot.

his text and redirects and subordinates them to God through the image of a uniform and ordered human movement towards Canterbury Cathedral symbolizing the *civitas Dei*. This important shift is confirmed in the next section of the General Prologue, which according to Colin Wilcockson constitutes the second part of a diptych opening *The Canterbury Tales*, as indicated by the decorated capitals in the Ellesmere manuscript (345–50). The mode of this second part is wholly narrative and the story is focused entirely on the holy pilgrimage. The first-person narrative persona is introduced as a pious pilgrim and integrated with other pilgrims travelling like him to Canterbury. The inverted rhyme "pilgrimage/corage," referring back to the preceding passage, implies the presence of the poetic self in that passage as well, but in a dispersed and indefinite fashion. Now the speaker defines himself as a pilgrim and turns wholeheartedly towards the "hooly blisful martir."

Interestingly enough, the passage delimited by the first and the second occurrence of this central rhyme, that is, lines 11 through 22, comprises exactly twelve lines, which is yet another use of 12 in Chaucer's composition, along with line 12 introducing manifold "pilgrimages" and line 21, the reversal of 12, focusing on the narrator's pilgrimage to Canterbury "with ful devout corage." The composition of the introductory passage draws our attention to number 12. Searching for a specific meaning of this number, one may note that the only number explicitly mentioned in the opening of the General Prologue is "nyne and twenty," the number of Canterbury pilgrims, given, significantly, in line 24, a double of 12. The total number of pilgrims including Chaucer is thus made to be 30, with the sum of its ciphers, 3, once again suggesting the Holy Trinity. One remembers, as well, that 12 is a number of Revelation, or Apocalypse, and of the heavenly city of Jerusalem, as highlighted by the Middle English *Pearl* composed by a poet contemporary to Chaucer.

But Chaucer's most topical allusion inscribed in the numbers 12 and 29 is to St. Thomas of Canterbury, for the numbers refer to the month and day of the liturgical celebration of the saint's martyrdom in the medieval Church, December 29th. The allusion makes much sense in the light of the overall significance of the Chaucerian diptych, with its pivotal turn from the eroticized description of nature to the Canterbury pilgrimage.[3] The meaningful numbers, either explicitly mentioned or evoked in the text, help us appreciate its inner rhythm alternating joy, spring, rebirth, and resurrection with suffering, sickness, winter, and death. This is also

[3] Number symbolism, a kind of mathematical poetics, was often utilized by medieval poets in the composition of their texts, as demonstrated by numerous studies, such as A.C. Spearing's paper on *Pearl* and other Middle English and Middle Scots poems.

the rhythm of the Christian liturgy, an awareness of which must have been deeply rooted, also subconsciously, in Chaucer's mind: a liturgy so designed as to celebrate martyrs like St. Thomas right after Christmas Day, and celebrate Christmas itself during the darkest month of winter, while commemorating the Crucifixion as well as the Resurrection in spring. T.S. Eliot captures this dual atmosphere of spring in the opening lines of *The Waste Land* with the imagery of birth and death, memory and desire, but the essential duality underlies also Chaucer's introduction to *The Canterbury Tales*.

Erotic and metaphysical discourses are intertwined also in Shakespeare's sonnets, some of which can be viewed as reversals of the pattern established in Chaucer's text in that they employ the idea of holy pilgrimage as an effective trope of erotic love. Whereas the Chaucerian persona ultimately displaces the erotic at the outset of *The Canterbury Tales*, and more explicitly in the Retraction, and becomes a repentant pilgrim, Shakespeare's persona can be defined as a passionate pilgrim.[4] Not all of Shakespeare's uses of pilgrimage are equally remote from the spirit of medieval poetry, though: in Sonnet 7, for example, the course of the sun in the sky is called his "golden pilgrimage" (l. 8; 1200), recalling Chaucer's image of the young sun running in the sky parallel to the humans travelling to Canterbury; Sonnet 60, in turn, employs the quest motif to convey the inevitable movement of human life towards death, "Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore, / So do our minutes hasten to their end" (ll. 1–2; 1207).

Typically, however, Shakespeare invests pilgrimage with new, non-religious meanings, which are merely subtly implicit in Chaucer. In general, Shakespeare likes to resort to religious discourse to convey the power of erotic desire: for instance, Sonnet 105, "Let not my love be call'd idolatry" (l. 1; 1214), plays upon the Catholic concept of the Holy Trinity, being an instance of sacred parody *à rebours*, whereby religious concepts are used for the ends of secular love poetry, not *vice versa*. Shakespeare repeatedly employs Christian concepts and religious vocabulary to magnify and elevate a deeply secular devotion. One could even risk a statement that in his poetry sacred words and images become erotic appetizers of desire. This is a tradition established before Chaucer, who employs it in his *Troilus* making, for example, Troilus fall in love with Criseyde in the temple.

In particular, in Shakespeare's sonnets a lover is figured as a pilgrim on the way to his beloved, seeking no forgiveness of sins but erotic fulfilment. The Bard's first sonnets, versions of what later became Sonnets 138

[4] In her study of love's pilgrimage in English Renaissance literature, Grace Tiffany registers the various changes of pilgrimage from religious quest to, for example, "erotic adventures" in Shakespeare's and Donne's poetry (21).

and 144, were published in a volume entitled *The Passionate Pilgrim* (1599), whose title may have referred to a line in *Romeo and Juliet*, where lips are envisaged as "two blushing pilgrims" (Schoenfeld 57). Interestingly, many of Shakespeare's sonnets that develop the *topos* of the lover's journey to the beloved form sequences usually composed of two poems. This is the case with sonnets 27 and 28. The former describes the speaker's mental journey to the addressee:

> Weary with toil, I haste me to my bed,
> The dear repose for limbs with travel tir'd;
> But then begins a journey in my head
> To work my mind, when body's work's expir'd:
> For then my thoughts—from far where I abide—
> Intend a zealous pilgrimage to thee,
> And keep my drooping eyelids open wide,
> Looking on darkness which the blind do see:
> Save that my soul's imaginary sight
> Presents thy shadow to my sightless view,
> Which, like a jewel hung in ghastly night,
> Makes black night beauteous and her old face new.
> Lo! thus, by days my limbs, by night my mind,
> For thee, and for myself no quiet find.
> (Shakespeare 1202)

Three kinds of travel appear in the poem. The first is the actual riding during the day to the beloved, which exhausts the speaker's "limbs" and makes him "weary with toil" so that he makes haste to repose. Going to bed alone is thus the second kind of travel, an anti-pilgrimage of sorts, ironically depicted in the opening line of the sonnet. The third kind of travel, on which the sonnet dwells, is "a journey in my head," the mental travel to the beloved made by night, when the tired body seeks rest but the restless mind keeps the speaker's "drooping eyelids open wide." The epithet "zealous" imbues this imaginary pilgrimage to the beloved with sacred connotations, so does the evocation of light in the midst of darkness: the imaginary sight of the beloved is "like a jewel hung in ghastly night," replacing both the sun shining during the day and the Son of God as the object of devotion. This nocturnal erotic travel is an entirely secular version of pilgrimage which reverses the medieval Christian concept and makes it subservient to Shakespeare's elevation of human love.

The sonnet's three types of pilgrimage between them render its persona a permanent erotic traveller who never finds quiet for himself and is reminiscent of Chaucer's "smale foweles" that "slepen al the nyght with open ye." This is, of course, a familiar *topos* of love literature and there is

no specific allusion to Chaucer on the part of Shakespeare. The pilgrimage in the sonnet is disorderly and nervous in comparison with the Chaucerian pilgrims' ride towards Canterbury, organized by the well-established spatiotemporal symbolic of medieval culture. The movement is at first extremely slow, as implied by the phrase "weary with toil"; then the speaker's tired body makes an ultimate effort: "I haste me to my bed"; and just when the "dear repose" seems to have been found, there begins another, arduous journey: "a journey in my head" and "a zealous pilgrimage to thee." His pilgrimage is a disoriented, haphazard, back-and-forth movement. The argument and the imagery of Sonnet 27 are taken up in Sonnet 28 so that the two poems form a bipartite composition. Sonnet 28 commences with the speaker reflecting upon his desire, thwarted with exhaustion, to return to the beloved: "How can I then return in happy plight, / That am debarr'd the benefit of rest?", and further develops the idea of the passionate lover's oppression and restlessness, when day and night "shake hands to torture me, / The one by toil, the other to complain / How far I toil, still further off from thee" (Shakespeare 1203).

Sonnet 34 describes the speaker's journey to the beloved when suddenly called by him and gives vivid details of the hasty ride which serve as metaphors of the rider's vulnerability in his eager approach and unexpected disappointment. He complains: "Why didst thou promise such a beauteous day, / And make me travel forth without a cloak, / To let base clouds o'ertake me in my way, / Hiding thy bravery in their rotten smoke?", and again: "'Tis not enough that through the clouds thou break, / To dry the rain on my storm-beaten face" (Shakespeare 1203). Comparing the beloved to the sun underscores Shakespeare's reversal of the familiar trope of pilgrimage (not of real pilgrimages, which had been abolished). In medieval literature the sun was a symbol used mostly for the resurrected Son of God, as in the sun/Son homophone. Shakespeare's pilgrimage is private, solitary, and decentred; it is directed not towards the centre of communal worship, as in Chaucer's passage, but towards the periphery of an individual erotic infatuation. In the sonnet, the so-conceived pilgrimage is forestalled, leaving the speaker with the sense of being disgraced and offended. In the metaphor of his bearing "the strong offence's cross" (1203) the poet again resorts to a Christian symbol and the concept of penance to emphasize the lover's passion.

In Sonnets 44 and 45 the impossibility of reaching the beloved by land and sea is contrasted with the speed of a mental journey. The two sonnets form a neatly symmetrical diptych exploiting a conceit based on the ideas of four elements and four humours. Sonnet 44 deplores slow physical travel through the elements of earth and water, whereas Sonnet 45 associates mental transportation with the other two elements, air and

fire. The speaker of the first sonnet wishes he were made of thought, but complains of being made of flesh and mostly "earth and water":

> If the dull substance of my flesh were thought,
> Injurious distance should not stop my way;
> For then, despite of space, I would be brought,
> From limits far remote, where thou dost stay.
> No matter then although my foot did stand
> Upon the furthest earth remov'd from thee;
> For nimble thought can jump both sea and land,
> As soon as think the place where he would be.
> But, ah! thought kills me that I am not thought,
> To leap large lengths of miles when thou art gone,
> But that, so much of earth and water wrought,
> I must attend time's leisure with my moan;
> Receiving nought by elements so slow
> But heavy tears, badges of either's woe.
> (Shakespeare 1205)

In Sonnet 45, on the other hand, the speaker praises the "swift motion" of travel in the mind, associating his thought with air and his desire with fire; such travel, he notes, covers distance instantaneously and overcomes the "present-absent" dichotomy (Shakespeare 1205).

Shakespeare takes up the motif of love's pilgrimage in Sonnets 50 and 51, another lyrical diptych, homogenous in its imagery and contrastively juxtaposing slow with speedy travel. Sonnet 50 describes an anti-pilgrimage, which for Shakespeare is not a journey away from God but away from a beloved person:

> How heavy do I journey on the way,
> When what I seek, my weary travel's end,
> Doth teach that ease and that repose to say,
> 'Thus far the miles are measur'd from thy friend!'
> The beast that bears me, tired with my woe,
> Plods dully on, to bear that weight in me,
> As if by some instinct the wretch did know
> His rider lov'd not speed, being made from thee:
> The bloody spur cannot provoke him on
> That sometimes anger thrusts into his hide,
> Which heavily he answers with a groan
> More sharp to me than spurring to his side;
> For that same groan doth put this in my mind:
> My grief lies onward, and my joy behind.
> (Shakespeare 1206)

The speaker's riding is slow because it takes him mile after mile away from his friend, and away from joy. The speaker is torn between the desire of his tired body to reach the end of travel and find rest, "ease" and "repose," after the toil of the long journey, and his unwillingness to move away from the beloved. The key conceit of the sonnet transfers the rider's spiritual heaviness, the inner "weight" that he bears, onto his horse, the beast that bears him and which symbolizes his irrationality. The beast is imbued with sensitivity and empathy and thus is a projection of the speaker's deepest feelings and desires. Although the rational and practical part within the rider is angry with the horse and makes him thrust his spurs in the animal's hide to provoke faster movement, his hidden passion and the irrational desire not to cover distance away from the beloved identify him with the beast, which "plods dully on." The identification with the poor beast, which is underscored by alliteration in "my woe—that weight in me—the wretch" and by lexical repetition in "How heavy do I journey on the way—which heavily he answers with a groan," enables Shakespeare to depict vividly the kind of dull pain accompanying frustrated erotic desire. The psychology of erotic bondage, which tends to be masochistic and self-destructive, is captured in the image of the "bloody spur" thrust into the horse's hide, with the implication that the rider is at the same time wounding himself. The beast's groan corresponds with the lover's own, sharper, suffering. Unlike the medieval pilgrimage, dominated by the sense of adventure and joyful expectation, despite the reality of moral and physical disease, the anti-pilgrimage of love is ridden with sorrow: "My grief lies onward." The sonnet's imagery and vocabulary, with the sharp groans, blood, and heaviness, are all employed towards conveying the dark side of erotic obsession. The speaker's kicking against the pricks may remind one of St Paul's "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7).

The second part of the diptych, Sonnet 51, begins and ends by verbalizing an excuse for the horse's slowness and, in the middle, develops an image of an eager pilgrimage towards a union with the beloved, which diametrically contrasts with the preceding depiction of an erotic anti-pilgrimage in that its racy swiftness is vividly painted.

Thus can my love excuse the slow offence
Of my dull bearer when from thee I speed:
From where thou art why should I haste me thence?
Till I return, of posting is no need.
O! what excuse will my poor beast then find,
When swift extremity can seem but slow?
Then should I spur, though mounted on the wind,
In winged speed no motion shall I know:

Then can no horse with my desire keep pace;
Therefore desire, of perfect'st love being made,
Shall neigh—no dull flesh—in his fiery race;
But love, for love, thus shall excuse my jade,—
'Since from thee going he went wilful-slow,
Towards thee I'll run and give him leave to go.'
(Shakespeare 1206)

Speaking in the name of gentle and generous love that overfills him, the poem's persona is willing to excuse "the slow offence" of his "dull bearer": there is no need of posting when I ride away from thee, he argues. From this new perspective the jade's being "wilful-slow" is not only forgivable but even deserves a reward, so in the end the lover will run and "give him leave to go." The speaker has consoled himself by an imaginary return to his friend. The main part of the sonnet is therefore filled with images that unfold a fantasy of an extreme speed of desire: when "swift extremity can seem but slow," when one seems to be "mounted on the wind" and still wishes to go faster, when one knows "no motion" in "winged speed," and when no horse can "keep pace" with one's desire. The imagery aims at transcending physical limitations. The love's pilgrimage is depicted as the "fiery race" of desire and symbolized by the cheerful neigh, which contrasts with the preceding sonnet's heavy groan. The diptych thus effectively portrays love's pilgrimage and anti-pilgrimage and the paradoxes of erotic desire, its dark side and its bliss.

Sonnets 97, 98, and 99 are unified by the speaker's sadness caused by separation from his beloved presented against the background of four seasons. Although this is a sequence of three sonnets, their structure is diptych-like, as Sonnet 97 is in the mood of winter and autumn, while the other two sonnets are set in spring and summer. In Sonnet 97, "How like a winter hath my absence been / From thee," the friend's withdrawal is compared to winter, with its "freezings," its "dark days," and "old December's bareness every where," preceded by an autumn whose harvest cannot be enjoyed either by the "widowed" speaker (Shakespeare 1212). Although Sonnet 98 depicts spring, the speaker is still unable to enjoy its beauties, for his friend is away from him: "From you have I been absent in the spring" (Shakespeare 1213). Sonnet 99 further develops the mood of loneliness and dissatisfaction as the speaker claims that the beauties of nature in the full bloom of summer are only poor imitations of his friend's beauty: "The forward violet thus did I chide: / Sweet thief, whence didst thou steal thy sweet that smells, / If not from my love's breath?" (Shakespeare 1213).

Unlike Chaucer's narrator, therefore, the Shakespearean persona cannot find comfort in the Christian sense of joy-in-suffering, nor can he

share the joys of nature, for a true summer is for him, as he says in Sonnet 97, marked solely by the presence of his beloved: "For summer and his pleasures wait on thee, / And, thou away, the very birds are mute" (1212). Sonnet 98 echoes the opening of the General Prologue while highlighting differences between Shakespeare's and Chaucer's rendering of the motif of pilgrimage and desire:

> From you have I been absent in the spring,
> When proud-pied April, dress'd in all his trim,
> Hath put a spirit of youth in every thing,
> That heavy Saturn laugh'd and leap'd with him.
> Yet nor the lays of birds, nor the sweet smell
> Of different flowers in odour and in hue,
> Could make me any summer's story tell,
> Or from their lap pluck them where they grew:
> Nor did I wonder at the lily's white,
> Nor praise the deep vermilion of the rose;
> They were but sweet, but figures of delight,
> Drawn after you, you pattern of all those.
> Yet seem'd it winter still, and, you away,
> As with your shadow I with these did play.
> (Shakespeare 1213)

Whereas in Chaucer's text nature leads naturally on to the thoughts of the Son of God, Shakespeare reads nature, darkened by the friend's absence, as the latter's imperfect sign and shadow. In Shakespeare's sonnets the goal of pilgrimage is mostly unreachable, leaving the speaker unhappy despite all his noble efforts to rise above the discontents of erotic desire. These discontents reach a peak in Sonnet 147, which gives a particularly accurate diagnosis of the lover's condition: "My love is as a fever, longing still / For that which longer nurseth the disease," it consists in being "frantic-mad with evermore unrest," and the speaker realizes that his formerly idealized beloved is "as black as hell" and "as dark as night" (Shakespeare 1220).

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Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Merchant's Tale*, Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Tale of the Enchanted Pear-Tree*, and *Sir Orfeo* Viewed as Eroticized Versions of the Folktales about Supernatural Wives

ABSTRACT

Two of the tales mentioned in the title are in many ways typical of the great collections of stories (*The Canterbury Tales* and *Il Decamerone*) to which they belong. What makes them conspicuous is no doubt the intensity of the erotic desire presented as the ultimate law which justifies even the most outrageous actions. The cult of eroticism is combined there with a cult of youth, which means disaster for the protagonists, who try to combine eroticism with advanced age. And yet the stories in question have roots in a very different tradition in which overt eroticism is punished and can only reassert itself in a chastened form, its transformation being due to sacrifices made by the lover to become reunited with the object of his love. A medieval example of the latter tradition is here the Middle English romance, *Sir Orfeo*. All of the three narratives are conspicuously connected by the motif of the enchanted tree. The Middle Ages are associated with a tendency to moralize ancient literature, the most obvious example of which is the French anonymous work *Ovide moralisé* (Moralized Ovid), and its Latin version *Ovidius Moralizatus* by Pierre Bersuire. In the case of *The Merchant's Tale* and *The Tale of the Enchanted Pear-Tree*, we seem to meet with the opposite process, that is with a medieval demoralization of an essentially didactic tradition. The present article deals with the problem of how this transformation could happen and the extent of the resulting un-morality. Some use has also been made of the possible biblical parallels with the tales in question.

ABSTRACT

The three tales that this paper is concerned with use the motif of enchantment. They are also clearly erotic, and their most intensely erotic aspects and scenes are clearly associated with that motif of enchantment. So the most obvious question that imposes itself is about the link between eroticism and enchantment. This link is, in a sense, obvious and trivial if we consider the basic definition of the verb "to enchant," even when used in its mythological and folkloric sense, namely "to exert magical influence upon; to bewitch, lay under spell," and even more so when the word is used in its more general and loose sense "to charm, delight, enrapture" (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

Chaucer himself talks, in his *The Knight's Tale*, about "The enchauntementz of Medea and Circes" (l. 1944) in a strictly erotic context when describing the temple and nature of Venus, the goddess of love, whose devoted servants Medea and Circe, both powerful witches and enchantresses, no doubt were. They were also both famous as ancient embodiments of the archetype of the *femme fatale*, that is of a dangerous and irresistible woman who seduces men to bring about their undoing, even though of Medea we often say that she reveals her dangerous aspect only as a reaction to having been shamelessly deceived by the man she chose for her lover or husband.[1] As regards Circe, she is, as is well known, in the habit of turning men into swine, which indeed might be interpreted as an ironic and quasi-puritanical metaphor of human sexuality whereby the behaviour of even highly civilized persons becomes reduced to mere animal instincts. Circe would then be an allegory of the dehumanizing power of sexuality, an allegory perhaps based on a misogynistic idea that this power is a female weapon used to turn men into women's abject slaves and kept animals. An interesting embodiment of the Circe archetype is the character of Acrasia from Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. She is an enchantress inhabiting the so called Bower of Bliss into which she attracts unwary knights who become her toys, and she turns them into beasts when she is bored with them. They become so beastly that they resent being restored to a human shape and they long for relapsing into an inhuman condition (Spenser 137–39).

[1] This is the usual interpretation of her behaviour based on the classical play *Medea* by Euripides, where she murders her own, and Jason's, children to take revenge on him, but in Robert Graves's *The Greek Myths* the same story is shown as much more complicated. For example, Medea shows her murderous aspects even earlier, when she deceived king Pelias into believing that she would bring about his rejuvenation, while in fact she intended to kill him (with Jason's connivance), which she did with the unwitting help of Pelias's daughters (Graves 2: 250–56).

Let it be also noticed that there is a significant lack of symmetry between the terms "enchanter" and "enchantress"; the latter seems to be much more often used in an erotic context than the former. A male enchanter is usually a magician performing various tricks by means of genuine magic or sleight of hand, while the female enchantress is nearly always a *femme fatale*, who may use magic, in its basic or metaphorical sense, but only for the purpose of achieving an erotic success. Enchantment then functions in practice as a term referring mainly to the supposedly female style of playing erotic games.

And yet, if we have a look at the way the motif of enchantment is used in folktales, we notice that it almost never refers to the act of falling in love, or becoming erotically fascinated by somebody. The male hero does indeed often fall in love with a woman who has something to do with enchantment, but usually in the sense that she has already been enchanted when she meets the male protagonist, and "to be enchanted" in this context means to be transformed, usually by a malicious sorcerer, or sorceress, into a supernatural creature that can sometimes appear in its human form, but very often appears in the form of an animal, typically, in the case of enchanted women, as a swan, or some other bird.[2] At the same time, it still remains true that it is dangerous to fall in love with an enchanted character, no matter whether the one who becomes enamoured is a man, and the object of his love a woman, or rather a female monster, or the other way round. We might risk a statement that, in folktales, the enchanting characters (in the sense of possessing great sex-appeal) are usually also the ones who have been enchanted (in the sense of being transformed into a non-human, or not entirely human, creature).[3] It is not easy at all to domesticate the enchanted character, and eventually to disenchant him or her, and thus turn them into conventional and fully human wives or husbands. The enchanted figures tend to be demanding and are very easy to take offence (if their conditions are first accepted, but then broken by their mortal partner), and when they do take offence, they turn their backs on their mortal lovers, and often forget about them altogether, choosing new mates for themselves among other

[2] Enchanted men, or boys, also often take on the form of birds, but they are more usually crows or ravens.

[3] There are exceptions to this rule; for example in Type 313 (The Girl as Helper in the Hero's Flight) it happens quite often that the hero finds himself in the power of an ogre and falls in love with his daughter, who is willing to help him in carrying out a series of impossible tasks and eventually in escaping from the ogre's house (see Thompson 89). She is clearly a magical creature, but she does not have to, even though she can, assume non-human forms. A good example of this type is the Scottish tale *Nicht Nought Nothing* (see Foss 24–28).

supernatural creatures. The mortal protagonist can, however, find them and win them back, but only at the cost of great suffering and privation. The whole vast class of tales about supernatural husbands and wives[4] seems to serve as a metaphorical representation of the great difficulty and risk inherent in an erotic, or heterosexual, relationship as such, even though the so called tales of magic are regularly provided with a happy ending.[5]

Let us return, however, to Chaucer's *The Merchant's Tale*.[6] Apparently, it has nothing to do with tales about supernatural husbands and wives. January, a respectable elderly citizen of the North Italian town of Pavia marries a young woman called May, who, in keeping with the convention of the so-called fabliaux, quickly proceeds to betray her highly unsatisfactory husband with a young man, and she gets away with it, while formally remaining January's wife. January is watchful and insanely jealous of his wife but he still lets himself be quite easily deceived by her. May is not shown as a supernatural creature; she is an ordinary healthy young woman who is clever enough at satisfying her carnal desires without weakening her social position, which she owes to her union with January. And yet it is enough to compare *The Merchant's Tale* with an anonymous English Breton lay called *Sir Orfeo* to find out that we have here to do with a drastic, but still recognizable, transformation of the narrative pattern of the tales about supernatural wives.

In *Sir Orfeo*, which is vaguely similar to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, we have a king, named Orfeo, whose wife, Queen Heurodys,

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[4] In the classic work of A. Aarne and S. Thompson they extend from Type 400 to Type 449, and their most fundamental forms are Type 400 (The Man on a Quest for his Lost Wife), where the motif of the Swan Maiden often appears, and which is represented by the following tales in the Brothers Grimm collection: *The King of the Golden Mountain* (92), *The Raven* (93), and *The Drummer* (193); and Type 425 (The Search for the Lost Husband), represented by the Grimms' tale entitled *The Singing, Soaring Lark* (88). See Aarne and Thompson 62–71. See also Chapter 5 [Lovers and Married Couples] in Thompson (87–105).

[5] The legends corresponding to the tales about supernatural wives naturally do not have to end happily; indeed they usually do not, like, for example, the French medieval legend of Mélusine, who is a fairy wife that takes offence, like in tales of magic, with her mortal husband, but, unlike in tales of magic, refuses to become reconciled with him (see Clier-Colombani). The same concerns the mythical parallels, such as the myth of Pluto and Proserpine, in which both husband and wife are supernatural, and where, instead of a static reunion between the husband and wife, typical of tales of magic, the wife regularly leaves her husband, and regularly returns to him, in keeping of course with the rhythm of natural seasons.

[6] J.S.P. Tatlock calls it "one of the most surprising pieces of unlovely virtuosity in all literature" and goes on to say "One might feel half ashamed of so greatly enjoying so merciless a tale, and might balk at prolonged analysis" (Tatlock 175–76).

having slept under a grafted tree, gets into contact with a powerful king of fairies who abducts her by magical means, in spite of armed guards that Orfeo placed around her, provoking her husband to a long search, in which he assumes the position of a lowly outcast and an itinerant musician wandering alone through deep woods. The search ends with Orfeo's recovering his queen from the hands of the fairy king, who, impressed by the beauty of Orfeo's musical performance, keeps his promise of granting the hero every wish that he may express, and with Orfeo's and Heurodys' joyful return to their country and to their former social position. Unlike in classical versions of the tales about supernatural wives, Heurodys is not an obviously enchanted character. She does, however, become psychologically transformed as a result of seeing the fairy king in her dream—this induces in her a fit of despair bordering on madness. She does not become offended with her husband, and she does not leave him, or rather, she does leave him, but not of her own volition. In later scenes, however, she appears as a typical fairy lady taking part, together with other female fairies, in the social events of the Fairyland, being apparently oblivious of her former life and her mortal husband. The latter's taking her out of that Fairyland and making her again into his queen has obvious features of removing the spell under which she has fallen. We may speculate that originally she was also a kind of swan-maiden, a denizen of the otherworld, whom Orfeo managed, albeit only for a time, to isolate from the contacts with her original fellow creatures.[7]

January, like Orfeo, is a man who has got out of touch with reality; he has created a fantastic image of marriage (or of life) based on his egotistic dreams. This can be seen in the following lines:

> Heigh fantasye and curious bisynesse
> Fro day to day gan in the soule impresse
> Of Januarie aboute his marriage.
> Many fair shap and many a fair visage
> Ther passeth thrugh his herte nyght by nyght,
> As whosotooke a mirour, polished bright,
> And sette it in a commune market place,
> Thanne sholde he se ful many a figure pace

[7] It is interesting that Robert Graves represents the Greek mythological Eurydice, who was a model for Dame Heurodys, as a serpent woman, so definitely a supernatural wife (Graves 1: 115, 128). From a folkloristic point of view, the mythical story of Orpheus and Eurydice, in its best known form, is, just like the myth of Pluto and Proserpine, a version of the tales about supernatural wives in which the happy reunion of the pair, characteristic of tales of magic, is rendered impossible (even though in the case of Orpheus and Eurydice we come, so to speak, within a hair's breadth of such a reunion), or given a pessimistic interpretation, which is generally typical of myths and legends.

By his mirour.
. . .
Yet is ther so parfit felicitee
And so greet ese and lust in mariage
That evere I am agast now in myn age
Tha I shal dede now so myrie a lyf,
So delicat, withouten wo and stryf,
That I shall have myn hevene in erthe heere.
(Chaucer 158–59, ll. 1577–85, 1642–47)

Busy imagination, strange invention
And soaring fantasy obsessed the attention
Of January's soul, about his wedding.
Came many a lovely form and feature shedding
A rapture through his fancies night by night.
As who should take a mirror polished bright
And set it in the common market place,
And watch the many figures pause and pace
Across his mirror;
. . .
Yet there is so perfect felicity
In marriage, so much pleasure, so few tears,
That I keep fearing, though advanced in years,
I shall be leading such a happy life,
So delicate, with neither grief nor strife
That I shall have my heaven here in earth[.]
(Coghill 383–85)

The lines that, in *Sir Orfeo*, seem to correspond to the above are the following ones:

Orpheo most of ony thing
Louede the gle of harpyng.
Syker was euery gode harpoure
Of hym to haue moche honoure.
Hymself loued for to harpe,
And layde theron his wittes scharpe;
He lernyd so, ther nothing was
A better harper in no plas.
[In] the world was neuer man born
That euer Orfeo sat byforn—
And he myght of his harpyng here—
He schulde thinke that he were
In one of the ioys of paradys,

Suche ioy and melody in his harpyng is.[8]
(French and Hale 324, ll. 25–38)

Sir Orfeo, too, all things beyond
of harping's sweet delight was fond,
and sure were all good harpers there
of him to earn them honour fair;
himself he loved to touch the harp
and pluck the strings with fingers sharp.
He played so well, beneath the sun
a better harper was there none;
no man hath in this world been born,
who would not, hearing him, have sworn
that as before him Orfeo played
to joy of Paradise he had strayed
and sound of harpers heavenly,
such joy was there and melody.
(Tolkien 134)

Orfeo trusts his skill at harp playing, just like January trusts his imaginary mirror, and both instruments serve to evoke visions of paradise, a fool's paradise. The difference of course is that Sir Orfeo's fantasies are based, after all, on some kind of reality, for he really is an excellent harpist, and can enchant even wild animals with his playing, while January can be only a passive object of enchantment, contemplating his mirror images.[9]

Of crucial importance, however, is the motif of a tree. It is through the tree, as we remember, that the fairy king manages to gain access to Heurodys's mind. A tree is also very important in *The Merchant's Tale*, namely the pear tree[10] growing in January's garden. When walking there, together with her husband, May is suddenly seized by an irresistible desire to eat a pear from that tree, which she represents, falsely as we should understand,[11] as a pregnant woman's whim. January, to humour his wife,

[8] In the spelling, "thorn" is here represented by "th," and "yogh" by "gh."

[9] If January had not been merely an old fool, it could have been perhaps possible to see him as almost a male equivalent of Tennyson's *Lady of Shallot*, or of the prisoners in Plato's famous *Allegory of the Cave*, whose attempt to escape the world of dreams, or rather to translate them into reality, ends in a dismal failure.

[10] Pear, as a symbol, is often associated with eroticism and femininity: "this is probably due to its sweet taste, juiciness and also to its shape which has a suggestion of the feminine about it" (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 742). On the other hand, it is true that the pear appears as masculine symbol in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, see *Romeo and Juliet* I.2.837.

[11] J.S.P. Tatlock calls it a "a silly pretense" (178).

helps her even to climb the tree in the branches of which the young Damian, who is a figure of small importance in the tale, is waiting for May to make love to her, which of course January, being blind, is completely unaware of. In *The Merchant's Tale*, the figure of the hero's supernatural rival undergoes an interesting reduplication. Apart from Damian, there appears Pluto, the king of the Underworld, who, however, contrary to expectations, does not seem to be interested in May; in fact, he tries to make January realize the unworthiness of his wife. It looks as though the scandalous sexual act in the crown of the pear tree, and the total humiliation of the husband who unwittingly assists the lovers, awake or summon the king and queen of fairies, whose names are Pluto and Proserpine. So, exactly as in *Sir Orfeo*, the ancient myths of the Underworld are collated with the folk legends of the fairy Otherworld.[12] Pluto immediately feels a kind of masculine solidarity with January, so he decides to restore his eyesight to make him see his wife's blatant disloyalty, while Proserpine takes of course the side of May and promises to give her the presence of mind sufficient to refute her husband's reproaches. In *Sir Orfeo*, the fairy king has clearly two faces: one is that of the hero's ruthless rival who brutally claims his wife for himself, the other that of an arbiter of good manners who can appreciate the hero's efforts, abide by the rules of the agreement between himself and Orfeo, and, albeit reluctantly, give him his wife back.

Let us have a closer look at the scene in which May is shown climbing the pear tree:

> "Allas," quod he, "that I ne had heer a knave
> That koude clymbe! Allas, allas," quod he,
> "For I am blynd!" "Ye, sire, no fors," quod she;
> "Bit wolde ye vouche sauf, for Goddes sake,
> The pyrie inwith youre armes for to take,
> For wel I woot that ye mystruste me,
> Thanne sholde I clymbe wel ynogh," quod she,
> "So I my foot myghte sete upon youre bak."
> (Chaucer 167, ll. 2338–45)

> "Alas," he said, "that there's no boy about,
> Able to climb. Alas, alas," said he,
> "That I am blind." "No matter, sir," said she,

[12] There is also a structural similarity, already indicated, between the myth of Pluto and Proserpine, that of Orpheus and Eurydice, the story of January and May, and the folktales about supernatural wives, as they all contain the motif of the protagonist who has to separate, for a time or for ever, from his wife, who is, in one way or another, transported into a different world, even though, in the case of the story of January and May, this "different world" is merely the crown of the pear tree.

"For if you would consent—there's nothing in it—
To hold the pear-tree in your arms a minute
(I know you have no confidence in me),
The I could climb up well enough," said she,
"If I could set my foot upon your back."
(Coghill 404)

What follows is a passage from *Sir Orfeo* concerning the precautions Orfeo takes to prevent his wife being abducted by the fairy king:

Amorwe the vndertide is come,
And Orfeo hath his armes ynome,
And wele ten hundred knightes with him,
Ich yarmed stout and grim;
And with the Quen wenten he
Right vnto that ympe-tre.
Thai made scheltrom in ich a side
And sayd thai wold there abide,
And dye ther euerichon,
Er the Quen schuld fram hem gon.
(French and Hale 329, ll. 180–88)

On the morrow, when the noon drew near,
In arms did Orfeo appear,
and ten hundred knights with him,
all stoutly armed, all stern and grim;
and with their queen now went that band
beneath the grafted tree to stand.
A serried rank on every side
they made, and vowed there to abide,
and die sooner for her sake
than let men thence their lady take.
(Tolkien 137–38)

A thousand excellently armed and prepared knights, led by Orfeo, that is their king, certainly make a more serious impression than an old, blind man pathetically embracing a tree. And yet both scenes are functionally, and to a large extent also formally, analogous. Both describe a futile attempt on the part of the mortal husband, to protect his wife from rivals, both consist in encircling a tree, with soldiers, or merely with arms, and both are totally ineffective, the difference being that January, embracing the tree, actually helps his rival, instead of creating any obstacles for him, or for his treacherous wife. Another difference naturally consists in the fact that Orfeo wants to protect his wife, who is visibly

repelled and terrified by rather than attracted to Orfeo's supernatural rival, while January's motivation is much more egoistic. He agrees to help his wife to climb the tree, as he cannot, being blind, do it himself,[13] but he also wants, as his wife readily recognizes, to make sure that nobody approaches that tree, being obsessively, even if not without reason, jealous of his wife (Chaucer 167, ll. 2341–44). Naturally, the husband's gesture of embracing the tree only repeats, on a metaphorical level, the gesture of enclosure embodied in the institution of marriage, and in the structure of the garden, and January's garden is described exactly as a tightly closed space:

> Amonges othere of his honeste thynges,
> He made a gardyn, walled al with stoon;
> (Chaucer 163, ll. 2028–29)

> And among other of his handsome things
> He had a garden, walled about with stone;
> (Coghill 395)

Orfeo is not a ridiculous and off-putting figure, like January, but he also shows a certain lack of intelligence in placing his guardians and his wife under the grafted tree, even though he could have realized, seeing that his wife had a nightmarish vision of the fairy king when sleeping under that tree, that the tree functions as a kind of lightning rod which attracts denizens of the Otherworld, or, in other words, that the tree is, or at least could be, a gateway to fairyland. Such is also, in a sense, the function of the pear tree in *The Merchant's Tale*, for the crown of that tree is inhabited not only by May and her lover making love, but also by Pluto and Proserpine, who are explicitly and repeatedly referred to as "kyng of Fairye" (ll. 2227, 2234) and "queene of Fayerye" (l. 2316).

A slightly different variety of the enchanted tree can be found in the story of Lydia and Pyrrhus (day 7, tale 9) from Boccaccio's *Decameron*, the story which, in its rough outline, is almost identical with the plot of Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale*. But the tree functions there in a slightly different way. In Chaucer's tale January's rival, Damian, is hiding in the garden, while, in Boccaccio, Pyrrhus, the youthful rival, and, like Damian, a servant of the old husband Nicostratus, is walking in the garden together with his master and the master's wife Lydia. When Lydia expresses her desire for a pear from the pear tree, Pyrrhus immediately climbs the tree to fetch it. Probably a pun is intended here because "pear tree" in Latin is "pirus,"

[13] This may well be a symbolical representation of his sexual impotence, which is not explicitly referred to in this tale.

so Pyrrhus[14] is himself a spirit of the pear-tree, and he is also the pear that Lydia really desires.

> . . . once in the tree, Pyrrhus called to his master, "Have you no shame, making love like that in broad daylight?" The master demanded an explanation for the strange remark, and Pyrrhus concluded that the pear tree was enchanted, giving the impression of unreal happenings below. To test the theory, he asked his master to climb the tree, and see if he too would behold impossible things below. His curiosity piqued, Nicostratus mustered enough strength to climb onto one of the pear tree's lower branches. Looking down, what did he behold but Pyrrhus and Lydia making fervent love. From his precarious perch, he shouted curses, threats, and insults at them, but they—engaged with other pursuits—quite ignored him. Nicostratus climbed down from the tree, only to find Pyrrhus and Lydia seated discretely on a garden bench. Their innocent demeanor convinced him that nothing unseemly had happened. Fearing that only a bedevilled tree could be responsible for the vile images that he had perceived, he sent for an ax and had it cut down immediately. From that time forth Nicostratus relaxed his watchful vigil over his young wife, and thus Pyrrhus and Lydia were able to pluck the fruits of their love at regular intervals, even without the help of their enchanted pear tree. (Ashliman)

Boccaccio's lovers do not then make love on the pear-tree, like in Chaucer, but rather under it, and the pear-tree itself is not so much enchanted, even though it is called an enchanted pear-tree, but rather it is used as if it were a universal enchanting device capable of turning fiction into reality, and reality into fiction. Nicostratus orders the "bedevilled tree" to be cut down, but this does not help much. The mechanism of confusion between reality and fiction once set in motion cannot be so easily halted, and old Nicostratus can no longer exercise his rights as a husband because he is no longer so sure about what is and what is not, and without such assurance no rights can be exercised. Lydia calls the pear tree "il nimico della mia onestà" (Boccaccio 492), "the enemy of my honesty," and it is obvious that the tree is treated here as a convenient scapegoat on which Lydia's sin may be laid. The classical scapegoat, however, is said to remove, or to bear away, the sins of the sinner,[15] whereas here no such moral purification is intended. On the contrary, Lydia hopes, in spite of her protestations, to be able to practise her dishonesty perpetually and

[14] Of course the name Pyrrhus is really a Greek one, and means "of the colour of fire," which is not a bad name for a lover.

[15] "And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness" (Lev. 16:22).

with impunity. Even after the tree is cut down, it remains "a friend of Lydia's dishonesty."

In Chaucer's tale, the lovers, or rather May herself, finds a slightly different way out. Owing to Pluto's intervention, January recovers his eyesight, but the first thing he sees is the sight of his wife making love to his servant, which of course makes him lose his temper:

> "Out! Help! Allas! Harrow!" he gan to crye,
> "O stronge lady stoore, what dostow?
> And she answerde, "Sire, what eyleth yow?
> Have pacience and resoun in youre mynde.
> I have yow holpe on bothe youre eyen blynde.
> Up peril of my soule, I shal nat lyen,
> As me was taught, to heele with your eyen,
> Was no thyng bet, to make yow to see,
> Than strugle with a man upon a tree.
> God woot, I dide it in ful good entente."
> (Chaucer 167, ll. 2366–75)

> "Help! Out upon you!" He began to cry,
> "Strong Madam Strumpet! What are you up to there"
> "What ails you, sir?" said she, "what makes you swear?
> Have patience, use the reason in your mind,
> I've helped you back to sight when you were blind!
> Upon my soul I'm telling you no lies;
> They told me if I wished to heal your eyes
> Nothing could cure them better than for me
> To struggle with a fellow in a tree,
> God knows it was kindness that I meant."
> (Coghill 404–05)

January naturally questions the word "struggle," since he saw the couple doing something rather different, but then the wife manages to convince him that he was wrong to have trusted his eyes, which, having been dysfunctional for so long, are not yet perfectly reliable.

We can indeed ask why the wife's "struggling with a fellow in a tree" ("strugle with a man upon a tree") should be considered a possible medicine for blindness. If this is a Biblical allusion, and of course the pear tree in January's garden has already been compared to the tree growing in the middle of the Garden of Eden,[16] then we would have to conclude that May alludes

[16] "Januarie is 'hoor and oolde', sharing the bare and unfruitful characteristics of his title month, whereas his youthful and 'fresshe' wife represents the spring seasons. This has

to the serpent's words: "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5), and that she offers an alternative version of the story of the Garden of Eden as a story about how Eve betrayed Adam with the serpent (a fellow on a tree) under a truly "bedevilled tree," which is a version of the tales about supernatural wives, in which case Eve would reveal her true nature of a serpent-maiden, an enchanted woman whom Adam, in a rather light-hearted gesture, took as his wife. Thus May, falsely and ironically at the same time, applies to her husband the promise that the serpent, also falsely and ironically, made to Eve. January, just like Adam, is granted new knowledge, but he is not pleased with what he gets to know, as it turns out that he is no longer the master of the garden, that, like Boccaccio's Nicostratus, he has lost his bearings, and no longer knows the difference between truth and falsehood, so that his physical blindness has been replaced by a metaphysical one. Thus he prefers to pretend that he still is in control of the situation, while his wife pretends that she is still loyal to him.

Let it be also noticed that Proserpine, in *The Merchant's Tale*, for a moment imitates the style of God's pronouncements after the sin of the First Parents has been discovered: she declares that from now on the nature of women will change, simply because such is her divine will, even though she also quotes the authority of the god Saturn, her grandfather, described as her mother's father, who was often represented as an aged man, i.e. a figure a little similar to God the Father:

> Now by moodres sires soule I swere
> That I shal yeven hire suffisant answere,
> And alle wonnen after, for hir sake,
> That, though they be in any gilt ytake,
> With face boold they shulle hemself excuse,
> And here hem doun that wolden hem accuse.
> For lak of answere noon of hem shal dyen.
> (Chaucer 166, ll. 2265–71)

> Now, by my grandsire's soul, though she is young
> I'll put a ready answer on her tongue
> And every woman's after, for her sake.
> Though taken in their guilt they shall make
> A bold-faced explanation to excuse them
> And bear down all who venture to accuse them;
> For lack of answer none of them shall die.
> (Coghill 402)

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particular relevance when considering the parallel between this tale, and the Biblical tale of Adam and Eve" ("The Merchant's Tale").

The above words sound like a heavily ironical echo of the words that the God of the Old Testament directs at Eve: "Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee (Gen. 3:16). In *The Merchant's Tale*, the role of Jehovah, as the one who banishes a sinful pair from a pleasant garden, could have been played by January, who is appropriately old and hoary, and who should have indeed chased away Damian and May, but who does nothing of the sort, which is again a clearly ironical touch.

We should briefly consider another biblical analogy to the story of January and May (and also the story of Orfeo and Heurodys), the one provided by the story of Susanna and the Elders from the Old Testament Book of Daniel.[17] Contrary to the appearances, it is not January that constitutes the structural parallel to the Elders, but rather Damian, while January is represented by Susanna's husband Joakim. In this story, the seducers of other people's wives are shown not as attractive youths, but as repulsive, vengeful and dirty-minded old men with whom no reader can sympathize. Joakim is indeed, like January, a rich man, probably much older than Susanna, and they both, i.e. Joakim and January, have secluded gardens. The story, unlike the fabliaux of which *The Merchant's Tale* is one, supports the cause of marital fidelity and Susanna is herself a champion of it. What connects the story of Susanna and that of May, or that of Heurodys, or that of Eve, is that her alleged act of adultery, or disloyalty, happened under, or in connection with, a tree. The lack of clarity as to what kind of tree it was—one of the Elders claims it was "a mastick tree," while the other says it was "a holm tree"—indicates the unreality of the act itself, but the tree in *Sir Orfeo* is also unspecified as to the species, and we know only that it was "a grafted tree," which means that it is composed of elements of two kinds of trees. The story of Susanna may be said to cast some light on the paradoxical, and potentially devilish, nature of the tree in *Sir Orfeo*.[18] Like Heurodys, who is assaulted by the fairy king when sleeping under a tree at noon, Susanna exposes herself, unwittingly, to the Elders' lust when she is overcome by the heat of the high noon and decides to take a bath in the garden. But of course January is, in a sense, like the Elders; he uses his superior social

[17] It seems that in the Protestant versions of the English Bible the story of Susanna is set apart from the Book of Daniel, or does not appear at all, while in the Catholic ones it is treated as part of that Book. But of course there are no differences in the contents of the story.

[18] The strong prejudice against the idea of "two in one" is also visible in the superstitious fear of the birth of twins reflected, for example, in the Middle English romance *Lay le Freine*, based on Marie de France's *Le Fresne*.

position to have sex with an attractive woman, even though in his case this leads to a failed marriage, while in their case the consequence is an attempt to bring the innocent woman to death, fortunately unsuccessful, though only narrowly prevented. But the parallel between January and Joakim is also interesting as in both cases we have to do with husbands whose marriage is saved, but at the cost of exposing their ineffectuality as husbands. The traditional role of the husband as a protector of his wife, but also as the one who defends his marital rights against potential male rivals, is in *The Merchant's Tale* fulfilled by Pluto, and in the story of Susanna by Daniel.

Thus, in the narratives discussed here, the appearances of a happy ending in the fairy tale style are preserved, the apparently disenchanted wife returns to her husband, just like Lady Heurodys returned to Sir Orfeo, but in fact it is the powers of enchantment, understood as uncontrollable transformation, that emerge triumphant. Nicostratus and January become easy scapegoats, that is passive victims, for ever enchanted and deceived by their wily wives, as is usual in an eternal triangle of this kind. Orfeo, however, from the Middle English romance, is an active and regenerative type of scapegoat, in a manner remotely reminiscent of Jesus Christ himself: he takes on himself the sins of his community, and his own, suffers an extreme humiliation, in order finally to emerge triumphant from a death-like experience, thus achieving a successful disenchantment by means of mastering, or sometimes negotiating with, the forces of enchantment.

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"I cluppe and I cusse as I wood wore": Erotic Imagery in Middle English Mystical Writings

ABSTRACT

The mutual influences of the medieval discourse of courtly love and the literary visions of divine love have long been recognized by readers of medieval lyrical poetry and devotional writings. They are especially visible in the affinities between the language used to construct the picture of the ideal courtly lady and the images of the Virgin Mary. Praises of Mary's physical beauty, strewn with erotic implications, are an example of a strictly male eroticization of the medieval Marian discourse, rooted in Bernard of Clairvaux's allegorical reading of the Song of Songs, where Mary is imagined as the Bride of the poem, whose "breasts are like two young roes that are twins" (Cant. of Cant. 4:5). Glimpses of medieval female erotic imagination, also employed to express religious meanings, can be found in the writings of the mystical tradition: in England in the books of visions of Margery Kempe, in the anonymous seers of the fourteenth century, and, to some extent, in Julian of Norwich. Though subdued by patriarchal politics and edited by male amanuenses, the female voice can still be heard in the extant texts as it speaks of mystical experience by reference to bodily, somatic and, sometimes, erotic sensations in a manner different from the sensual implications found in the poetry of Marian adoration. The bliss of mystic elation, the ultimate union with God, is, in at least one mystical text, confidently metaphorized as an ecstatic, physical union with the human figure of Christ hanging on the cross.

ABSTRACT

The presence of erotic imagination and erotic metaphor in medieval religious discourse is a well-known phenomenon discussed most often in the context and from the anthropological perspective of Michel Foucault's three-volume *L'Histoire de la sexualité*, which defined the manifestations of sexuality as an important part of cultural identity of any period in history. A search for such manifestations in early English religious literature was proposed and successfully accomplished by Lara Farina in her *Erotic Discourse in Early English Religious Writings*, where Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman texts, such as *Christ I,* the *Ancrene Wisse* or Thomas of Hale's *Lov Ron*, are shown to contain numerous references to sexuality and eroticism. The appearance of the themes in the religious literature of the late Middle Ages is discussed in the writings of Caroline Walker Bynum and Karma Lochrie.[1] Acknowledging the research that these scholars have done along the lines of an anthropological reading of medieval texts, the present article proposes to look at how the bodily and erotic images work in chosen medieval mystics from the perspective of exegetic and spiritual traditions affecting the growth of medieval mysticism.

The sources of erotic imagery in medieval religious writing have been identified in two distinct phases of religious discourse distant from each other by at least several hundred years. The first one was the Patristic commentary on the Song of Songs, which had to come to terms with, and find an exegetic explanation for, the bold images of sensuous love contained in the Old Testament: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth" (Cant. of Cant. 1.2) or "His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me" (Cant. of Cant. 2.6). Inspired by the Judaic tradition, which interpreted the poem as an allegory of the relationship between God and Israel, the Fathers allegorized the erotic encounter of Solomon's very carnal lovers as the union of the human soul with God, the meeting of the spiritual bride with her celestial lover.[2] The other, later phase of erotic metaphorization of some religious meanings was connected with the growth of St. Bernard of Clairvaux's Theology of Love, in which the Song of Songs was a central Biblical text, and the later medieval development of the language of the Marian cult which, in its attempt to celebrate Mary as the ideal of womanhood, often employed forms and habits of expression developed by

[1] Walker Bynum's *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* and Lochrie's *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, both published in 1991, are especially important here.

[2] For a discussion of the history of the interpretations and misinterpretations of the Song of Songs, see William E. Phipps's "The Plight of the Song of Songs."

the secular literature of courtly love.[3] It celebrated Mary's virtue by way of celebrating her physical beauty expressed in pseudo-Petrarchan language[4] as in "sterne that blyndis Phebus bemes bricht" (Saupe §89).

The Fathers of the Church responsible for the evocative allegorization of the Song of Songs were primarily Origen and Gregory of Nyssa. In their homilies and commentaries, the strongly sensuous images and dialogues of love are for the first time in Christian writing interpreted as a metaphor of the spiritual union of God and the human soul (McGinn 157–60). Origen and Gregory both insist that what the poem narrates is not a record of the sensorial experience of the soul's meeting with God, but only a translation of that mystical oneness with Him into a language of the outer senses. Their reading makes allegory the basis of Christian interpretation of the Canticle and renders the images of Solomon's poem and its language a perfect vehicle for later mystical expression. Commenting on the evocative passages of the Biblical text, Origen says in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*:

> The divine scriptures make use of homonyms, that is to say, they use identical terms for describing different things . . . so that you will find the names of the members of the body transferred to those of the soul; or rather the faculties and powers of the soul are to be called its members. (Origen 26–27)

For Origen it is clear that the erotic images are only a linguistic embodiment of an experience of a completely different nature. In his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* Gregory of Nyssa follows this understanding and, additionally, explains the allegorical and also moral adequacy of the erotic metaphor:

> The most acute physical pleasure (I mean erotic passion) is used mysteriously in the exposition of these teachings. It teaches us the need for the soul to reach out to the divine nature's invisible beauty and to love it as much as the body is inclined to love what is akin and like itself. The soul must transform passion into passionlessness so that when every corporeal affection has been quenched, our mind may seethe with passion for the spirit alone. (Gregory of Nyssa 49)

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[3] The complicated relationship between the medieval concept of courtly love and religious discourse received the first but so far the most comprehensive discussion in C.S. Lewis's *The Allegory of Love* (1–43). While the Marian cult and its erotic courtly language is primarily a late medieval phenomenon, Farina (25) finds "eroticized representations" of Mary already in the Cynewulfian *Christ I*.

[4] Cf. "Una donna piú bella assai che 'l sole, / et piú lucente," poem 119 from Petrarch's *Canzoniere* (390).

"Transforming passion into passionlessness" echoes the stoic concept of *apatheia*, appropriated for early Christianity by Clement of Alexandria and the Desert Fathers (Dreyer 41), and clearly separates the sensuous from the spiritual and, what follows, the linguistic vehicle, apparently erotic and physical, from its passionless, spiritual tenet. Early Christian thought is still Platonically dualist. True mystical experience is possible only when the burden of the material body and all its passions are shaken off: the spiritual eye opens only when the physical eye closes. Yet Origen and Gregory use the term "senses" to refer to the inner, spiritual faculties through which the soul experiences the presence and love of God.[5] Of course, the term is used figuratively since they both see the spiritual senses as completely different and separate from the outer senses, but the metaphorical approximation they make between the two experiences establishes the parallel and sanctions the future translation of the inner experience into the sensorial language of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting. The authority of such a translation, made primarily for a didactic and instructional purpose, is derived by the Fathers directly from the Scriptures, in which God reveals himself through human language. In the understanding of the early Fathers of the Church, the images of erotic love of the Song of Songs should be read as an allegorical implication and not a sensorial representation of the inner experience of the love of God, which remains separate and incommunicable other than through a metaphor.

When we move from Biblical exegesis to the expression of mystical experience, the parallel between the inner joy of the union with God and outer sensorial experience can be understood by recourse to the modern cognitive psychological concept of affective intentionality, that is, the tendency to project our inner psycho-somatic states onto our judgments and experiences of the outer world.[6] Endorsing the process of affective intentionality as partial explanation of the medieval mystic's experience allows the baffled contemporary reader to understand images akin to "the most acute physical pleasure" not only as linguistic symbols of the ineffable and otherwise inexpressible spiritual experience of God, as Gregory explained it, but also as a projection of the spiritual state of elation accompanying the mystical experience onto the realm of the erotic and sexual pleasure. In

[5] For a discussion of the concept of the spiritual senses in Origen and Gregory, see *The Spiritual Senses. Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, edited by Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley, especially the chapters by Mark J. McInroy (20–35) and Sarah Coakley (36–55).

[6] For a discussion of the concept, see "The Structure of Affective Intentionality," chapter 7 of Andrew Tallon's *Head and Heart: Affection, Cognition, Volition as Triune Consciousness* (183–98). Affective spirituality is now commonly referred to in discussions of the mystic experience (see e.g. McGinn 156–71).

such a vision of the mystic expression, eroticism ceases to be only a metaphor and comes to be seen as sensory rationalization of an otherwise extrasensuous state. An inner and passionless spiritual pleasure evokes associations with a parallel, though essentially different, experience of a physical bodily pleasure expressible through the language of the senses.

The Song of Songs continued to attract the exegetic attention of theologians and continued to serve as a guide for the spiritual growth of seers and visionaries. The erotic metaphor became rooted in mystical discourse for good. It was primarily through the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux that the text was to inspire a new life in the mystical movement. The thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries were a time when the Christian Church became more open to the growing numbers of believers. The decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council,[7] the appearance of the mendicant orders and travelling preachers, the growth of vernacular religious literature, are well-known facts which allowed Christian men and women from all social classes to participate more actively in the spiritual life of the church. The period also saw an unprecedented growth in the number of female mystics.

Bernard of Clairvaux's writings were a response to the need for a new less elitist and less intellectual vision of man's relation to God and are considered to be among the founding texts of what is known as medieval affective spirituality. In his sermons on the Canticle Bernard profusely uses the language of the outer senses when he speaks of spiritual experience and while, overall, he still means to use it metaphorically, his bodily images tend to dominate the spiritual. He follows the Patristic caution not to mix the two levels of experience when he says that the mystical soul can only touch God "but by the heart, not by the hand; by desire, not by the eye; by faith, not by the senses" (*On the Song of Songs* 28:9), just as Mary Magdalene was allowed to "touch" Christ in the "*Noli me tangere*" scene in John 20:11–18. Yet his reference to Mary's desire to touch makes the argument gendered and erotic, especially when the spiritual and the bodily become synthesized in the metonymic metaphor, "You will touch with the hand of faith, the finger of desire, the embrace of devotion; you will touch with the eye of the mind." While in patristic interpretations the inner love of God was only expressed by the language of the experience of a carnal desire for God, in Bernard the humanity of God in Christ, the carnal love of Christ, is where spiritual love begins. He writes:

> . . . because we are of flesh (*carnales*) and are begotten through the flesh's concupiscence, our yearning love (*cupiditas vel amor noster*) must begin

[7] For a summary of the decrees and effects of the Fourth Lateran Council, see F. Donald Logan's *A History of the Church in the Middle Ages* (184–224).

> from the flesh; yet if rightly directed, advancing under the leadership of faith, it will be consummated in spirit. ("Epistle II to Guigo" qtd. in Taylor 406)

Popular spirituality and much of medieval visionary practice and visionary writings inspired by Bernard took his emphasis on *afectus* and the role of the outer senses in growing up to love God for granted and turned them into a guide to mystical growth.

This tendency to focus on the outer rather than on the inner experience is especially typical of some women mystics who tend to express their mystical experience in strictly somatic terms that narrate and describe visions in which they come into bodily contact with Christ. An early example of this female affective mystical specificity can be found in the thirteenth-century writings of Hadewijch of Brabant, a Dutch poetess and mystic associated with the emerging spiritual movement of the Beguine nuns. Hadewijch records her experience on an occasion of receiving the Eucharist, the Body of Christ:

> . . . he came in the form and clothing of a Man, as he was on the day when he gave us his Body for the first time. As a human man, wonderful and beautiful, with glorious face, he came to me as humbly as anyone who belongs completely to another. . . . Then he came to me as himself, took me entirely in his arms and pressed me to him. My whole body felt his, in true bliss, in accordance with the desire of my heart and my humanity. So I was wholly satisfied and fully transported. . . . Then it was to me as if we were one without difference. It was thus: outwardly, to see, taste and feel, as one can outwardly taste, see, and feel in the reception of the outward Sacrament. (281)

Hadewijch's report attempts no metaphor other than that supplied by the context of the sacrament of the Eucharist, which she receives prior to her vision. Most intriguing is the literality with which she treats the implications of coming into physical contact with the Body of Christ. Her language constructs a report of a sensorial bodily experience, indeed an erotic experience, which leaves her satisfied and transported. " . . . I remained in a passing away in my Beloved, so that I wholly melted away in him and nothing any longer remained to me of myself" (282). Here the outward senses cease to be only a metaphor and parallel of the experience. The outward sensations of seeing, touching, tasting and feeling, expressed in a sensuous language, become for Hadewijch records of that experience. Becoming "one without difference with" Christ does not, in this context, imply freeing oneself from the burden of bodily passions. Quite the opposite, Hadewijch describes her meeting with the Divinity within the sphere

of her psycho-somatic sensual consciousness. We discover in her a clear digression from the patristic warning against literality. For Hadewijch, the sensuous pleasure she describes seems to be not a metaphor, but an actual part of her mystical journey.

The English mystics of the fourteenth century, Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, as well as the author, or possibly authoress, of *A Talkyng of the Loue of God*, may not all be as erotically suggestive in the description of their experiences as the quotation from Hadewijch, but they certainly come from the school of Bernard's Theology of Love, and all, like Hadewijch, though to different degrees, communicate their meanings through sensuous, somatic, experiential narratives of their visions. They all belong to the cataphatic, positive way of mystical life. They saw the mystic calling as a mission and felt obliged to share their visions which, they believed, could be expressed in a comprehensible human language. The apophatic school of mysticism, on the other hand, spoke of the experience of the union with God as a "cloud of unknowing,"[8] an experience ineffable and inexpressible. The imagery of the cataphatic women mystics follows that of the *Brautmystik* tradition, where the bride and groom from the Canticle are constantly evoked and where the female mystic identifies with the bride and pictures herself as Christ's lover.

The imagination of Julian of Norwich, however experientially and bodily oriented, is much less erotically explicit than Hadewijch's or Margery's. Julian begins her visionary experience with a close meditation of the Passion of Christ, which was a common and a recommended practice. Her own unique vision is the description of the profusion of blood flowing from Christ's wounds in which she almost drowns, and then a telescoped picture of the same blood curdling and drying on the naked body of the dying Christ. Julian experiences her first visions when she lies in sickness in her bed. There is, in her writing, a strong awareness of her own body; she describes the sickness sensation, and she transfers this bodily discourse into her visions of the divine message. The sensual body becomes for her, as if, a vehicle for knowing God. Julian explains that human sensuality is a result of the soul inspiring the body. She writes:

> Thus I understond that the sensualite is groundid in kind, in mercy, and in grace, which ground abylith us to receive gefts that leden us to endles life. For I saw full sekirly that our substance is in God. And also I saw that in our sensualite, God is. (Vision LV)

[8] As the title of the fourteenth-century English apophatic mystical treatise named it; see *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

There is no longer in her vision of body and soul the dualistic divide which keeps the two domains of human experiences apart. Julian goes further than Bernard did when he encouraged the meditation of the humanity of Christ as a preamble to the spiritual journey. For Julian, human sensuality is in itself an experience of God and is divine because it was Christ's own attribute in his death on the cross. While the physicality of God's presence is never treated with an openly erotic vocabulary by Julian, the sensorial experiences are always involved in conveying her visions. Speaking of the final meeting of the saved with God she writes:

> And than shal we all come into our Lord, ourselfe clerely knowand and God fulsomely havyng; . . . Hym verily seand, and fulsomly feland, Hym gostly heryng, and Hym delectably smellyng, and Hym swetely swelowyng; and than shal we sen God face to face, homly and fulsumly. (Vision XLIII)

A similar endorsement of the body and the sensual experience can be found in the more controversial and certainly more intriguing *Book of Margery Kempe*. Margery is remembered as much for her evocative mystical visions as for the autobiographical narrative of her pilgrimages. She rises from the pages of her book as a religious traveller traversing Europe in search of spiritual fulfilment in the shrines of saints and of theological instruction from other mystics and seers. We learn from her about her secondary virginity, which she chose after giving birth to fourteen children, her notorious weeping at the sight of the Crucifix, which baffled and annoyed churchmen, her confident rebukes addressed to priests and bishops who did not understand her passionate love and pity of Christ, and, what interests us most, her wedding ceremony with Christ, which she narrates as a vision she experienced.

Margery combines in her visionary book the tradition of the Canticle-inspired *Brautmystic* with the sensuous passion of Bernard's affective spirituality and her own very experiential manner of metaphorizing meanings by mapping the daily world she was familiar with. She represents herself throughout the book as Christ's lover, who she becomes having persuaded her husband to become chaste after "she had ful many delectabyl thowtys, fleschly lustys, and inordinat lovys to hys persone" (Book I, Ch. 79). Her renouncement of the marriage bed is a continuous theme recurring throughout her book, a decision which, as she believes, will put her in the embraces of her spiritual lover. Christ, whom Margery describes as "the semeliest man that evyr myth be seen er thowt" (Book I, Ch. 85), himself appears to her many times and declares her his beloved:

> I have telde the befortyme that thu art a synguler lover, and therfor thu schalt have a synguler love in hevyn, a synguler reward, and a synguler worshep. And, forasmech as thu art a mayden in thi sowle, I schal take the be the on hand in hevyn and my modyr be the other hand, and so schalt thu dawnsyn in hevyn wyth other holy maydens and virgynes. (Book I, Ch. 22)

While the experiential grounding of this singular attention she receives from Christ may be a dalliance taken out of a courtly poem, Margery usually sees her union with Christ in more homely colours. The metaphor of the married union between the soul and God becomes in her book a totally experiential argument on the medieval dimension of marriage, including a detailed narrative of the ceremony. Christ explains to Margery the nature of their union:

> Thu wost wel that I far lyke an husbond that schulde weddyn a wyfe. What tyme that he had weddyd hir, hym thynkyth that he is sekyr anow of hir and that no man schal partyn hem asundyr, for than, dowtyr, may thei gon to bedde togedyr wythowtyn any schame er dred of the pepil and slepyn in rest and pees yyf thei wil. And thus, dowtyr, it farith betwix the and me. (Book I, Ch. 86)

The passage is not only an unpoetic echo of the conversation between the groom and the bride of the Song of Songs, but also an example of Margery's straightforward translation of the spiritual union with Christ into the vision of a married couple going to "bedde togedyr wythoutyn any schame er dred" as a symbol of the ultimate consummation of their love. The wedding ceremony, one of the most memorable passages in her book, features all the experiential details of a medieval wedding, with the marriage vow, the witnesses, and even the congratulations and wishes of the guests.

> And than the Fadyr toke hir be the hand in hir sowle befor the Sone and the Holy Gost and the Modyr of Jhesu and alle the twelve apostelys and Seynt Kateryn and Seynt Margarete and many other seyntys and holy virgynes wyth gret multitude of awngelys, seying to hir sowle, "I take the, Margery, for my weddyd wyfe, for fayrar, for fowelar, for richar, for powerar, so that thu be buxom and bonyr to do what I byd the do. For, dowtyr, ther was nevyr childe so buxom to the modyr as I schal be to the bothe in wel and in wo, to help the and comfort the. And therto I make the suyrté." And than the Modyr of God and alle the seyntys that wer ther present in hir sowle preyde that thei myth have mech joy togedyr. (Book I, Ch. 35)

Margery's traditional vision of herself as a married woman, with all the duties appertaining to the social role, again brings her to mention sexuality. It is the husband who expects her love.

> I wil that thu love me, dowtyr, as a good wife owyth to love hir husbonde. And therfor thu mayst boldly take me in the armys of thi sowle and kyssen my mowth, myn hed, and my fete as swetly as thow wylt. (Book I, Ch. 36)

While Margery repeats here the Patristic synthetic metaphor of the "arms of the soul," the invitation to the sweet kisses on the mouth, the head and the feet is delivered without the metaphorical qualification and creates a straightforward erotic image.

Much more sensual and erotically explicit than either Julian or Margery is the fourteenth-century *A Talkyng of the Loue of God*, a collection of prayers and meditations written for and, possibly, by nuns. The sensuous and erotic imagery is evoked to express the speaker's adoration of the crucified Christ. The meditative practice represented by the mystic echoes the affective school of Bernard and was seen in Julian's intensive focus on the dying body of Christ. But the nun of *A Talkyng of the Loue of God* goes much further in depicting the vision of the adoring person in an ecstatic act of embracing, kissing and licking the body of Christ.

> Thenne ginneth the loue to springen at myn herte and glouweth up inh my brest wonderliche hote . . . I lepe on him raply as grehound on herte al. Out of myself with loueliche leete. And cluppe in myn armes the cros bi the sterte. The blood I souke of his feet. That sok is ful swete. I cusse and cluppe and stunte otherwhile as mon that is loue mad seek of loue sore . . . I cluppe and I cusse as I wood wore. I walawe and I souke I not whuche while. And whon I haue al don, yit me luste more . . . . Thenne fele I that blood in thougt of my Mynde as it weore bodlich, warm on my lippe and the flesch on his feet bi fore and beohynde so soft and so swete to cusse and to cluppe. (61)

The enumeration of verbs of action, all erotically explicit (lepe, cluppe, souke, cusse, walawe), coupled with the repetitive "I," builds a rhythmical ecstatic intensity in the text that leaves the reader breathless and shocked by the created image.

The "passionlessness" of the mystic experience preferred by the early Fathers in their reading of the Song of Songs[9] and encouraged by them

[9] The reception of the Song of Songs in the Middle Ages is a complicated topic which cannot be addressed here in full. The teachings of the Fathers concerning the

as a way to spiritual fulfilment is in some later medieval mystics, especially female mystics, replaced with a passionate, and increasingly ecstatic description of bodily sensations, whose vividly evocative erotic language overpowers and subdues the traditional metaphorical message of a spiritual rather than a bodily experience. The original Biblical and Patristic erotic metaphor from the Song of Songs, which was understood as a sensuous, and therefore an approachable and a comprehensible parallel to the inner and otherwise inexpressible experience of the mystic's joy and ecstasy caused by Divine presence, becomes, in some later mystics, the focus and the essence of the mystical message. Like Hadewijch, or the speaker of *A Talkyng of the Loue of God*, the cataphatic, affective female mystic of the late Middle Ages is so engulfed in the description of the sensuous experience of her bodily interaction with Christ that her message, as it is conveyed by the language she uses, appears to be primarily sensuous, somatic and erotic. The expected passionlessness of the ultimate union with God is transformed into a very passionate image rooted in the senses and the erotic experience.

While it is possible to trace the Biblical and exegetic origins of the bodily metaphors of late medieval mystical adoration of Christ as man and to ascribe their erotic quality, at least partly, to the gender of their authors and the phenomenon of affective intentionality, it must be admitted that they baffle the reader with their unabashed eroticism until today. They must have posed a similar problem of taste and propriety to medieval readers. We know, for instance, that the erotic language of another Beguine nun, Mechthild of Magdeburg, was considerably toned down by her Latin translators, as was her open criticism of the Church, for which the Beguines were suppressed in the late Middle Ages (Tobin 7). Margery Kempe herself speaks of the enmity she met for her ecstatic outbursts of tears and her teaching. Their gender, traditionally deprived of authority in religious matters, as well as the uniqueness of their language did not help the female mystics to win recognition. The modern mystic and scholar, Simone Weil, believes that she can understand her visionary predecessors and excuses their sensuous vagaries by an interesting parallel: "To reproach mystics with loving God by means of the faculty of sexual love is as though one were to reproach a painter with making pictures by means of colors

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sublimation of the soul's ultimate mystic union with God from anything worldly and bodily were actually never questioned. In the twelfth century Hugo of St. Victor still says: "*Debemus per haec verba passionis transire ad virtutem Impassibilitatis*" ["We ought to pass over to impassible virtue through these words of passion"] ("Explicatio", PL 196, C406, qtd. in Astell 38). What changed over time was primarily the language in which mystic readers reacted to the Song of Songs. For further discussion, see Anne W. Astell's *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages*.

composed of material substances. We haven't anything else with which to love" (Weil 472).

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"Youth is Drunke with Pleasure, and therefore Dead to all Goodnesse": Regulating the Excess of the Erotic Early Modern Body

ABSTRACT

This article investigates the erotic and youthful body in John Fletcher's play *The Faithful Shepherdess*, written for The Children of the Queen's Revels *c.*1607. For many early modern scholastic, medical, and conduct manual writers, the life stage of Youth was a particularly dangerous moment in an individuals' life, a time where the body was in a constant state of flux and ruled by unhealthy bodily excess. Fletcher's play presents an assortment of characters who are all ruled by or obsessed with their own youthful passions. This article engages with Galenic humoral theory, an area that has been neglected in scholarship on Fletcher's play, to provide a close analysis of Youth and erotic excess on the early modern stage.

ABSTRACT

My title quotation is taken from *The Discoverie of Youth and Old Age* (1612). According to the author of the pamphlet, Youth "glorieth in pride, swelleth with envy, boasteth of its strength, sacrificeth to its owne faire face, it is carried along with self love, and so becomes worse then a very foole" (7). The life stage of Youth was understood as a moment that was steeped in and governed by excess; an increasingly destabilizing and disruptive moment. Youth was characterized by its pursuit of pleasure, a time of life without regulation that defined a body that was both uncontrollable and unstable. Youth was affected by the extremes of pride, envy, strength and beauty and all of these qualities resulted in a dangerously unstable humoral body that was constantly steeped in excess. A disrupted body often resulted in disruption to society, as the author of the pamphlet realized: "youth is alwaies litigious, & troublesome" (8). The anonymous author of the pamphlet, writing under the guise of "Youth," critically suggests how Youth was easily provoked to the utter disruption of social harmony:

> and therefore if any bee so audaciously bold, as to give me the lye, or (in any sort) to abuse mee, my advise to him is, that he warily looke to himself, for otherwise I protest unto him, upon the word of a gentleman, that I will sheath my rapier in the best heart hee hath. (19)

Youth was easily inflamed, excessively angry and excessively disruptive to conventional societal regulations and "the control of youth was essential to social order more generally" (Griffiths 37). For Francis Lenton, author of the pamphlet *The Young Gallants Whirligigg: Or Youths Reakes*, the sins of Youth were that young men were prone "[t]o sweare, to lie, to kill, to steale, to whore, / With thousand other petty vices more" (9). This article will explore the social problems that arise through youthful bodily excess, via an exploration of the youthful body ruled by lust in John Fletcher's play for The Children of the Queen's Revels, *The Faithful Shepherdess* (*c.* 1607).

Early modern men and women inherited a Galenic medical understanding of their bodies that ultimately resulted in the notion that a body was an unstable and constantly changing vessel that was subject to the sway of bodily humours. "Men's bodies were thought to be hotter and drier, women's bodies colder and more spongy" (Paster 77). Men were therefore naturally subject to the consequences of excess bodily heat, anger and lust. Alexandra Shepherd usefully summarizes Renaissance understandings of the bodily humours:

> According to humoral theory, all matter consisted of the four elements, each of which was associated with a combination of qualities: air (hot and wet); fire (hot and dry); earth (cold and dry); and water (cold and wet). In the human body these four elements were associated, respectively, with blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm, which were in turn linked to four bodily temperaments or humours: sanguine, choleric, melancholic, and phlegmatic. There was a distinct hierarchy of bodily qualities and their associated humours. Although all four qualities were necessary for a body to function, different proportions produced differences in bodily capacity according to temperament, age, and gender. Heat and moisture were life-giving, while coldness and dryness sapped energy. Thus gender difference was accounted for in terms of women's comparative coldness and moistness in relation to men who were, in contrast, privileged by their relative heat and dryness. (50–1)

Youthful choleric and melancholic bodies dominate Fletcher's play with its bodily investigations into how the passion of lust affects a range of shepherds and shepherdesses. Gail Kern Paster writes that

> [l]ike other contemporary playwrights, Shakespeare found in language of the humours and their four qualities of cold, hot, moist, and dry a discourse for signalling the relationship within his characters between embodied emotion and perceptible behaviours, between the mind's inclination and the body's temperature. Extremes of emotion correlate with extremes of temperature. (85)

This article will suggest that John Fletcher is one such of those other contemporary playwrights fascinated by the youthful humoral body and the extremity to which humours can enforce the way that men and women act. As Robert Y. Turner briefly suggests, Fletcher's "shepherds contain within them their source of trouble—their passions—which they must struggle to control" ("Slander in *Cymbeline*" 192). Indeed, the Youthful body is a body that is difficult to regulate, and furthermore, it is a body that is constantly fluctuating and has no finite sense of selfhood. An excessively unbalanced humoral body can signal a complete transformation from a balanced and controllable body. Gail Kern Paster observes this transformative capability of the humoral body, a "bodily transformation from the inside out, from the mind's inclination to follow the body's temperature" (87). The humorally balanced bodies of the leading actor for the company, Nathan Field, and his fellow boy actors are also dangerously unstable as young men who are expected to perform a variety of passions and emotions. If the material disguise and physical performance was successful, the young body of the actor may also be at risk from a bodily transformation. As Dympna Callaghan suggests, "Theatre as an institution

was, however, implicitly based on the forced expropriation of child labor and the threat of sexual victimization. Further, these economic and sexual practices molded the boys, aesthetically, if not surgically, into the shape of eunuchs" (67). The body of the boy actor is at its most unstable when performing as a woman, "Eunuchs, then, are understood as male *representations* of women" (Callaghan 66). Neither masculine nor feminine, indeed reminiscent of the body of a eunuch, the boy actor need always ensure that he was in control of his own susceptible body during the performance.

As Shepard has commented, "[y]oung bodies were represented as dangerously overpowered by heat and moisture" (51) according to early modern humoral theory, and Fletcher's play explores the policing of lust and the power of chastity. However, the youthful body is notoriously difficult to regulate, whether this be in the form of internal or external attempts at regulation. "Additional differences in bodily complexions were attributed to the impact of external influences such as diet, exercise, emotional demands, the environment, the climate, the season of the year, and even the time of day" (Shepard 51). The time of day is crucial for *The Faithful Shepherdess* because it is during the night and under darkness that the shepherds and shepherdesses seem to be affected by a series of dangerous humours that are difficult to police and regulate as well as damaging to their youthful bodies. What is particularly important here is how consuming the bad humours are in the play. As we shall see below, the characters are at the total mercy of their humoral bodies and display only the most miniscule moments of self-reflection that reveal that how they are acting is incorrect or dangerous to their own bodies. Furthermore, the characters that are subject to bad humours display no inklings of any kind of attempt to control or regulate these bad humours; such a thought does not even occur cognitively. All of this demonstrates that according to scholastic, philosophical, and medicinal knowledge, many men and women in the early modern period were at the total mercy of their humours and locked in a continual battle to ensure that they are humorally balanced and in control of their performative and changeable bodies. Shepard provides support for such an idea:

> One of the most striking aspects of humoral accounts of the body is their emphasis on how difficult the ideal was to achieve, especially given the body's temperamental changeability. The bodies described in these terms were not static but in an almost constant state of flux. An even-tempered bodily complexion was not a given—even for (gentle)men—but a largely unrealizable standard used both to gauge illness and health and to account more generally for differences in physical and emotional potential. (53)

This article will explore the changeability of the erotic youthful body in Fletcher's "ironic pastoral" (Munro 3), particularly the vulnerable body of the choleric Perigot.

Previous literary scholarship on the play has tended to explore Fletcher's engagement with the pastoral tradition, tragicomedy, and with attempts to account for the play's failure on the stage in the Blackfriars theatre in 1607. Lee Bliss blames the indoor audiences' "kindred lack of sophistication" as a primary reason for the play's failure (296), and implicitly summarizes the lack of contemporary critical response to the play by suggesting that scholars, likewise, have been unsure exactly how to respond to Fletcher's play. Bliss comments:

> *The Faithful Shepherdess* should not, I think, be dismissed either as a bloodless literary exercise plagued by the undramatic stasis of its Italian inspiration or as a hot-house flower whose occasionally stunning verse is marred by Fletcher's lamentable (and life-long) prurience of imagination. (296)

Bliss is certainly correct that Fletcher's tragicomedy should not be dismissed as bloodless. Indeed, as Philip J. Finkelpearl observes, Fletcher is clearly influenced by "the latest developments on the Continent and interested in seeing how Guarini and Spenser might be combined" (286). For James J. Yoch the result of this combination is primarily conservative and moralistic: "Fletcher's design conforms with the conventional use of tragicomedy to illustrate the advantages of moderation in private and public life" (128). Lucy Munro interprets the influence of Guarini and Spenser as complex. Munro writes that "*The Faithful Shepherdess* represents an attempt to integrate Italianate pastoral with the English tradition exemplified by the Spenserians, drawing on both versions of pastoral in ways in which each is complicated and ironised" (124). Accounting for the play's failure on the Blackfriars stage, Lucy Munro suggests that "without a prologue to guide them, Fletcher suggests [in his address to the Reader], the confused spectators fell back on versions of pastoral and tragicomedy very different from those he aimed to promote" (97). What Fletcher was promoting however was innovative drama. William Proctor Williams also perceives the genre of tragicomedy as influential with regards to what he interprets as a positive message seeping into the audience's cognitive thought processes through an engagement with the play. Williams comments that

> Fletcher's form of tragicomedy is, if nothing else, hopeful in outlook; even its bad characters are seldom punished. The Fletcherian form, though it may grow out of generic concerns, grows out of social ones as

> well. It grows out of the belief on the part of Fletcher, his followers, and their audiences that the proper view of life is an optimistic one. (142)

Robert Y. Turner meanwhile suggests that "characters . . . act with passionate disregard for the dictates of reason" ("Heroic Passion" 109), but this is surely an observation that ignores the influence of scholastic humoral theory on Fletcher's play. There are two crucial elements that previous scholarship on Fletcher's play has failed to comment upon. Firstly, critics have ignored Fletcher's interest in early modern humoral theory. *The Faithful Shepherdess* is obsessed with how youthful bodies are uncontrollable and subject to constant fluctuations when experiencing feelings associated with love. Fletcher's shepherds and shepherdesses experience significant humoral imbalances throughout the play which reveal and complicate Fletcher's interest in male and female bodies. Secondly, critics have been largely quiet in commenting upon the fact that Fletcher's play was written for and performed by a child acting company. Fletcher, like Field, is interested in the regulation and changeability of the youthful early modern body. The significance of "boy-ing" lust warrants further investigation.

There is an external stimulus that affects Fletcher's shepherds' and shepherdesses' humoral bodies: love. It is the policing of these bodily emotions that is the primary concern of the play. As Bliss observes, "[n]aive emotions also reveal man's inner contradictions, for love paradoxically breeds violence and hate as well as gentleness and reverence" (300). It is the careful regulation of lustful bodies, instigated and controlled by the faithful shepherdess Clorin, that is fundamentally in balance in the play. Every body in *The Faithful Shepherdess* is subjected to the sway of the humours. The young shepherdess Cloe is particularly affected by heated bodily humours and is utterly masculine in her quest to lose her virginity. After an unsuccessful attempt to get Daphnis to have sex with her, Cloe comments, "Is it not strange, among so many a score / Of lusty bloods, I should picke out these thinges / Whose vaines like a dull river" (I.iii.146–48). Her own hot humoral body only encounters cool, and thereby effeminate men, who are not up to the task of relieving her of her virginity. Cloe immediately encounters a rather more willing shepherd, Alexis, who is easily corrupted by Cloe's lust, speaking "oh how I burne / And rise in youth and fier!" (I.iii.190–91). As Cloe later remarks, her body is so governed by lust, that "It is Impossible to Ravish mee, / I am soe willing" (III.i.212–13). Amarillis, who is likewise heated with hot lustful blood at the mere sight of Perigot, scoffs at his rejection by speaking a soliloquy where she acknowledges, "I must enjoy thee boy" (I.ii.192). Daphnis meanwhile, attempts to regulate his own humoral body when faced with the prospect of being polluted by Cloe's lust. Daphnis speaks:

"I will not entertaine that wandring thought, / Whose easie currant may at length be brought / To a loose vastness" (II.iv.11–13), instead choosing to regulate and police his own rebellious blood:

> . . . I charge you all my vaines
> Through which the blood and spirit take their way,
> Locke up your disobedient heats, and stay
> Those mutinous desires, that else would growe
> To strong rebellion. (II.iv.16–20)

Daphnis is aware of the need for self-regulation in Youth to control and inhibit lustful desires from entering the bloodstream of the body against the will of the individual. Hot lustful blood is "disobedient," "mutinous," and rebellious, actively fighting against the temperate body. The temptations for many young men, in particular, those newly apprenticed in the metropolis, must have been staggering. As Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos reports, as

> Ian Archer has shown, during the 1570s there were at least 100 bawdy houses operating in London, located mostly outside the walls but often also in the city's commercial heart, where quite a few apprentices lived. Some prostitutes in these establishments were allegedly enticing young men "to their utter ruyne and decay." The merchant apprentice who kept a wench in Covent Garden spent some £40 or £50 for her clothes and other expenses. (201)

The Sullen Shepherd is one such character governed by lust as Amarillis suggests. He is "One that lusts after every severall beauty, / But never yet was knowne to love or like" (I.ii.200–01) and is represented as a hyperdeviant individual, deeply dangerous to the health of society.

The Sullen Shepherd is an extreme example of a body corrupted by excessive humoral imbalance. Governed by lust and at the mercy of his bad humours, the Sullen Shepherd speaks "I do not love this wench that I should meet, / For never did my unconstanteie yet greet / That beautie" (II.iii.1–3). The Sullen Shepherd is so consumed by lust that he has lost his ability to rationalize, instead choosing only to be a slave to his hot passion:

> . . . all to me in sight
> Are equall, be they faire, or blacke, or browne,
> Virgin, or careless wanton, I can crowne
> my appetite with any. (II.iii.10–13)

Furthermore, the Sullen Shepherd is an expert deceiver, fully able to "perform" a range of amorous and honest suites to a woman that his fancy

leads him to: "Offer her all I have to gaine the jewell / Maidens so highly praise: then loath and fly, / This do I hold a blessed destiny" (II.iii.18–20). Later, excited by the beauty of Amoret, the Sullen Shepherd debates how his humours could have led him to rape Amoret, "if she had denied / Alone, I might have forced her to have tried / Who had bene stronger" (III.i.128–30). Acknowledging that his "blood is up" (III.i.132), the Sullen Shepherd demonstrates his dangerously excessive body; dangerous to society, dangerous to women, and dangerous to his bodily health: "now lust is up, alike all women be" (III.i.135).

Early modern society recommended numerous activities to police and regulate lust. "Lust could be subdued by Bible reading, meditation, fasting, labour, hard fare, and hard lodging" (Mendelson and Crawford 20), and the chosen outcast Clorin practices many of these forms of temperance in her wood side retreat. The youthful Perigot is at the mercy of his uncontrollable humours throughout the play because of the external stimulus of "love" that unbalances and upsets the body's humours. In Act I Scene ii, four couples of shepherds and shepherdesses are gathered to await the coming of the Priest of Pan. The Priest regulates the lustful thoughts of the young men and women and controls their bodies with his discourse that champions the power of purity and chastity (I.ii.9–28). Just as the youthful body is subject to several external stimuli that dangerously corrupt the correct flow of the bodily humours, it is the external influence of the Priest of Pan who can govern and police the youthful body back to "normal."

The Priest of Pan, like many early modern commentators writing about the youthful body, believed that the hotness associated with youth was dangerous and difficult for the individual to gain self-control over. As Alexandra Shepard states, "[w]hile the hot vigour of youth was frequently celebrated, it was nonetheless also approached as a continued source of instability which could easily overpower the brain and hinder the capacity for rational action" (56). If the Priest of Pan does not continue to closely police the shepherds and shepherdesses then their capacity to control their bodily lust will not only pollute and destroy their own youthful bodies but will also pollute and destroy the theatrical pastoral Arcadia, and the young men and women will neglect their sheep. Many early modern commentators suggested that it was to old age that Youth should turn for advice on how to live life sensibly and in moderation. The anonymous author of the pamphlet *The Discoverie of Youth and Old Age* asked

> Proud and scornefull youth: heare old age with patience, & answer unto her demaunds: for shee asketh thee, where is thy chastity? Where is thy discreation? Where is thy constancie? Where is thy humilitie? Where is thy temperance? Where is any thing whereby to commend thee? (34–35)

In early modern England, excessive heat in youth was also particularly relevant to an individual's social station in life. For social harmony, excessive heat and lust needed to be carefully regulated:

> heat needed bridling. This could be achieved through a careful regime of diet and exercise, and, more significantly, with "civil and vertuous education"—something that was beyond the reach of the majority. Thus the venery associated with hot bodies ungoverned by civil manners correspond to the disruption feared from the unruly and uneducated lower orders. Men's bodies, therefore, were not rated simply in meritocratic terms, but were ranked within the confines of contemporary assumptions about the social order, as physical inferiority was grafted onto social inferiority. (Shepard 61)

The Priest of Pan, therefore, possesses a significant role in Fletcher's pastoral world because it is through his cleansing discourse that social harmony and good government of the said world is maintained. Crucially, in Fletcher's play, after the Priest of Pan has suitably indoctrinated and thereby regulated the lustful thoughts of the young men and women and left the stage, Perigot and his lover Amoret are left alone. Perigot's conversation with Amoret becomes increasingly sexualized and "hot," revealing his own fiery humoral body. It appears that the Priest of Pan has failed to regulate this particularly hot male body. Perigot praises the beauty of Amoret (I.ii.61–67), commenting that her "haire [is] more beauteous then those hanging lockes / Of young *Apollo*" (I.ii.68–69). Amoret is quick to regulate and chastise his language, interrupting her lover to suggest "Shepheard be not lost, / Ye are saild too farre already from the coast / Of our discourse" (I.ii.69–71). Like the hot fluid sailing through his veins, Perigot is slipping into lustful language, objectifying the body of Amoret and praising her overpowering beauty. Amoret advises Perigot not to lose himself, that is, that he not lose control of his body. It is also intriguing that in this moment when Perigot is unable to contain his praise, he likens the beauty of Amoret to the body of the beardless and athletic youthful Apollo, surely a playful piece of metatheatre from Fletcher, reminding his audience of the beardless boy beneath the feminine attire of Amoret.

With his blood heated by his sexual passion for his lover, Perigot unintentionally renders that desire onto a masculine body. This links to a common concern of the anti-theatricalists, such as Stephen Gosson, that the spectator at a play would become erotically attached to the body of the boy actor beneath the female costume. Gosson writes in his pamphlet, *The S[c]hoole of Abuse* (1579), about the dangerous experience of attending a play at a public theatre. There are "straunge consortes of melodie, to tickle the eare, costly apparrell to flatter the sight, effeminate gesture to

raivsh the sence, and wanton speache, to whette desire to inordinate lust" (B7). The spectator is indoctrinated by an alluring assault on the senses, apparently drawn to the effeminate gesture of the boy actor playing the part of a woman, furthermore enticed by the wanton speech that arouses feelings of lust. The enticing words are particularly dangerous according to Gosson because the infectious words that are spoken by the actor pollute the air and are drawn inside the body of the spectator to their utter ruin. The words, "by the privy entries of the eare, slip downe into the heart, and with gunshotte of affection gaule the minde, where reason and virtue shoulde rule the roste" (B7). The polluted words, inside the body of the spectator, enter the bloodstream and affect judgement and rational thought, altering the perception of the spectators who find themselves sexually attracted to the boy player. As Edel Lamb comments, "the plays effectively advertize and display the young players as sexual, or as Mary Bly describes them, 'erotic commodities.' Furthermore, this example specifically locates the boy in homoerotic discourse" (51).

Gosson's fears are certainly accurate in the surviving reports of audience experiences of attending a play. With reference to two foreign visitors who saw plays performed by The Children of the Chapel in 1602, who were both captivated by the performances of the boy actors, Edel Lamb writes that "[t]he representation of the voice of the English boy performer in both accounts is loaded with sexual connotations, as the boy charms his audience and the writers recording these performances seem almost enraptured by this experience" (77). Here are two audience members who experience pleasure from the performance of the boy actors and experience an altered, and for Gosson a negative, bodily experience from watching a play. Thomas Middleton would, in his pamphlet *Father Hubburd's Tales* (1604), suggest that a theatregoer may "call in at the Blackfriars where he should see a nest of boys able to ravish a man" (173), once more suggesting the alluring capabilities of the boy actors. Gosson's pamphlet is obsessed with the personal bodily abuse that spectators inflict upon themselves by attending a play. Gosson advises his reading public not to "go to Theaters for being allured, nor once bee allured for feare of abuse" (C5). The healthy balanced body is at risk from sensorial assault in the theatres. Socially, foul words, meanwhile, were also damaging to easily impressionable and swayable young men in the early modern period. Paul Griffiths describes an extraordinary and highly comic situation which also takes place in a pastoral retreat. Griffiths reports that:

> One day in 1696 . . . 12-year-old John Cannon of Somerset "took a ramble to the river" with his schoolfellows. At the riverside an older youth who is mysteriously called "the elder of the Scraces then about 17 (years

> old) after some aquarian diversions took an occasion to show the rest what he could do if he had a female in place, and withal took his privy member in his hand rubbing it up and down till it was erected and in short followed emission, the same as he said in copulation." This "elder of the Scraces" then "advised more of the boys to do the same, telling them that although the first act would be attended with pain yet by frequent use they could find a deal of pleasure, on which (Cannon reported) several attempted and found as he said indeed." (243–44)

This remarkable account describes what later commentators would deem bodily "self-pollution" and once again suggests how Youth is governed by lustful desires.

The character of Perigot is one such unhealthy body that is negatively swayed by alluring discourse. Perigot is heedless, or unable, to self-regulate his body despite Amoret's verbal advice for him to control his humours and he speaks in response to her cautious conference that she loves him:

> I take it as my best good, and desire
> For stronger confirmation of our love,
> To meete this happy night in that faire grove,
> Where all true shepherds have rewarded bene
> For their long service. (I.ii.82–86)

Perigot, with his veins truly fired, attempts to gain a promise from Amoret that they will have sex that evening. Amoret, however, is not swayed by Perigot's sexy discourse and is in control of her humoral body. She replies to him:

> Deere friend you must not blame me if I make
> A doubt of what the silent night may doe
> Coupled with this dayes heat to moove your blood:
> Maids must be fearefull, sure you have not bene
> Washd white enough, for yet I see a staine
> Sticke in your liver, goe and purge againe. (I.ii.87–92)

Amoret is aware of Perigot's dangerously hot humoral body and coupled to some external factors, such as the darkness of the night and the previous heat of the day, is fully aware of his bodily imbalance. In particular, darkness and the moon were perceived by early modern conduct writers to be particularly dangerous to the bodies of women. "The moon, associated with the menses, marked women as wandering, changing, mentally and morally unstable. During her menstrual periods, Queen Anne was considered 'a little mad' by her male advisers" (Mendelson and Crawford 72). However, it is the male body that is in danger here.

As Amoret observes, Perigot's blood has been stirred up by lust and she urges him to purge his lustful body, citing Perigot's liver as the seat of his amorous passion. Amoret's chastising words appear to have an effect on Perigot as he flatly denies that he was trying to coerce her into sexual activity: "onely my intent / To draw you thither, was to plight our troths, / With interchange of mutuall chaste imbraces" (I.ii.96–98). It could be that Amoret's verbal chastisement has quelled the heat of Perigot's blood, or, that Perigot is deliberately scheming in his calculated response that reassures Amoret that he is in control of his humoral body whilst plotting for an amorous coupling later that evening, or, that Amoret has simply misunderstood and misinterpreted the strength of chaste affection that Perigot champions. Perigot does maintain that he possesses only "chaste desires" (I.ii.122) and Amoret agrees to meet him that evening. Perigot's affirmation that his desires are chaste is found in a curious speech that, once again, is steeped in ideas of humoral imbalance and polluted bodies. Perigot's parting speech to his lover states that:

> . . . When I leave to be
> The true admirer of thy chastity,
> Let me deserve the hot polluted name,
> Of a wilde woodman, or affect some dame
> Whose often prostitution hath begot,
> More foule diseases, then ever yet the hot
> Sun bred through his burnings, whilst the dog
> Pursues the raging Lyon, throwing fog
> And deadly vapour from his angry breath,
> Filling the lower world with plague and death. (I.ii.128–37)

Perigot desires that when his chaste desires fail him his own identity be changed to identify his bodily state, that of a "hot polluted" wild woodman like the Sullen Shepherd, whose identity is encapsulated in his name. Perigot further likens his impure and hot body as comparable to the body of the diseased prostitute, who fares worse than the body that is continually sunburnt. Sunburnt in this context appears to be related to bodily humours, that is that the heat of the Sun makes one lustful and heats the blood to dangerous levels which cannot be controlled. The image of the dog is particularly pressing as early modern society believed that dogs carried the plague virus, adding further images of rotten decay and disease that are emitted from the body of the dog; its breath a foul vapour that brings "plague and death," infecting and polluting, in this instance, the pastoral haven. Plague was a pressing concern for early modern England; as the heart of the body of England, London, regularly suffered from the foul breath of infection, particularly devastating in 1603. Whether

the plague had shut the theatres in 1607 or not, the outbreak was so violent by 1608, the year that the first quarto of *The Faithful Shepherdess* was printed, that Fletcher mentioned it in his printed dedication to Sir Walter Aston. Fletcher writes of the "infection" (493) that along with the "common prate / Of common people" (493) can silence plays. Infection and pollution were pressing concerns during the composition of *The Faithful Shepherdess* and its subsequent preparation for publication and it is hardly surprising that Fletcher obsesses over bodily health and contamination during the course of the play.

Perigot is of course also affected bodily by an external stimulus that upsets his humoral balance: love. "Love upset the humours: it inflamed the heart inducing an excess of heat which could, without strict vigilance, overthrow the reason associated with manhood" (Shepard 79). Perigot's body, and the body of Youth in general in the early modern period, was genuinely at risk from the effects on the passions that love may cause. Perigot's reason, and manhood, is called into question when he is eventually overpowered by love, and he loses control of his own body when he feels aggression towards what he believes to be the sexually charged Amoret; it is in fact Amarillis transformed into the likeness of Amoret. Act III scene i focuses on Amarillis, disguised physically and verbally as an exact likeness of Amoret, as she attempts to seduce Perigot into having sex with her. Alone in the woods together, Perigot is seemingly in control of his bodily humours as the pair sit down together: "Iwas only that the chast thoughts might bee showen, / Iwixt thee and mee, although we were alone" (III.i.283–84). The heated and lustful body of Amarillis will not settle for chaste thoughts during this secretive meeting and becomes forcibly active; governed by excessive passion she makes a bold move on Perigot:

> Come, *Perigot* will show his power that hee
> Can make his *Amoret*, though she weary bee,
> Rise nimbly from her Couch, and come to his.
> Here take thy *Amoret,*imbrace and Kisse. (III.i.285–88)

The sexually aroused Amarillis throws herself into Perigot's arms, expecting to heat his blood and fire him into a performance of manly lustful sexuality. Instead, the chaste Perigot asks bewilderingly "What meanes my love?" (III.i.289) to which the ungovernable body of Amarillis lustfully and hotly replies:

> To do as lovers shud,
> That are to bee injoyed not to bee woed.
> Ther's nere a Sheapardesse in all the playne,

> Can kisse thee with more Art, ther's none can faine
> More wanton trickes. (III.i.289–93)

Amarillis's youthful body, fired by lust, effectively reverses the conventional gender hierarchy of early modern England. Made bold by her lustful heat, Amarillis woos Perigot forcibly and in an aggressively masculine manner, which horrifies the chaste yet emasculated Perigot. Amarillis's unruly body champions a form of love that is purely sexual. Amarillis believes that lovers should have sex rather than spend time courting each other, attempting to fire Perigot's blood with such saucy suggestions that there is no other shepherdess that can kiss him "with more Art," which may imply passion or perfection and also that she is superior to any other shepherdess for the "wanton trickes" that she is willing to perform.

Perigot is not interested by what he perceives to be a chastity test, wishing rather to die than dare to dishonour his Amoret (III.i.293–95). Amarillis's response amplifies the typical misogynistic early modern interpretation of women as dominated by lust and, once again, is forceful and governed by her desire to have sex with this young man:

> Still thinkst thou such a thinge as Chastitie,
> Is amongst woemen? *Perigot* thers none,
> That with her love is in a wood alone,
> And wood come home a Mayde. (III.i.296–99)

Perigot, so far, has been able to control his own bodily humours and has carefully self-regulated his temperature to ensure that his veins are not fired by the saucy discourse of Amarillis. However, Perigot becomes increasingly agitated during the following exchange:

> PERIGOT. My true heart thou hast slaine.
> AMARILLIS. Fayth *Perigot*, Ile plucke thee downe againe.
> PERIGOT. Let goe thou Serpent, that into my brest,
> Hast with thy Cunning div'd, art not in jest?
> AMARILLIS. Sweete love lye downe. (III.i.301–05)

It is clear, however, that despite regulating his body from lust during this exchange, Perigot's anger is beginning to take control of his person and his passion is becoming harder to supress and remain balanced. Inflamed by an excess of yellow bile and resulting in a body dominated by excessive choler, Perigot begins to act in an uncontrollable manner, losing all traces of masculinity:

Then here I end all love, and lest my vaine
Beleeife should ever draw me in againe,
Before thy face that hast my youth mislead,
I end my life, my blood be on thy head. (III.i.311–14)

In this heated decision, unable to control his passions and overcome with anger and grief, Perigot sinisterly suggests that he will commit suicide to prevent his misled youth being tempted again by the dangerous trappings of love. Within a moment, the changeability of Perigot's passions and unregulated body demonstrate a further dangerous display of bodily instability and excess. As Perigot has been indoctrinated by the Priest of Pan that lust is a polluting sin, Perigot takes it upon himself to violently regulate the lustful body of Amarillis.

In a moment of extreme bodily excess, Perigot decides that "[t]his steele shall peirse thy lustfull hart" (III.i.318), attempting to plunge his knife into the heart of Amarillis. Amarillis manages to flee and the stage directions indicate that "*He runs after her*," allowing for the Sullen Shepherd to appear and uncharm Amarillis so that her transformation is ended. Perigot appears, chasing in Amarillis and after observing that Amarillis is not the same woman that he chased off stage, at least to his deceived eye, Perigot admits that he cannot control his passionate anger. Apologizing to Amarillis, Perigot speaks "my rage and night / Were both upon me and beguild my sight" (III.i.333–34), drawing attention to the dangerous bodily state that his uncontrollable anger has put him into. His passions are so uncontrollable that his sight is beguiled and, coupled to the darkness of night, further indicates that Perigot is humorally imbalanced. Such a dangerous excess of anger is quickly demonstrated to the audience as the real Amoret enters to Perigot and with the briefest of exchanges, Perigot stabs Amoret before speaking, "Death is the best reward thats due to lust" (III.i.346), next fleeing the stage, an attack that Lucy Munro describes as "sexualised, if not [a] figurative rape" (129). It is, however, problematic to suggest that the moment that Perigot attacks the body of Amoret be a sexualized moment akin to rape, considering how excessively chaste the body of Perigot is in the play. Perigot is a character fearful of sexuality and aware of the dangers of the polluting nature of bodily lust. It is difficult to account for the bodily excess of Perigot and why such a brutal form of policing lust is enforced by his character. No longer in control of his body and governed by anger, Perigot may represent the early modern fear of a man that cannot suitably regulate his own passions becoming beastly and monstrous. Such a bodily extreme would aptly demonstrate Fletcher's insistence on the general themes of temperance and moderation with regards to love and sexuality in this play. But it is also important that Perigot may

act in an unmanly fashion precisely because of his inability to regulate his own lover (despite the fact that it is the lustful Amarillis rather than the chaste Amoret). As Alexandra Shepard suggests,

> losing authority over women amounted to relinquishing both manhood and admittance to male society. Such representations serve to reinforce the patriarchal blueprint by emphasizing the dangers of an inverted gender hierarchy, and by scapegoating women for any breakdown in male authority. (80)

Such societal ideas may suggest why Perigot isolates himself after attacking Amoret in the play after he has attempted not only to kill himself but also to kill Amoret, since he has lost his place in conventional society because of his failure to construct a healthy and chaste relationship. At this moment, an outcast from conventional society, Perigot's emasculation is the direct result of his inability to control and supress the masculine lust of Amarillis disguised as Amoret.

This article has offered a tentative reading of the problems of early modern erotic desire that depicted young men and women as dangerous bodies that needed careful policing. Fletcher is evidently a playwright interested in bodily excess and it is this engagement with the excessively uncontrollable male and female humoral body that appears liberating yet destructive. Finally, in conclusion, it is fitting that Alexandra Shepard suggests that "[m]ale youth was widely characterized as an age of extremes, marked both by an unrivalled capacity for spirited and courageous action and a seemingly unlimited potential for vice" (24). This observation on early modern society shares many parallels with Fletcher's play, which explores the dangerously unstable bodies of shepherds and shepherdesses in an Arcadia which is marked by the fantastical and the courageous and, in the darkness of the forest, exemplifies the vices of the human body.

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Eroticism—Politics—Identity: The Case of Richard III

ABSTRACT

Richard III's courtship of Lady Anne in William Shakespeare's *King Richard III* is a blend of courtly speech and sexual extravaganza. His sexual energy and power of seduction were invented by Shakespeare to enhance the theatrical effect of this figure and, at the same time, to present Richard as a tragic character. Richard's eroticism in Act 1 Scene 2 makes him a complicated individual. Playing a seducer is one of the guises he uses to achieve his political aims on the one hand, and, on the other, the pose of a sexually attractive lover enables him to put his masculinity to the test. Throughout the scene Richard is haunted by his deformity that, together with his villainy, makes him a stranger to the world and an enemy to his family and the court. In order to overcome his self-image of a disproportional cripple he manifests his sexuality towards Anne to boost his self-esteem and to confirm that the lady will accept him despite his obvious physical shortcomings. This article uses Georges Bataille's theory of eroticism and erotic desire to characterize Richard as a tragic individual and to explain the reasons behind his unexpected sexual behaviour in the seduction scene.

ABSTRACT

Act 1 Scene 2 of Shakespeare's *Richard III* is a culmination of Richard's acting skills, where he reveals different aspects of his sexuality: he poses both as a Petrarchan lover and as a sexually aroused male. It is interesting that he should manifest his erotic desire so explicitly before Lady Anne, especially as throughout the play he is very aware of his physical deformity as a hunchback with a withered arm. At the beginning of the play alone he asserts several times: "I, that am not shap'd for sportive tricks [sexual games], . . . I, that am rudely stamp'd . . . I, that am curtail'd of this fair proportion" (*Richard III*, 1.1.14,16,18).[1] The role of a seducer in the wooing scene seems altogether unnatural for Richard, the crookback, in the same way as his excessive show of masculinity. This makes him a prime object of study using Georges Bataille's definition of eroticism[2] as "a psychological quest, independent . . . of any concern to reproduce life" (Bataille, *Erotism* 11), during which the protagonist puts himself to the test in order to prove himself more worthy as an individual. This article argues that Richard's overt manifestation of eroticism towards Lady Anne is, first of all, a way to refuse to limit himself within his individual personality and, secondly, an attempt to deny his individual life as a cripple and a social outcast. Eroticism is also used by Richard to break social taboos in his revenge on society, mostly his mother and the court, that rejected him.

It is important to note that Richard Gloucester "fashions" himself as a lover in the same way as he plays an obedient brother towards Clarence or as a thoughtful uncle to his nephews, the young princes. "Self-fashioning" is a term for "the action or process of making, for particular features or appearance, for a distinct style or pattern," but in sixteenth-century England it comes to denote "the forming of a self" (Greenblatt, *Renaissance* 2). Fashioning is also connected with the changing of shapes or arriving at a less palpable shape such as "a distinctive personality, a characteristic address to the world, a consistent mode of perceiving and behaving" (Greenblatt, *Renaissance* 2). Self-fashioning does not exist independently of one's culture and can be compared to a certain awareness of cultural codes and

[1] Henceforth abbreviated to *R III*.

[2] In his seminal work *Erotism, Death and Sensuality*, Bataille differentiates between two terms, sexuality and eroticism, both of which are used in the analysis. Sexuality denotes physical desire and is connected with "[s]exual reproductive activity"; eroticism is defined as "a psychological quest independent of the natural goal: reproduction" (Bataille, *Erotism* 11), and the latter term will be more significant in the description of Richard's negotiation(s) with his identity in the wooing scene.

modes of behaviour operating in a given society. Social and cultural codes function as mechanisms of control; they "create" specific individuals or cause individuals to craft their public selves according to the socio-cultural expectations. Self-fashioning is characterized by theatrical play and a great show of acting skills; it involves the individual's dissimulation, pretending to be someone else by wearing a mask of an actor. In the case of Richard, he dons many different social masks, presenting many selves. The mask of the lover is, on the one hand, a way of taking revenge on his family, and, on the other, a means of testing himself, and of overcoming his weaknesses and complexes as a deformed and rejected man.

Shakespeare's idea to present his character as a hunchback comes mainly from Sir Thomas More's *History of King Richard III* (1513) and from Edward Hall's *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and Yorke* (1548), which was largely based on More's story. Much as in Hall's chronicle "the portrait [of Richard III] is not wholly dark" (Bullough 226), More's Richard had to be villified because he was part of the Tudor propaganda. According to More's very hostile account, Richard "transforms his nature, increasing the tyrant's villainy at all points" (Bullough 226). More's work is an outcome of his personal experience that he had gathered while serving as a page in the household of John Morton, the Archbishop of Canterbury and Chancellor under Henry VII, in the years 1489–92, only half a dozen years after Bosworth Field (1485). More was also acquainted with Robert Fabyan, the London chronicler, and Polydore Vergil, Henry VII's historian, who consistently and intentionally upheld the Tudor myth in his depiction of history. The blackness of Richard as a character in Thomas More is linked with his physical deformity:

> . . . little of stature, ill-featured of limbs, crook-backed, his left shoulder much higher than his right, hard-favoured of visage and such as is in princes called warlike, in other men otherwise. He was malicious, wrathful, envious, and, from before his birth, ever froward. . . . It is for truth reported that the Duchess his mother had so much ado in her travail that she could not be delivered of him uncut, and that he came into the world with his feet forward and (as the fame runs) also not untoothed: either men out of hatred report above the truth or else nature changed her course in his beginning who in the course of his life many things unnaturally committed. (35)

In More's *History* Richard's physical deformity is an external sign of his malign nature. Shakespeare, naturally, follows More in his depiction of Richard III, but apart from some common allusions to Richard as the allegorical Vice figure, Shakespeare's character is not a "motiveless villain" (Haeffner 16). In Shakespeare, Richard's physical deformity influences his

Machiavellian attitude to the world and the people around him, and he is aware of the fact that his very birth was a curse to his mother, who hates him. Misshapen and devoid of maternal affection, he breaks all ties with his family and the court, disclosing his thoughts and plans only to the audience, as we read in *3 Henry VI*:

> I that have neither pity, love nor fear.
> . . .
> I have often heard my mother say
> I came into the world with my legs forward.
> . . .
> The midwife wondered and the women cried,
> O, Jesus bless us, he is born with teeth!
> And so I was, which plainly signified
> That I should snarl, and bite and play the dog.
> Then since the heavens have shaped my body so,
> Let hell make crooked my mind to answer it
> I have no brother, I am like no brother.
> And this word love, which greybeards call divine
> Be resident in men like one another
> And not in me: I am myself alone.
> (*3 Henry VI*, 5.6.65–83)

Both More and Shakespeare make references to Richard's unnatural birth and to the idea that he came into the world with his legs forward or that he was born with teeth; the latter functions as common gossip,[3] which was retained and popularized by Hall's chronicle. Shakespeare presents his Richard as very conscious of his drawbacks also in the opening soliloquy in the play *King Richard III*, which serves as a prologue to his tragedy. Richard's idea of himself is that of a man "cheated by dissembling nature," "deformed, unfinished," "so lamely and unfashionable . . . that dogs bark at [him]" (*R III*, 1.1.19–20, 22–23). It seems that his deformity and villainy should prevent any success in wooing, and yet he remains victorious as a lover.

[3] This and other (pseudo)facts concerning Richard's deformity in More's *History* are questioned by contemporary researchers and are believed to have only a fictional basis. For example, Annette Carson recounts the scene from Shakespeare's play in which Richard III thrusts his withered arm into Hastings's face and accuses all present of witchcraft. Shakespeare's depiction of Richard as a one-armed hunchback is, again, modelled on More's account and has very little to do with reality, as, Carson says, stories of Richard as a crookback "are disproved by his well-attested prowess in battle, and no one who is known to have seen him ever mentioned deformity or disability" (Carson 89). This article focuses on Richard's deformity as it was presented by Shakespeare, regardless of its factual or fictional origin.

The meeting of Richard and Anne is a metaphorical encounter of ugliness and beauty; his eroticism in the scene is aimed at a destruction and profanation of female beauty. Bataille believes that the function of eroticism is to desire beauty, which is usually found in the lover's face, only later to "befoul" it "not for its own sake but for the joy brought by the certainty of profaning it" (*Erotism* 144). The union of two bodies presents a contrast between the purest nature of mankind (love) and a hideous, animal-like quality of sexual organs. The face and its beauty have to be profaned by, for example, revealing the woman's secret parts and, next, by conjoining with male organs. Beauty is an important aesthetic aspect in eroticism, because it is only beauty that can be spoilt—ugliness cannot be profaned—and to "despoil" and "transgress" the beautiful is the aim of eroticism. Eroticism acquires sense only when it is juxtaposed with real beauty, physical or moral. Bataille notes that "[h]umanity implies the taboos, and in eroticism it [humanity] and they [taboos] are transgressed" (*Erotism* 145). Richard's eroticism in the seduction scene challenges the greatest social taboos of his time: he decides to seduce Anne in front of the corpse of her father-in-law. The lady's humanity stands in opposition to his villainy and cruelty. Anne will turn out to be the victim of Richard's sexual conquest; her beauty in the play is a necessary sacrifice to ascribe meaning to his ironic and grotesque performance. As Bataille states: "In sacrifice, the victim is chosen so that its perfection shall give point to the full brutality of death" (*Erotism* 144). The wooing scene is a prognostication of death for Anne, and Richard does not leave any doubt that it will be otherwise.

The seduction scene in the play has no antecedents in Hall's or Holinshed's chronicles and is Shakespeare's pure invention (Chernaik 57). Lady Anne, historically speaking, had only been betrothed to king Henry VI's son, Edward; however, Shakespeare in the play presents her as Edward's wife (Greenblatt, "Richard III" 320). The scene begins with an elegiac spectacle—there is Anne lamenting the death of her husband and father-in-law, standing in front of the open coffin with Henry's corpse. We do not learn much about Anne, as she utters conventional set phrases that are characteristic of the language of the elegy. Anne's oration abounds in apostrophes, deictic gestures, ritualistic repetitions, and her speech can be classified as self-address:

> Set down, set down your honourable load
> (If honour may be shrouded in a hearse)
> Whilst I awhile obsequiously lament
> Th' untimely fall of virtuous Lancaster.
> (*R III*, 1.2.1–4)

She soon turns to cursing Richard, the perpetrator of both murders, and her lament, which is very official in tone and based on set phrases ("I . . . obsequiously lament . . . Th' untimely fall"), acquires the form of a personal imprecation that is accompanied by emotional outbursts. Anne's curse evokes the images of hand, heart and blood, which additionally draws attention to Richard as a murderer: "O cursed be the hand that made these holes, / Cursed the heart that had the heart to do it / Cursed the blood that made this blood from hence" (*R III*, 1.2.14–16). She associates Richard with venomous animals, "adders, spiders, toads, / Or any creeping venom'd thing that lives" (*R III*, 1.2.19–20). Finally, she puts a curse on any child he may father, relating to Richard's own misshapen body: "If ever he have child, abortive be it: / Prodigious and untimely brought to light, whose ugly and unnatural aspect / May fright the hopeful mother at the view" (*R III*, 1.2.21–23). All accusations directed at Richard are spoken with bitterness and scorn; the lady no longer laments the death of her husband but she wishes his murderer ill: she would like Gloucester's children to be as misshapen in body as he is. Anne utters her words before Richard appears on the stage. The encounter of the murderer and the victim takes place next to Henry's corpse, which highlights the "preposterous and paradoxical nature of the situation" (Clemen 24).

Richard now enters the stage: Anne continues with her insults, but he patiently waits until her first outburst of anger subsides. There is a clear contrast in the first part of their exchange between the contemptuous language of Anne's and the flattering words of Richard's (Clemen 27): "dreadful minister of hell" (*R III*, 1.2.46), "foul devil" (*R III*, 1.2.50) (the first time of many in the play when Richard's diabolical nature is mentioned), "[u]nmanner'd dog" (*R III*, 1.2.39), "hedgehog" (*R III*, 1.2.104) (a scornful reference to his crest, the boar), and these are juxtaposed with Richard's "sweet saint" (*R III*, 1.2.49), "lady" (*R III*, 1.2.68), "madam" (*R III*, 1.2.116), "divine perfection of a woman" (*R III*, 1.2.75). Anne is described in angelic terms, as opposed to the devilishness with which Richard is associated. Richard's verbal boldness is to be admired, for he is a foul murderer who very openly admits his crimes before the lady:

> ANNE. . . . dead they are, and, devilish slave, by thee.
> RICHARD. I did not kill your husband.
> ANNE. Why then he is alive.
> RICHARD. Nay, he is dead;
> . . .
> ANNE. Thou wast provoked by thy bloody mind,
> That never dream'st on aught but butcheries.
> Didst thou not kill this King?
> RICHARD. I grant ye, yea.
> (*R III*, 1.2.91–94, 101–4)

Richard's strategy in this conversation is to provoke Anne to even greater outbursts and accusations while he himself remains withdrawn; he is a listener and avoids lengthy monologues. The mistake on Anne's part is that she actually enters into dialogue with Richard, which encourages him to take the floor and control their conversation. Ornstein believes that Richard "kills" with words (66); he seems bored by his crimes, which makes him even more distanced from his villainous acts. His dialogue with Anne is another challenge, something that he will take up as "an opportunity to bustle, a goal worthy of his extraordinary energies and talents" (Ornstein 67). Richard is bold enough not only to admit his foul crimes, but also to be sexually extravagant in his speech. His repartees are laden with straightforward sexual allusions:

> ANNE. And thou [are] unfit for any place but hell.
> RICHARD. Yes, one place else if you will hear me name it.
> ANNE. Some dungeon?
> RICHARD. Your bed-chamber.
> ANNE. I'll rest betide the chamber where thou liest.
> RICHARD. So will it madam, till I lie with you.
> (*R III*, 1.2.111–16)

From a self-conscious crookback "where sits deformity to mock [his] body" (*3 Henry VI*, 3.2.158), he turns into a sexually aroused and attractive male who demands Anne's bed chamber (Chernaik 57–58). Richard's sexual allusions manifest his want of destruction and transgression. In his eroticism he transgresses social taboo by wooing a widow whose husband he killed and who is his future victim. Bataille asserts that "[o]ften the transgression is permitted, often it is even prescribed" (*Erotism* 63). Taboos are there to be violated: the murder of the king was more rewarding simply because it was banned and, similarly, seducing Anne is worthwhile because she represents another taboo (the king's wife) that Richard must challenge on his way to the throne. Thus, Anne's body is a prohibition which has to be transgressed, and Richard's fascination with this taboo necessitates its violation, to use Bataille's terms (*Erotism* 68). It should be noted that the transgressor derives great joy from violating the erotic taboo. Eroticism or erotic desire can also be dangerous for an individual: it creates a sense of horror at the feeling of loss, which Bataille calls the "[d]esire horrified at losing and at losing oneself" (*Accursed* 103). It is so because our eroticism often makes us want things that are unattainable for us; our wants and desires often exceed our real capacities and only the men of the most strength "risk the greatest losses and go to meet the most serious threats" (Bataille, *Accursed* 104). Such a man is Richard III: he has not got "the means to want it" (Bataille, *Accursed* 104), he is a cripple,

a deformed villain, and yet when faced with a challenging wooing, he decides to manifest his sexuality in language and behaviour and "expose himself to danger" (Bataille, *Accursed* 105). Self-exposure to danger (or ridicule) is a risk Richard has to take in order to grapple with his identity and prove himself successful, even at the cost of "losing [him]self" (Bataille, *Accursed* 103).

It is thanks to his verbal art and manipulation of the conversation that Anne yields to Richard's verbal charm in the scene. Richard very skillfully changes his tactics, springing his erotic desire on lady Anne, who is now the cause of everything. Having been given a chance to explain his actions and to defend himself, he starts to fall back on the image of Anne's beauty[4] that haunts him at night, which, he claims, was his only reason to kill her husband:

> ANNE. Thou wast the cause and most accurs'd effect [of Edward's death].
> RICHARD. Your beauty was the cause of that effect:
> Your beauty, that did haunt me in my sleep
> To undertake the death of all the world,
> So I might live one hour in your sweet bosom. (*R III*, 1.2.124–28)

Anne represents a beautiful object of Richard's erotic desire, which he wants to possess and fears to lose. He tries to pacify Anne's anger and accusations by telling her that her beauty was responsible for the murders he had committed, saying: "your beauty was the cause of that effect" (*R III*, 1.2.125). He indicates that the perspective of being with her, possessing her as a woman and lying on her "sweet bosom" (*R III*, 1.2.28) was what encouraged him to kill Edward. Bataille believes that "[p]ossession accentuates the objective quality of whatever may induce us to transcend our own limitations" (*Erotism* 142). Richard's erotic seduction in this scene has a clear aim: to undertake a challenge and possess a beauty outside his reach, and thus to face his limits as a deformed villain, and, maybe, to feel a different man. Anne as the object of desire has a potential to get him closer to the kind of life he would normally never experience if it was not for his desire. Richard's verbal eroticism

[4] We have to refute another myth, this time concerning Lady Anne's beauty. Recent anthropological findings have proven that Anne's jaw displayed a peculiar dental anomaly; she suffered from hypodontia, which "must almost certainly have descended to her via her Neville ancestry" (John Ashdown Hill qtd. in Carson 197–98), which resulted in Anne's missing six teeth. In Shakespeare's play, however, Richard only refers to her beauty, as in: "Your beauty was the cause of that effect: / Your beauty, that did haunt me in my sleep" (*R III*, 1.2.125–26).

is indicative of his sense of "continuity" and "discontinuity" (Bataille, *Erotism* 140); he stands between two different realms: on the one hand, the world of desire, which fulfils his sense of possession and makes him feel a full-fledged man, and, on the other, the real world which leaves him disillusioned, rejected, and all too aware of his limitations. What contributes to Richard's tragedy as an individual is the fact that his existence, both as a man and as a lover, verges on "continuation" and "discontinuity" (Bataille, *Erotism* 140). In one way, he rejoices in playing the lover and paying Anne fake compliments, but in another it is only a false pose. Richard, being himself, is so unattractive that only as an actor can he gain success in social interactions: he plays an obedient brother to Clarence and a true friend of Hastings's to have their trust, and in the same way he plays the heart-broken lover in front of Anne to make her pity him and accept him as her suitor.

As the scene progresses, Richard openly declares his love and devotion, which Anne is very close to accepting even though she spits at him; their closeness is, actually, visible in the shift from the verbal (Anne's imprecations) to the physical (Anne's spitting). Clemen believes that Richard's sudden change from dissimulation towards an open declaration of affection makes her accept his honesty as something genuine, so that she believes in his love and remorse (32–33). Now Richard decides to direct the focus of the conversation on himself. We can observe Richard as a courtly lover; he still maintains that his murderous deeds he performed in the name of his lady's beauty. While Anne is still talking of revenge, he asserts that "[i]t is a quarrel most unnatural, to be revenged on him that loveth thee" (*R III*, 1.2.138–39) and that he killed Edward to "help [her] to a better husband" (*R III*, 1.2.143), and that man is himself. His style of addressing Anne is elegant and even studied (Ornstein 67). He continues in the same vein when the lady wants him out of her sight and says his sight is poisonous to her. Richard pronounces the wish that her eyes were like basilisks, relating to a mythical animal that killed with its very sight; he wants the lady to infect him with her eyes and strike him dead. This is a sudden change of heart, as Clemen notes (33), with no logical reasons that would account for it. He plays the part of a great orator, who uses courtly discourse to persuade Anne to yield to his charm. His language now, very rhetorical and poetic in tone, differs from the abrupt dialogues that have gone before. It is important to emphasize the antitheses between "mine eyes" and "thine eyes" as in: "Those eyes of thine from mine have drawn salt tears" (*R III*, 1.2.157), which are words aimed at Anne, and which might relate to their mutual suffering after the king's death. Richard's speech relies on courtly convention: sonnet-like images of tears and eyes or the lover's cheeks wet with tears (Clemen 34); he also strives

to express Anne's beauty indicating that he is not a good speaker:[5] "[m]y tongue could never learn sweet smoothing word" (*R III*, 1.2.172).

These elements of the courtly love-poetry that Richard employs are additionally emphasized by the lady's tyranny, which is directly indicated in the words: "Teach not thy lip such scorn, for it was made / For kissing lady, not for such contempt" (*R III*, 1.2.175–76). Anne spits at Richard and casts scornful glances, as the stage directions inform. Richard's speech is very theatrical in nature, which is also manifested in his behaviour: in a very theatrical manner he gives Anne the sword, asking her to kill him. He kneels before her and lays his breast open, urging her to do it:

> [*Kneels*] *he lays his breast open, she offers at it with his sword*.
> RICHARD. Nay, do not pause, for I did kill king Henry—
> But 'twas thy beauty that provoked me.
> Nay, now dispatch: 'twas I that stabbed young Edward—
> But 'twas thy heavenly face that set me on.
> *She falls the sword*.
> (*R III*, 1.2.183–86)

Richard's "self-fashioning" as a courtly lover has one aim: to make an impression upon Anne. His baring of his chest for the sword-thrust is a highly melodramatic gesture, which, somehow, lacks spontaneity; his acting consists in "calculated changes of mood [that] are unpredictable" (Ornstein 67). Richard's wooing is clearly an effect of previous study and cool calculation, but he adapts his theatrical performance so well to the need of the situation that he manages to dupe Anne with his pretended protestations of affection. Thus, from Anne's initial reaction [*she offers at it with his sword*] we can observe that she experiences a change of heart, which she demonstrates in her final gesture [*she drops the sword*], and in her words to Richard: "Arise dissembler" (*R III*, 1.2.188). Anne symbolically accepts his remorse and mercifully decides to spare his life. Richard in a very shrewd, diabolical manner appeals to her good nature, which stops her from the sword-thrust. Anne does not want to carry out the judgment herself; she says: "I will not be thy executioner" (*R III*, 1.2.189). In

[5] We know that this is not entirely true, because Richard actually prepared himself quite well for seducing Anne and even when he says that he is not skilled at courtly speech, the lady's reaction proves otherwise. Ornstein believes that if Richard "applied himself to seduction, he might have rivaled Casanova" (68). His false humbleness in this scene resembles Henry V's political wooing of Princess Katherine of France, where the king, certain of his conquest, admits that he is only a plain soldier, who is not trained in paying compliments or behaving like a courtly lover: "I cannot look greenly nor / Gasp out my eloquence, nor I have no cunning in / Protestation, only downright oaths, which I never use / Till urged" (*Henry V*, 5.2.143–46).

a stichomythic dialogue at the end, Anne develops some more intimacy with Richard, and she is clearly overcome by him:

> ANNE. I would I knew thy heart.
> RICHARD. 'Tis figured in my tongue.
> ANNE. I fear me both are false.
> RICHARD. Then never was man true.
> ANNE. Well, well, put up your sword.
> RICHARD. Say then my peace is made.
> ANNE. That shalt thou know hereafter.
> RICHARD. But shall I live in hope?
> ANNE. All men, I hope, live so.
> RICHARD. Vouchsafe to wear this ring.
> ANNE. To take is not to give.
> (*R III*, 1.2.196–206)

Anne accepts the ring and yields to Richard's undeniable charisma, despite her initial hatred and scorn. To some extent it could be said that Anne is gullible and is easily misled into believing in Richard's affection by his perfect "fashioning" as a courtly lover. In contrast, she may just as well be aware of the fact that she is an element of some political game, and she consciously decides to play her part, counting for a gain. Anne is sometimes thought to be easily impressionable, "frivolous," "incapable of deep affection" (Richardson 19) and her mourning at the king's coffin may seem unnatural and insincere, simply too theatrical. In such case, recognizing Anne's changeable nature, Richard

> addresses her with the most perfect knowledge of her constitution. He knows that her feelings are violent; that they have no foundation in steady determined principles of conduct . . . that the undecided mind, without choice or sense of propriety, is equally accessible to the next that occur. (Richardson 19–20)

One possibility is that Anne is by no means naïve but that she actually wants to be seduced, and her invectives and imprecations result from the resentment which is caused by Richard's coolness and lack of concern at her abuse (Richardson 20–21). One way or the other, the task of seducing Anne is not easy regarding the circumstances (she is courted by the murderer of her husband), and it requires from the lover much verbal skill and acting to prove his affection.

The audience is now left alone with Richard, who rejoices in his political success; with evident satisfaction and a touch of irony he acknowledges the fact that his wooing is grotesque, a deformed lover winning the hand of his future victim:

> Was ever woman in this humour woo'd?
> Was ever woman in this humour won?
> I'll have her, but I will not keep her long.
> What, I that killed her husband and his father:
> To take her in her heart's extremest hate,
> With curses in her mouth, tears in her eyes,
> The bleeding witness of her hatred by,
> Having God, her conscience, and these bars against me—
> And I, no friends to back my suit at all
> But the plain devil and dissembling looks—
> And yet to win her, all the world to nothing!
> Ha! (*R III*, 1.2.232–43)

Richard's final exclamation reflects his surprise and self satisfaction; he congratulates himself on his skillful play—Richard-the actor has achieved something that was out of reach when he was himself—the lady chose him. Much as his wooing is a political undertaking and a cool-calculated decision, Meredith Anne Skura notes that his delight is genuine (66). Anne has accepted all his moral drawbacks and physical deformity: "And will she yet debase her eyes on me, / . . . On me that halts and am misshapen thus?" (*R III*, 1.2.251, 255). Ironically, Richard admits that he does not even in one half equal Edward, Anne's late husband: "On me, whose all not equals Edward's moiety?" (*R III*, 1.2.254). He is unique in his courtly-sexual rhetoric, in his melancholic and simultaneously ironic attitude. At the end of the scene Richard invokes an image of a looking glass to reflect his shadow: "Shine out, fair sun, till I have bought a glass, / That I may see my shadow as I pass" (*R III*, 1.2.267–68). However, what he is bound to see is always the shadow of a cripple.

Richard of Gloucester possesses a clear family background in Shakespeare's play: the mother who did not approve of him from his birth and to whom he is "one false glass / that grieves [her] when [she sees her] name in him" (*R III*, 2.2.53–54), and the father, the Duke of York, who was a political failure. In the play Richard is presented as a social outcast whose physical deformity is an external mark of his villainous, "deformed" identity. The figure of Richard strikes us as somebody who is very much aware of his drawbacks, both moral and physical, and also as an individual who, struggling with his identity, wants social acceptance. Therefore, he "fashions" himself into many different roles, among which is the part of an ardent lover to Anne. Despite his villainy and the joy he derives from it, he is a tragic character and his personal tragedy is emphasized by his public performance, as well as by the variety of roles he embodies: a good brother, a protective uncle, a genuine friend. His "self-fashioning" as a lover ends in the successful accomplishment of this role: wooing the widowed lady

Anne. This part in particular gives him satisfaction and, it could be argued, serves as a psychological rescue for Richard. Some critics claim that this marriage, actually, did not "advance" his political status and that Richard in the seduction scene is in need of love more than it seems (Skura 66; Clemen 19). Anne, therefore, also has a role to play: she arises as Richard's "amorous looking-glass" (*R III*, 1.2.260), and the moment she capitulates and succumbs to his charm "she mirrors back a more handsome image of himself" (Skura 66).

There are several functions of eroticism in the seduction scene in Shakespeare's play: revenge, negotiation with one's identity, and attaining the sense of "continuity" (Bataille, *Erotism* 15). First, Richard transgresses erotic taboos, as he is a crookback who woos his victim, and, eventually, he is a villainous crookback who turns out to be a master of seduction. He violates social stereotypes because he wants to take revenge on the court that stigmatized him. Secondly, his physical ugliness causes him to befoul all beauty around him; he seduces Anne because he takes pleasure in destroying her beauty. Anne's accepting Richard's offer of marriage marks the beginning of her downfall as a woman and puts her moral beauty—integrity and moral values—into question. The "profanation of beauty" (Bataille, *Erotism* 145) and the "transgression" (Bataille, *Erotism* 63) of taboo are not only connected with Richard's want of possession, but they also help the protagonist negotiate his troubled identity. We can see that Richard is playing all the time and this is because he finds it difficult to accept the man he has become. In fact, only as an actor can he be accepted by others (Anne), and he proves to be successful in his undertakings; acting makes it easier to transcend his limitations. Finally, Richard's unexpected turn to eroticism in language is his way to overcome uncertainty about his position, which is when the feelings of "continuity" and "discontinuity" linger on. According to Bataille, "[t]he transition from the normal state to that of erotic desire presupposes a partial dissolution of the person as he exists in the realm of discontinuity" (*Erotism* 15), therefore an important role of eroticism is to "substitute for the individual isolated discontinuity a feeling of profound continuity" (*Erotism* 17). Surely, Richard attains the sense of "continuity" in the seduction scene, because, for a moment, he feels a different man (not himself), and because this grotesque wooing allows him to see his crooked shadow reflected in his lover's eyes.

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Eroticism and Its Discontents: Eroticism in Modern Drama, Film and Prose

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In a World Characterized by Transience and Doomed to Extinction Some Old Women Still Need Love —Mrs Rooney from Samuel Beckett's *All That Fall*

ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the world of transience, deterioration and death characteristic of Boghill, the place of action of Samuel Beckett's short radio play—*All That Fall*. In a broadcast drama, existence is equivalent to being heard, the idea skilfully employed and commented upon by the playwright. The characters actually heard in the play are in most cases elderly or quite old and even the two young ones appear in the context of death. Numerous off-the-air individuals are dead, sterile or suffering from different illnesses. The two main characters' situation is not different—Mr Rooney is blind, and his wife, Maddy, complains of many ailments. She is a woman in her seventies, overweight and having different kinds of health problems and thus, several times in the course of the play she expresses a wish to die. At the same time, however, in encounters with men on her way to the station she speaks in a manner characterized by numerous sexual innuendos. Furthermore, she expresses a strong yearning for love and hopes her unloving husband would show her some warm feelings. Thus she becomes a convincing illustration of Georges Bataille's argument: "Eroticism, it may be said, is assenting to life up to the point of death" (11).

ABSTRACT

"Love is the demand to be loved."
(Sartre 343)

Beckett's first radio play, *All That Fall*, was written in English in 1956 and presented on BBC Radio Three on January 13, 1957. The piece came into being at the invitation of the BBC which

> prompted Beckett to think for the first time about the technique required for a medium of which sound and silence are the sole components. And it was probably through thinking about sound in general, as distinct from voice in particular, that he had the idea for a play in which sound effects would play a vital role. "Never thought of a radio play technique," he wrote to Nancy Cunard, "but in the dead of t'other night got a nice gruesome idea full of cartwheels and dragging feet and puffing and panting which may or may not lead to something." (Knowlson 385)[1]

Even though unwilling to do so, Beckett would occasionally make a comment on his writing or even indicate some details. Such was the case, for instance, with *Not I*:

> "I knew that woman in Ireland," Beckett said, "I knew who she was—not 'she' specifically, one single woman, but there were so many of those old crones, stumbling down the lanes, in the ditches, beside the hedgerows. Ireland is full of them. And I heard 'her' saying what I wrote in *Not I*. I actually heard it." (Bair 622–23)

Despite the fact that the above remarks concern another play and another heroine, they fit Mrs Rooney perfectly well.

Having created the play, Beckett was absolutely certain that it was meant for the radio only: "*All That Fall* is specifically a radio play, or rather a radio text, for voices, not bodies. I have already refused to have it 'staged' and I cannot think of it in such terms. . . . to 'act' it is to kill it" (qtd. in Frost 191 and Zilliacus[2]).

In radio drama, existence is equivalent to sound—everything that ceases to produce sound becomes nonexistent. Beckett exploits the power of the voice and other sound effects to evoke a transitory presence in

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[1] Linda Ben-Zvi notices that Beckett, interested in numerology, "is fond of building his compositions on triads, and in *All That Fall* he adds to the natural, human, and mechanical sounds the sound of music: Schubert's *Death and the Maiden*" ("Samuel Beckett's Media Plays" 27).

[2] The frontispiece quotation for Zilliacus's *Beckett and the Art of Broadcasting*.

a temporal universe. The purely aural medium depends more radically than the stage on temporal dimension. The artist manipulates our attention, giving or withholding perceived phenomena moment by moment, stressing the fact that whatever is silent disappears. Kenner has noted that in this play all the "movements in space are translated by the aural medium into time, where sounds extend themselves and die" (169). He adds: "Thus the mode in which the play itself exists, as a series of auditory effects in time, sustains its theme of transience" (170). The fading of the sound symbolically represents the fading of existence, the change of being into non-being. This notion, even though undoubtedly true, is contradicted by what, at times, is happening in the play as, for instance, when Mrs Rooney says: "Do not imagine, because I am silent, that I am not present, and alive to all that is going on. . . . Do not flatter yourselves for one moment, because I hold aloof, that my sufferings have ceased" (Beckett, *All That Fall* 25). In this speech she objects to the notion of being nonexistent while silent, but also expresses the idea of living as suffering, consistently reappearing in Beckett's canon. Even if her statement is taken into account, when mute, she, in fact, does not really exist for the listeners. Her constant movement from being heard/alive to being silent/dead evokes the notion that she is only partly alive, the idea expressed *verbatim* by her in several places in the play, as, for instance, when she says: "Don't mind me. Don't take any notice of me. I do not exist. The fact is well known" (48).

The ambiguity of the terms "dead" and "alive" may be discussed in reference to the young and old characters (also those only mentioned by others and not actually heard) as well as to Carl Jung's lecture Beckett attended in October 1935 (Knowlson 170) and wrote about in a letter to his friend, Thomas McGreevy (Beckett, *Letters* 282). The playwright discussed the personal and intellectual influence the lecture had on him in a conversation he had with Charles Juliet in 1968:

> I have always sensed that there was within me an assassinated being. Assassinated before my birth. I needed to find this assassinated person again. And try to give him new life. I once attended a lecture by Jung in which he spoke about one of his patients, a very young girl. After the lecture, as everyone was leaving, Jung stood by silently. And then, as if speaking to himself, astonished by the discovery that he was making, he added: In the most fundamental way, she had never really been born. (qtd. in McDonald 55)

Rónán McDonald writes:

> In the early 1960s, Beckett spoke to Lawrence Harvey about a general feeling of "being absent" or "existence by proxy." Along with this

> contingent or displaced experience goes the intuition of "a presence, embryonic, undeveloped, of a self that might have been but never got born, an être manqué [an absent being]." Given the preoccupation with absent presence in *All That Fall*, with characters who are not quite "there," together with the associated theme of sterility and child death, these remarks are particularly illuminating. Harvey goes on to offer a reading of *All That Fall* in the light of his conversation with Beckett as "a parable about this abortive being." (55)

A direct reference to Jung's lecture can be found in *All That Fall* where Mrs Rooney mentions going to a lecture given by "a new mind doctor," hoping "he might shed a little light on [her] lifelong preoccupation with horses' buttocks" and directly quotes the words of Jung which were of such a great importance for Beckett: "The trouble with her was she had never really been born!" She also says: "it was something he said, and the way he said it, that have haunted me ever since" (35–36). Jung's sentence haunts not only Mrs Rooney but also Beckett who makes yet another reference to the lecture in *Footfalls* where May says: "A little later, when as though she had never been, it never been, she began to walk" (242). It might be said that most of Beckett's characters are similar to the girl from Jung's lecture. Just like all people, they live to die finally, yet differently from average people, they are fully aware of this fact.

Let us now concentrate on the idea of transience, the theme of the play adequately expressed by the qualities of the medium used. Beckett's whole *oeuvre* is characterized by a consistency of the vision of human existence, many aspects of which are described in his essay written in 1931. It may be argued that "Proust" is to a lesser extent a critical analysis of the French writer's masterpiece, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, than an excuse on Beckett's part to present his opinions concerning "the double headed monster of damnation and salvation—Time" (11), "Time cancer" and its attributes, "Habit and Memory" (18) which are the instruments people employ to lessen the "suffering of being" (19), the punishment for the "eternal . . . sin of having been born" (67).[3] In his analysis of Proust's novel, Beckett does not include many quotations from it, yet the ones he does are of great importance not only for the novel and Beckett's discussion of it, but also for the playwright's ideas concerning human existence and the role eroticism plays in it. For instance, Beckett quotes the following passage of the novel:

[3] Knowlson mentions that the phrase "original . . . sin of having been born" (Beckett, "Proust" 67) may owe something to Calderón's sentence in *Life Is a Dream* (604): "For man's greatest crime is to have been born" (Calderón), which was later, as Libera argues, propagated by Schopenhauer in his *The World as Will and Representation* (29). This might well be the case as Beckett was familiar both with the drama and the philosopher's ideas.

> How have we the courage to wish to live, how can we make a movement to preserve ourselves from death, in a world where love is provoked by a lie and consists solely in the need of having our sufferings appeased by whatever being has made us suffer? (54)

The sentence written by Proust sheds light not only on the Frenchman's novel but also on the whole output of Beckett. Furthermore, it makes the ideas concerning eroticism as voiced by Georges Bataille especially useful in analyzing the great Irishman's output. In the introduction to his book, the critic argues:

> If a precise definition were called for, the starting-point would certainly have to be sexual reproductive activity, of which eroticism is a special form. . . . Eroticism, unlike simple sexual activity, is a psychological quest independent of the natural goal: reproduction and the desire for children. . . . Reproduction implies the existence of *discontinuous* beings. . . .We are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but we yearn for our lost continuity. We find the state of affairs that binds us to our random and ephemeral individuality hard to bear. Along with our tormenting desire that this evanescent thing should last, there stands our obsession with a primal continuity linking us with everything that is. . . . In essence, the domain of eroticism is the domain of violence, of violation. . . . The most violent thing of all for us is death which jerks us out of a tenacious obsession with the lastingness of our discontinuous being. We blench at the thought that the separate individuality within us must be suddenly snuffed out. . . . The transition from the normal state to that of erotic desire presupposes a partial dissolution of the person as he exists in the realm of discontinuity. Dissolution—this expression corresponds with *dissolute life*, the familiar phrase linked with erotic activity. (11–17)

Before moving to the discussion of Maddy Rooney and her attitude pertaining to questions concerning life, love, death and eroticism, as the term is understood by Bataille, it seems justified to pay some attention to the other characters in the play, young and old, both those who are actually present in the soundscape of this radio play and those only mentioned, because all of them greatly contribute to the overall aura of these issues in the drama.

The vision presented by the play is dominated by images of people slowly yet inevitably approaching death, the stress being put on the suffering intrinsically, as it seems, connected with the process. Mr Slocum's mother is "fairly comfortable" as they "manage to keep her out of pain" (17); Mr Barrell's father is dead and "didn't live long to enjoy his ease" after having retired from his post of the station-master (21); Jerry's

"poor father" has been "taken away" so that he is all by himself now (28); Mrs Tully's "poor husband is in constant pain and beats her unmercifully" (33) and the previous incumbent has died and been replaced by Hardy (38). Mr Rooney, blind and ill, twice tells Jerry to come for him on Monday, adding, on both occasions, the same sentence: "if I am still alive" (28, 39). On being asked by Maddy whether he is not well, he answers:

> Well! Did you ever know me well? The day you met me I should have been in bed. The day you proposed to me the doctors gave me up. You knew that, did you not? The night you married me they came for me with an ambulance. You have not forgotten that, I suppose? [*Pause*.] No, I cannot be said to be well. But I am no worse. Indeed I am better than I was. The loss of my sight was a great fillip. If I could go deaf and dumb I think I might pant on to be a hundred. Or have I done so? [*Pause*.] Am I a hundred, Maddy? (31–32)

In this respect, Mrs Rooney does not seem to be any better than the others. When she finally gets to the station, the following conversation takes place:

> MR BARRELL: . . . Well, Mrs Rooney, it's nice to see you up and about again. You were laid up there a long time.
> MRS ROONEY: Not long enough, Mr Barrell. [*Pause*.] Would I were still in bed, Mr Barrell. [*Pause*.] Would I were lying stretched in my comfortable bed, Mr Barrell, just wasting slowly, painlessly away, keeping up my strength with arrowroot and calves-foot jelly, till in the end you wouldn't see me under the blankets any more than a board. [*Pause*.] Oh no coughing or spitting or bleeding or vomiting, just drifting gently into the higher life, and remembering, remembering . . . [*The voice breaks*.] . . . all the silly unhappiness . . . as though . . . it had never happened . . . (20–21)

Her situation, like that of all the other grown up or, rather, elderly people in the play is a slow (and often painful) movement towards death, a point which she makes during a conversation with Mr Slocum. On being asked by him if she is going in his direction, she answers: "I am, Mr Slocum, we all are" (17). To some extent, at least, there should be nothing extraordinary in this statement—all people's end, after all, is death. Yet, in the context of the play, this assertion stops being that obvious. Firstly, not a single grown-up character seems to be enjoying their lives. Secondly, whereas the natural rhythm presupposes the continuation of the species by the next generation, this does not seem to be the case in the world they inhabit. And, finally, procreation and continuation of the species does not seem

desirable, a point made in the drama by Mr Tyler, who curses, among others, "the wet Saturday afternoon of [his] conception" (15).

The only two representatives of the younger generation actually heard during this radio play are Jerry, whose father is dead, and Dolly, a small girl standing on the station platform and warned by her mother to be careful: "Give me your hand and hold me tight, one can be sucked under" by the coming train (25). Even in the case of these two small children, then, the idea of death is discernible. There are also some children's cries heard (which gives them essential presence in this radio play). Mrs Rooney states they are "The Lynch twins jeering at [them]" and, fearing that they will pelt them with mud again, Mr Rooney threatens them off with his stick (31). Steward argues it is worthwhile to study "'A lynch-pin' of misopedia in Beckett's works, which runs from the murderous misopedia of 'The Expelled' back to *Watt* and on to the equally murderous *All That Fall*" (79). He goes on to discuss *Watt* and "the grotesquely extended Lynch family":

> The 28 souls of the family from the 85-year-old patriarch to the four-year-old twins, Pat and Larry, are a catalogue of suffering. Determined to reach their collective 1,000 years, they breed regardless of the inevitable consequences; pain and death. . . . Slaves to the will-to-live, the Lynches produce slaves of the will-to-live, imprisoned within inevitable suffering and, unfortunately for the Lynches' dreams, inevitable death as a phenomenon of life. (83)

Taking into account Beckett's vision of human existence, persistent in his whole *oeuvre* and specified in the presentation of the Lynch family in "The Expelled," as well as the way the twins treat the Rooneys, it is not surprising that Dan's next speech is a kind of confession:

> Did you ever wish to kill a child? [*Pause*.] Nip some young doom in the bud. [*Pause*.] Many a time, in winter, on the back road home, I nearly attacked the boy. [*Pause*.] Poor Jerry! [*Pause*.] What restrained me then? [*Pause*.] Not fear of man. [*Pause*.] (31)

Steward rightly contends that "the replacement of 'bloom' by 'doom' strongly suggests that it is in blooming that one is doomed, that life itself is the disaster that one should wish to avoid" (84). The thought of killing a child, as Dan himself acknowledges, has haunted him for some time and it seems almost certain that on this very day he has made his dream come true. There are quite a few hints in the play indicating that he is responsible for the death of the boy on the railway track. When Mrs Rooney asks him what has happened, he dismisses her, saying "I have never known anything to happen." When she insists on getting an answer, he changes the

subject, speaking "*Violently*" (30–31). Later, at the end of the play, when Jerry brings the ball[4] to him, he denies it belongs to him and, on Jerry's insisting that Mr Barrell said it did, he takes it saying: "It is a thing I carry about with me." As Maddy asks for further explanation he, again, repeats his answer, this time, however, "*Violently*." Mrs Rooney persists in trying to get a concrete answer, despite her husband's attempts to make her give it up. Then Jerry says the sentence: "It was a little child, Ma'am," followed by Mr Rooney's "*groan*," as the stage directions indicate. It is only then that we learn the details of the accident: "JERRY: It was a little child fell out of the carriage, Ma'am. [*Pause*.] On the line, Ma'am. [*Pause*.] Under the wheels, Ma'am" (38–39). Mr Rooney's reaction is clearly indicative that he was lying when he said he did not know what had happened, and both his not wanting to discuss the event and his reaction to Jerry's report make it nearly certain that he is responsible for the child's death.

Mrs Rooney is contrasted with the misopediast her husband is. Yet, even though she is so interested in what has happened, she does not react to the information concerning the tragic death of the boy. Katharine Worth states that "despite her histrionics and grotesqueries" she is "a mater dolorosa" (237). On several occasions in the play, she expresses her deep grief connected with the premature death of her daughter: "Minnie! Little Minnie!" (14, 16). She lost her child a long time ago and she has remained childless. Furthermore, were Minnie alive, as Mrs Rooney notices, she would not be able to procreate: "In her forties now she'd be, I don't know, fifty, girding her lovely little loins, getting ready for the change . . ." (16). Despairing over the death of her only offspring, she does not seem even to notice the fact that her family will not continue in the future. In this respect, she differs from Mr Tyler, who, on being asked how his daughter is, answers: "Fair, fair. They removed everything, you know, the whole . . . er . . . bag of tricks. Now I am grandchildless" (14). It is not certain, though, whether he is really worried about the end of his family line or, whether, not knowing how to speak about the ailment and operation of his daughter, he adds the second sentence simply to make the situation clear. In this atmosphere characterized by deterioration, suffering and sterility, the only reference made to possible procreation comes in a sentence uttered by Dan, referring, however, not to the world surrounding him, but to that of fiction: "I think Effie is going to commit adultery with the Major" (29).

Being the main heroine of the drama, Maddy Rooney is paid most attention to and, furthermore, presented in a way underlying the ambiguity

[4] It is not quite certain what the object really is, as Mrs Rooney, after having inspected it, says: "It looks like a kind of ball. And yet it is not a ball" (38).

of her character as she may be perceived as a mixture of contradictions (sometimes real and, at other times, ostensible). She is, as specified in the stage directions, a "*lady in her seventies*" (11), who mentions her "once female shape" (22) and now refers to herself saying: "Oh I am just a hysterical old hag I know, destroyed with sorrow and pining and gentility and churchgoing and fat and rheumatism and childlessness" (14). Her life is intrinsically bound with suffering: "It is suicide to be abroad. But what is it to be at home, Mr Tyler, what is it to be at home? A lingering dissolution" (15). Wherever she is, she is reminded of death approaching. There is so much suffering in her life that, twice in the course of the play, she expresses a death wish:

> How can I go on? I can't. Oh let me just flop down flat on the road like a big fat jelly out of a bowl and never move again! A great big slop thick with grit and dust and flies, they would have to scoop me up with a shovel (14)

and "What's wrong with me, never tranquil, seething out of my dirty old pelt, out of my skull, oh to be in atoms, in atoms" (17). Furthermore, she seems to envy the hen run over by Mr Slocum's car:

> Oh, mother, you have squashed her, drive on, drive on! [*The car accelerates. Pause.*] What a death! One minute picking happy at the dung, on the road, in the sun, with now and then a dust bath, and then—bang!—all her troubles over. [*Pause*.] All the laying and hatching. [*Pause*.] Just one great squawk and then . . . peace. [*Pause*.] They would have slit her weasand in any case. (19)

There are several intriguing details in this description. Firstly, while talking about the hen, Maddy uses the pronoun "she." Secondly, speaking about it she refers to the bird as if it were similar to her—"all the troubles over." Thirdly, she speaks about "laying and hatching," thus making a reference to procreation. Fourthly, she states that death is unavoidable. And, finally, fifthly, the impossibility of life continuing, of persistent death and unavoidable deterioration is not restricted to people but it also applies to animals and inanimate objects: the dead hen will not hatch any more, hinnies cannot procreate, despite it being June, there are rotten leaves in the ditch (36), Mr Tyler's bicycle has a flat tyre and causes continual problems (15) and Mr Slocum's car will not start and then he is "crucifying his gearbox" (18, 20).

While Mrs Rooney's body prepares for death and even eagerly awaits it, her soul is still dominated by desires. Even though in her seventies, she often makes references to sex, which may be noticed in her

numerous encounters with men. She first meets Jerry, who has problems with a hinny which does not want to move. On seeing that, Maddy says: "Give her a good welt on the rump. [*Sound of a welt. Pause*.] Harder! [*Sound of a welt. Pause*.] If someone were to do that for me I should not dally" (13). Her remark makes a parallel between the unwillingness of the horse to travel and her own problems with walking. Simultaneously, it evokes the idea of women getting a slap on the bottom as a sign of primitive flirtation. The sexual undertones of this scene are discussed at length by Steward who concedes: "the pseudo-sadistic beating of the animal is also present, from which arguably Maddy gains some sort of excitement, possibly of a sexual nature" (26). The next man she meets on her way to the station is Mr Tyler, who is wobbling on his bicycle. When he suggests he might lay his hand lightly on her shoulder and asks her for permission to do so, she answers: "No, Mr Rooney, Mr Tyler I mean, I am tired of light old hands on my shoulders and other senseless places, sick and tired of them" (15). When she soon afterwards breaks down recalling her daughter and he tries to calm her down, "*exploding*," she says: "Will you get along with you, Mr Rooney, Mr Tyler I mean, will you get along with you now and cease molesting me?" (16), using a word which is often used in connection with sexual harassment. Later, however, she suggests: "Oh cursed corset. If I could let it out, without indecent exposure. Mr Tyler! Mr Tyler! Come back and unlace me behind the hedge! [*She laughs wildly, ceases*.]" (17). Her reaction clearly indicates that she is fully aware of the indecency of her suggestion. Then, when she spots Mr Slocum, she says: "Well if it is not my old admirer the Clerk of the Course, in his limousine" (17). It seems doubtful whether he has ever been her admirer. Furthermore, such a remark coming out of the lips of a seventy-year-old woman is rather ridiculous. Besides, slightly earlier, when Mr Slocum has problems with getting out of the car and argues "I'm as stiff as yourself," she says: "Stiff! Well I like that. And me heaving all over back and front. [*To herself*.] The old reprobate!" (18). As he is helping her to get into the car, pushing her from behind, she says: "Oh! . . . Lower! . . . Don't be afraid! . . . We're past the age when . . . There! . . . Now! . . . Get your shoulder under it . . . Oh! . . . [*Giggles*.] Oh glory! . . . Up! . . . Up! . . . Ah! . . . I'm in!" (18).

Commenting on this scene, Katharine Worth concedes:

> "Destroyed" she may be but her sexuality is still vital, as the wicked little episode with Mr Slocum suggests: she never fails to pick up a bawdy double entendre, and she enjoys a good giggle when he heaves her up into his car by following (with seemingly enthusiasm) her unabashed instruction "Get your shoulder under it." (237)

Maddy's sexual vitality may be for her a way of compensating herself for her husband's inability or unwillingness (or both) to show any tender feelings towards her. It is clearly visible in the scenes presenting them that she is yearning for his love. To show him her love she has decided to undertake the exhausting trip to the station so as to demonstrate her love for him in this way on his birthday. As the delayed train arrives at last and Maddy meets Dan, the following exchange ensues:

> MRS ROONEY: Kiss me.
> MR ROONEY: Kiss you? In public? On the platform? Before the boy? Have you taken leave of your senses?
> MRS ROONEY: Jerry wouldn't mind. Would you, Jerry?
> JERRY: No, Ma'am. . . .
> MR ROONEY: Why are you here? You did not notify me.
> MRS ROONEY: I wanted to give you a surprise. For your birthday.
> MR ROONEY: My birthday?
> MRS ROONEY: Don't you remember? I wished you your happy returns in the bathroom.
> MR ROONEY: I did not hear you.
> MRS ROONEY: But I gave you a tie! You have it on!
> [*Pause.*]
> MR ROONEY: How old am I now?
> MRS ROONEY: Now never mind about that. Come.
> MR ROONEY: Why did you not cancel the boy? Now we shall have to give him a penny.
> MRS ROONEY: [*Miserably.*] I forgot! I had such a time getting here! Such horrid people! [*Pause. Pleading.*] Be nice to me, Dan, be nice to me today. (28–29)

Mr Rooney, however, does not intend to be nice—he scolds her several times for not having called Jerry off and calculates precisely how much money they have lost because of this. The quarrel culminates when he says: "[*Violently*.] Two hundred pounds of unhealthy fat! What possessed you to come out at all? Let go of me!" (31). The scene shows explicitly well that the feelings of the spouses differ—she wants to show him her love and expects the same from him while he wants to be left alone. We do not know whether they have ever been happy together. In the dialogue quoted above, when asked by Maddy if he does not feel well, Dan's answer clearly indicates that she was the active person in their relationship. What is also evident, however, is that she has always yearned for love and that she is greatly disappointed by what she is getting now, and most probably used to get in the past:

> Love, that is all I asked, a little love, daily, twice daily, fifty years of twice daily love like a Paris butcher's regular, what normal woman wants affection? A peck on the jaw at morning, near ear, and another at evening, peck, peck till you grow whiskers on you. (14)

As the play approaches its end, and they are close to their home, Maddy asks Dan: "Put your arm round me. [*Pause*.] Be nice to me! [*Pause*. *Gratefully*.] Ah, Dan!" (37). Maybe, after all, they are happy together. Such an interpretation can be supported by the next plea of Maddy which is satisfied by Dan again: "Hold me tighter, Dan. [*Pause*.] Oh yes!" (38).

Two more aspects of the play seem to deserve some attention, namely the music which forms its frame and the title of the piece. At the beginning of the play and also at its end, on their journey home from the station, Mr and Mrs Rooney pass a house where an "old woman," living all alone, is playing a record to which Mrs Rooney comments: "All day the same record" and Mr Rooney specifies it is *Death and the Maiden* (37). Beckett chose Schubert's piece because it was his favourite, but also, which is more important, because he knew of no other "music so heavily imbued with such sorrow" (qtd. in Bair 477). Mary Bryden discusses the chosen music in the following way:

> On the face of it, there is a feasible connection to be made between the title of the song and the image of an old woman living all alone, particularly since the directions indicate that the "music dies." Yet even the analogic journey is interrupted by ambiguity, since the maiden of Schubert's song is still young when Death comes to claim her. This old woman, on the other hand, has had the leisure to play the music over and over again. She is not so much dying as reliving (and thus suspending) the experience of proximate death. (37)

The choice of this concrete piece of music may have also been caused by a poem written by German poet Matthias Claudius and translated into English by P. Jurgenson:

> THE MAIDEN: Oh! leave me! Prithee, leave me! thou grisly man of bone!
> For life is sweet, is pleasant.
> Go! leave me now alone!
> Go! leave me now alone!
> DEATH: Give me thy hand, oh! maiden fair to see,
> For I'm a friend, hath ne'er distress'd thee.
> Take courage now, and very soon
> Within mine arms shalt softly rest thee! (Claudius)

Discussing the play, Paul Davies argues:

> The nature of the tragedy is that the body fears and prepares for death, the soul desires and prepares for life. This is concealed in the message of Death to the maiden, and in the mythographic message which that poem itself carries from Beckett's play over to the listener. (156)

Steward argues that a new perspective on the use of Schubert's music may be provided by Gregory of Nyssa, as quoted by Dollimore:

> The bodily procreation of children . . . is more an embarking upon death than upon life. . . . Corruption has its beginning in birth and those who refrain from procreation through virginity themselves bring about a cancellation of death by preventing it from advancing further because of them. . . . they keep death from going forward. . . . Virginity is stronger than death. . . . The unceasing succession of destruction and dying . . . is interrupted. Death, you see, was never able while human birth was going on in marriage. (qtd. in Steward 2–3)[5]

The childless Mr and Mrs Rooney go on living and suffering, occasionally falling down to rise (or be raised) again. In this context, the title of the play is indicative, a point noticed by Knowlson:

> In spite of the apparent comic texture of the play, human misery and suffering emerge as so overwhelming that, when Psalm 145, verse 14 is quoted—"The Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down"—it is greeted by the lame, seventy-year-old Maddy Rooney and her blind husband, Dan, with wild laughter at its bitter irony. (38)

They do not react to the subject of the sermon mentioned by them slightly earlier, "How to be Happy though Married" (38), even though it also has some relevance to their situation. Zilliacus, among other critics, concedes: "The incidents in the play serve as a stave for a threnody on the theme of decay and meaningless death" (32). Steward presents a different reading, arguing

> The wish to fall, never to rise again, is consistently expressed throughout the play. . . . Maddy and Dan's world is so arranged that the final fall is not an option. The Lord, if one must be posited, insists on holding them up. . . . there is the annoyingly stubborn presence of the continuation of

[5] Jonathan Dollimore. *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture*. Harmondsworth: Allen Lane, 1998. 46.

> meaningless life, of precisely *not* falling. . . . [and] While *this* generation pants on, the hope might remain that the suffering can end through an end of regeneration (137–38).

Mrs Rooney, just like Winnie from *Happy Days*, is, as Graver concedes, one of "gritty and flamboyant survivors, [who] are continually seen as comic in their rhetorical extravagance" (146). Ruby Cohn voices a similar opinion:

> she endures volubly as she trudges, stumbles, climbs in and out, up and down, in sunshine and in rain. Neither coming to nor going from the train station does she fall. Invisible on the air waves, she makes an epic journey that is conveyed through sound effects, but the dialogue surrounds her with death. Even her name, Maddy Dunne Rooney, puns on a mad old woman who is done for and ruined. (165)

Mrs Rooney's behaviour may be described by two quotes. The first one comes from Georges Bataille's book: "Eroticism, it may be said, is assenting to life up to the point of death" (11). The second one is taken from Beckett's "Proust" essay: "A being scattered in space and time is no longer a woman but a series of events on which we can throw no light" (58), and, to be precise, comes from Proust's novel.

Billie Whitelaw thus comments on the work with Beckett on *All That Fall*:

> Apart from letting me hear a certain *tone* that he required, which from long practice I was able to pick up very quickly from him, he invariably said one particular thing, usually in passing, that gave me the key to the part. This time he said that Maddie Rooney was "bursting with abortive explosiveness." Suddenly I saw this image of a Michelin tyre of a creature blowing up in front of me. That's how I played her—huffing and puffing, dragging her feet, shod with ill-fitting shoes, walking and weaving her way to the station, before she exploded out of her stays. (234)

In the course of the play, Mrs Rooney does not explode. As this radio drama ends, the stage directions read: "*Silence.* JERRY *runs off. His steps die away. Tempest of wind and rain. It abates. They move on. Dragging steps, etc. They halt. Tempest of wind and rain*" (39). Amid the tempest of wind and rain, the entropy of the surrounding world and the suffering of all the people around and also of her own, Mrs Rooney does not fall, she lovingly accompanies her unloving husband and continues living on despite the death which awaits her at the end of the journey.

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Eroticism in the "Cold Climate" of Northern Ireland in Christina Reid's *The Belle of the Belfast City*

ABSTRACT

Closely based on the dramatist's personal experience, Christina Reid's *The Belle of the Belfast City* offers a commentary on the life of the Protestant working class in the capital of Northern Ireland in the 1980s from a woman's perspective. It shows the way eroticism is successfully used by the female characters as a source of emancipation as well as a means not only to secure their strong position in the private domain of the household, but also to challenge the patriarchal structures that prevail in the Irish public sphere. The analysis of the play proposed in this essay focuses on the contrast between the presentation of its male and female characters. I will demonstrate that, while the former group desperately cling to the idea of preserving the social *status quo*, the latter display a more progressive outlook on the social and sexual politics of the country. In particular, I will investigate how the tensions between the representatives of the two sexes reveal themselves in the corporal sphere. I will argue that, as opposed to the erotically-inhibited and physically-inarticulate male characters, the female *dramatis personae* take advantage of being more connected to their bodies and use their physicality in an erotic fashion to subvert the rules of the patriarchal system and its strict moral code that limits their social roles to those of respectful mothers, obedient sisters or virtuous wives.

ABSTRACT

The presentation of eroticism in *The Belle of the Belfast City* is deeply rooted in the social and political context of Northern Ireland which plays an important role in Reid's whole dramatic *oeuvre* as one of the most crucial factors determining the lives of her characters. Although Reid's works are difficult to categorize under the label feminist or political, since they "present more of a description of the . . . situation than an active fight against society, as bad as it is" (Große 402), they show a strong influence of the macro-politics of the country on the micro-politics of the Protestant family in Northern Ireland, suggesting the impossibility of separating the private from the public. Another element that *The Belle of the Belfast City* shares with many other of Reid's plays is the fact that it draws inspiration from the dramatist's own life in the capital troubled by the sectarian conflict.

Reid has repeatedly admitted that her dramatic works are closely based on her personal experience of being raised in a Protestant working class family in Belfast. This meant growing up mostly in a female-dominated environment, since, as she puts it, "working-class women spend all our time with other women and children" (qtd. in Shannon 212). In the interview held in Łódź at the international conference "Irish Drama of the 20th and the 21st Centuries: Changes and Evolutions," Reid spoke about spending her childhood mostly in the company of her mother, grandmother and great-aunts, whom she remembers as excellent storytellers. Although she describes them as "terribly respectable Protestant women" (Reid, Interview), deeply concerned about the way they should present themselves to their neighbours, when left alone by men, who in their free time usually headed for the pub, they would show a markedly different, otherwise concealed, bawdy aspect of their personality. This often erotically flavoured behaviour met with social consent, since, as Bataille explains,

> More often than not moderate eroticism is tolerated and where there is condemnation of sexuality, even when it appears to be stringent, it only affects the façade, the act of transgression itself being allowed as long as it is not made public. (219)

Not unlike the Mundy sisters from Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa*, who in the moment of a carnivalesque relief transform in the eyes of the male narrator, Michael, "into shrieking strangers" (Friel 2), women in Reid's family used to get together in the privacy of their home to practise their own female habits and rituals involving activities such as drinking sherry

or telling "dirty stories" which were otherwise absent from their daily life (Reid, Interview). As Reid stated on another occasion, "It made me realize how ageless women are—they can talk like young girls at any age and on their own are tremendously uninhibited and bawdy—a side that they would never show to men" (qtd. in Roche 134), which finds an adequate reflection in *The Belle of the Belfast City*.

Addressing the dystopian elements and strategies used in the play, Lachman contends that the drama is informed by

> the view that culture, controlled by discourses of power which are most often designed and possessed by men, is responsible for painful transition of a female body and mind from the state of natural and spontaneous potentiality to the state of ordered, civilised form. (145)

Yet, despite these pressures, Reid's women appear capable of subverting and challenging the dominant male ideology as well as asserting themselves as independent and liberated individuals. With this in mind, in my article, I wish to address the erotic aspect of the lives of the Protestant women of the North, easily discernible in their carnivalesque activities, as presented in *The Belle of the Belfast City*. Juxtaposing Reid's female characters with some of the male *dramatis personae* who are presented as more detached from their bodies and thus, erotically inarticulate, I will investigate the role eroticism plays in their daily existence, focusing on the use of the erotic as a tool of manipulation and empowerment as well as a signpost indicating a path to independence and self-esteem. The analysis will demonstrate the importance of eroticism in defining power structures and relations within the family, particularly between the representatives of the opposite sexes, and thus support the interpretation of the play as a "tribute to the indomitable aspect of women" (O'Dwyer 241).

In order to gain a proper insight into the subject matter, it is necessary to begin with a brief overview of the situation of women in Northern Ireland in the mid-1980s, which the play illustrates. In her book on twentieth-century fiction by Irish women, Heather Ingman quotes Edna Longley's pamphlet "From Cathleen to Anorexia: The Breakdown of Irelands" (1990), which highlights a clear-cut division of gender roles in the society.

> Longley argues that masculinist ideologies such as Protestantism, Catholicism, nationalism and unionism, have exercised and continue to exercise a stronger hold in the North than in the Republic[; she states]: "Ulster's territorial imperative has produced a politics which pivots on male refusal to give an inch." (141)

Reid supports this opinion and gives it an expression in *The Belle of the Belfast City*. When the sisters Vi and Rose exchange their social and political views in an elaborate Shavian fashion typical of his discussion plays, the latter states: "Their right-wing Protestant Church is in total agreement with the right-wing Catholic Church on issues like divorce and abortion, on a woman's right to be anything other than a mother or a daughter or a sister or a wife" (Reid, *Belle* 221). As shown in *The Belle of the Belfast City*, this attitude, on the one hand, relegates women from the male-dominated public world of politics and religion; on the other, it reinforces the matrilineal bonds among the female members of the society. As Lachman notices, "the level of confidential understanding between women and the sophistication of emotional, intellectual and moral framework allow them to constitute an intellectually independent community which exists parallel with the official and legitimate society" (148). In this way, Reid presents the private sphere of the household not so much as a traditional confinement for the independent female spirit but as the last stronghold of female power.

The boldest and most vivid character in the play is Dolly, the eponymous Belle of the Belfast City, a matriarch who, after the death of her husband, acts as the head of the female-dominated family. Despite her ripe old age, the character seems full of energy and vitality which she uses in a truly carnivalesque fashion. This positions her in the long line of literary presentations of mature women, such as Chaucer's Wife of Bath or Beckett's Mrs. Rooney, to name but a few, whose bawdy, often sexually explicit remarks and behaviour challenge the patriarchal standards of female modesty and decency.

Dolly describes her animated and insubordinate spirit in terms of dance. She states: "I can cope with not bein' able to dance with my feet no more. But I couldn't cope with not bein' able to dance in my head" (Reid, *Belle* 197). The choice of the metaphorical image does not seem accidental in this context, since both the Protestant and the Catholic Church in Ireland have perceived this form of kinaesthetic activity as erotically charged and exciting the sexual urges of the body, and hence deemed it as sinful and subversive towards their dominant religious ideologies. Christina Reid once mentioned in a private conversation that the women who danced have been often perceived in the Protestant community as evil. In the play, she puts words condemning dance into the mouth of one of the supporting characters, preacher Issac Stanaloft, who appears in one of the numerous retrospections in her play. The man, whose sexually ambiguous behaviour renders him as a possible child molester, delivers a message that denounces all popular forms of entertainment, dance included. He lectures his audience to beware of

> the unholy passions of Satan's cinemas[,] drinking dens of the evil[,] the dreadful desires of women who dance[, t]he devil's voluptuous temptresses with painted faces and lacquered nails and hair dyed red with sin[,] the devil who lurks in the dark dance halls and hostelries and picture places. (Reid, *Belle* 233)

Dolly categorically rejects this type of religious discourse, putting the carnivalesque moments of joy and pleasure in their rightful place in the everyday life of the family.

Yet, her life was not always smooth and easy. At the age of thirteen, after she won a talent competition in songs, recitations and tap dancing, Dolly became a reliable source of income for her family who for the next six years "dress[ed] her up as if she was thirteen . . . an' trail[ed] her round draughty oul halls to sing to audiences of twenty or thirty" (Reid, *Belle* 180–81). It was only the marriage to Joe Horner who fell under the spell of her performance that changed her life. The man freed Dolly from the fetters of forced infantilism and introduced her to womanhood. Contrary to what might be expected, marriage did not put an end to Dolly's dancing days. As Rose explains, "from then on she gave up the stage and did all her dressing up and dancing and singing just for him" (Reid, *Belle* 180). One may suspect that this kind of private performance was not deprived of erotic overtones which served as a source of Joe Horner's constant fascination with and youthful sexual attraction to Dolly. What the woman received in return was a possibility to enjoy a high status within the family with her husband "wait[ing] on her hand and foot" (Reid, *Belle* 181) and an exemption from the household chores. As Dolly herself admits: "I was never a housewife. My Joe never wanted that. He was a rare bird. An Ulsterman who could cook" (Reid, *Belle* 195). Nurturing the erotic side of their relationship, she positioned herself as a precious trophy, in this way boosting Joe's male ego, which seems but a tactic for gaining power within the family and a means of subversion towards religious fundamentalism and extreme right-wing Unionism represented by her nephew Jack and Ian Paisley, the extremist Protestant preacher who "has frequently emphasized the authority of fathers and husbands in the home" (Ingman 144) and whom Reid often mentions in the play.

In her relationship with Joe, Dolly avoided open conflicts; she rather exercised her power applying certain manipulative strategies. She neither downgraded her partner nor did she overtly express her superiority. Instead, she praised his sexual virility and used her other veiled erotic tactics. Even years after Joe's death, she proudly and plainly announces him as "the cock of the North" (Reid, *Belle* 181), which clearly shocks her daughter Vi.

The middle-aged woman does not perceive this as a proper way of speaking about her deceased father, especially that the words are uttered by her seventy-seven-year-old mother, who, by the standards of the local society, should probably be preparing to meet her maker rather than incessantly recalling her flamboyant past.

The erotic nature of Dolly's relationship with Joe used to meet with the moral suspicion of the local Protestant community, especially when Dolly unexpectedly got pregnant at the age of forty-one, which became "the talk of the neighbourhood" (Reid, *Belle* 181). Reid provides a straightforward explanation for this reaction in one of the interviews:

> Well, I think we are—pardon the pun—all screwed up about the sexual thing here. We are taught, both Catholic and Protestant, very early on that sex is something sinful, that it is something for marriage and that women just have to put up with it [and Protestants are taught that.] Even more. Because you've got that big Scottish Calvinist thing that sex in itself is a sin. (qtd. in Shannon 214)

Thus, what appears to be the source of controversy in the play is the fact that, since they did not plan the child, it is clear that the couple were sexually active not so much for the sake of procreation but for erotic pleasure. As Rose comments ironically, "Bad enough to be doing it at their age, but even worse to be enjoying it so much that she was careless enough to get caught" (Reid, *Belle* 181). What may shed some further light on this particular societal attitude is Bataille's idea that:

> Erotic conduct is the opposite of normal conduct as spending is opposite of getting. If we follow the dictates of reason we try to acquire all kinds of goods, we work in order to increase the sum of our possessions or of our knowledge, we use all means to get richer and to possess more. Our status in the social order is based on this sort of behaviour. But when the fever of sex seizes us we behave in the opposite way. Pleasure is so close to ruinous waste that we refer to the moment of climax as a "little death." (Bataille 170)

Such a socio-economic approach proves particularly valid in relation to the Protestant working class with its strong ethos of work and stringent rules of morality, which Dolly breaches by giving birth to a child, and in this way bringing the evidence of her excessive erotic behaviour into the public sphere. Consequently, it is no wonder that, although the pregnancy meets with her husband's enthusiasm, it also causes gossip among the neighbours.

Dolly is strongly self-conscious about her matriarchal role in the house, which becomes most conspicuous when, after Joe's death, she is unwilling to

yield her position to the usurping young nephew Jack. Her comment: "Jack likes to be the only man. The one in charge. Thought he would be the man of the house when Joe died. I soon put him in the right place" (Reid, *Belle* 219) sheds light on the overt struggle for dominance taking place in the private sphere of the household. Conscious of the need to constantly remind Jack of his position within the family, she repeatedly asserts herself as the superior figure, for instance when she informs her nephew about his sister having left her husband, a fact that he was clearly unaware of, commenting ironically: "Nobody never tells me nutin' these days" (Reid, *Belle* 184).

In order to humiliate Jack and exhibit his weaknesses and limitations, Dolly again makes an effective use of her erotic schemes. In one of the retrospections presented onstage, she forces her teenaged nephew to participate in a carnivalesque familial performance to celebrate the birthday of her deceased husband. Dolly introduces a role play in which Jack is to perform the part of a soldier courted by young women. The very idea of dressing up for the performance appears to him already inappropriate from the point of view of Protestant decency and respectability, but it is the words of the song they are about to sing that bring the young man to an outburst of anger and frustration. Here, again, the juxtaposition of the female erotic articulacy and the religion-based male inhibitions becomes evident. The song has the form of an exchange between a soldier and a maiden, played by Jack's sister, Janet, who asks him in a teasing fashion for the reasons why they should not marry. The man offers her a whole range of excuses just to finally admit that it is impossible for he already has a wife. At this point, the tension reaches its peak.

> *Jack is almost in tears in anger and humiliation. He grabs hold of Janet, shakes her, shouts.*
> JACK. Oh no sweet maid I cannot marry you!
> For I have a wife of my own!
> *He runs out*. (Reid, *Belle* 219)

The role imposed on Jack can be seen as a form of mockery, in which all the women of the house, apart perhaps from Vi, ridicule his excessively strict moral conduct. It reveals Jack's sexual and erotic inhibitions which stand in conflict with his desire to be a model man playing a superior role in the family. Performing the provocative scene of wooing conducted by a woman, the female characters manifest that they feel comfortable with the erotic aspect of their lives, thus pointing at Jack's deficiencies in this respect, which he perceives as degrading and humiliating. Consequently, the game introduced by Dolly seems a part of her conscious tactics of putting her nephew in the right place in the hierarchy of the family, thwarting

his hopes to rule the house. Yet, it should be stressed that another possible reason for the rise of erotic tension and anger in the scene results from the nature of the toxic relationship between the siblings and the subtly implied erotic fascination of Jack with his sister which can never be realized, due to the strong social and religious taboo against incest.

Dolly's position changes only when her health deteriorates radically after a stroke, subsequently to which the family house becomes the property of the National Front, due to Jack's and his associates' machinations. Earlier, however, Dolly incessantly acts as a jester introducing the spirit of subversion to the household. These moments are frequently charged with erotic energy clearly permeating most of her showy songs which contain numerous explicit allusions to courting and erotic behaviour and which strongly contradict Protestant moral strictness. She is a queen of misrule orchestrating the carnivalesque activities performed within the private sphere of the family.

Apart from being Dolly's source of power and authority, eroticism also plays a liberating role in Janet's life. The woman's traumatic childhood has left a deep mark on her psyche, which is conspicuous in her constant feeling of guilt, fear of sin as well as submissiveness and an inability to decide about her own life. At first, growing up in an emotionally and physically sterile Presbyterian family and later remaining under the watchful eye of her despotic brother, who declares himself "the guardian of [her] faith" (Reid, *Belle* 205), Janet has not fully developed into a self-conscious woman aware of her rights and needs.

Jack's dictatorial tendencies are evident already in the siblings' early youth when the boy violently smashes the figure of a "pretty lady" Janet bought in Dublin, which turns out to be a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and severely reprimands his sister with the ferocious words of a fanatic preacher:

> That's no pretty lady. It's a blasphemous Popish statue. A heathen image of Christ's mother. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them, for I the Lord Thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and the fourth generation of them that hate me. You have sinned, Janet. You have broken the fourth commandment. You must be punished. (Reid, *Belle* 204)

Taking into account the nature of her later transformation, Janet's seemingly childish whim to buy the statue seems to be endowed with a symbolic meaning. As Marina Warner observes,

> Although Mary cannot be a model for a New Woman, a goddess is better than no goddess at all, the sombre-suited masculine world of the Protestant religion is altogether too much like a gentleman's club to which the ladies are only admitted on special days. (qtd. in Ingman 143)

Apart from being an incarnation of physical beauty and thus an object of Janet's admiration, which, according to the strict Protestant ethics, would be considered as an instance of vanity, the figure serves as a symbol of Janet's need for an icon that would stand for female strength and unity, something that Jack desperately tries to destroy. McDonough suggests yet another interpretation; she argues that, in the figure of the Virgin Mary,

> Jack can see only a symbol. [Thus, his] reaction to Janet demonstrates how women in general, and his sister in particular, have for him been turned into symbols by his religious upbringing. Jack shares this desire to shape Janet into a symbol with Janet's Catholic husband Peter, and even with the Englishman, Martin, with whom Janet had an affair. (189)

Consequently, the destruction of the statue may also be seen as anticipating the shattering of the imposed and strongly reinforced gendered role models and the subsequent emancipation of Janet, which to a large extent is a reaction against the sin-obsession and unrelenting misogynist stance of her brother.

Apart from the toxic relationship with Jack, who assumes the role of a strict guardian of her body and soul, another reason for Janet's dissatisfaction is her unhappy celibate marriage which provides her with neither emotional nor physical fulfilment. Desperate to change her life and "tired of being the sister of a devil and the wife of a saint" (Reid, *Belle* 208), the woman eventually yields to the persuasion of her more liberated cousin, Rose: she visits London and spends a romantic night and a day with a man ten years younger than her. This adventure not only gives Janet bodily satisfaction, but also has far-reaching psychological effects.

In order to explain this change, let me briefly refer to Bataille and his definition of eroticism as opposed to surrendering to low carnal instincts. He argues: "Human eroticism differs from animal sexuality precisely in this, that it calls inner life into play" (29). As Janet presents it, her adventure is not only an occasion for a release of the accumulated sexual energy, but an erotic experience which gives her a deep sense of procrastinated emotional fulfilment. She admits: "It was everything I ever dreamt it might be" (Reid, *Belle* 208). The erotic encounter with the young lover provides her with a sense of self-worth and confidence. To go even further in this direction, it may be seen as a transforming experience that conditions a significant metamorphosis of the character and a redefinition of her female

self, which alludes to Judith Butler's idea of gender identity understood as an "accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo" in whose performative nature "resides the possibility of contesting its reified status" (520). In the play, it is the erotic, as opposed to the sexual, that serves as a destabilizing factor that stimulates the change in the fossilized gender constructs through transgressing the sedimented narrow norms and models towards greater autonomy and individuality.

Trying to confront it with the ideology her mother and brother tried to instil in her, Janet at first reacts to her experience with confusion. She realizes that she lacks remorse for her "sinful" behaviour, which causes her puzzlement and fear. Janet states: "I don't feel guilty, and I should feel guilty. I need to feel guilty. . . . There is no forgiveness without repentance. And I'm not sorry" (Reid, *Belle* 206). She tries to provide a justification for her behaviour using religious discourse: "Maybe I'm possessed. Maybe Martin is the devil my mother said was always there. Waiting at your shoulder. Fornication. Adultery. Adultery. Adultery . . ." (Reid, *Belle* 207), yet to no avail.

Janet's initial situation and her gradual change are visually projected onstage in the scene which may serve as an expressionistic presentation of the character's sense of entrapment in her socially defined gender roles. Janet is literally positioned between two men representing two different standpoints and claims. One of them is her kind-natured, erotically inarticulate Catholic husband, Peter, singing a simple de-eroticized folk song declaring his platonic love; the other one, Jack, recites a passage from St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians in which the apostle presents marriage as an undesired but necessary means to bridle human immorality and praises a solitary life of erotic abstinence, thus encouraging his sister to leave her marriage and return to the one who "as the man of the house [will] protect [her] from temptation" (Reid, *Belle* 196). One may observe a considerable amount of erotic tension implicit in the scene resulting from both men's desire to repossess Janet which is visually presented as an act of the reclamation of her body by the two characters who occlude her and announce one after another: "I love you. Come back to me" (Reid, *Belle* 209), though paradoxically in reality Janet's relationship with either man is anything but bodily. In this scene, however, Janet's physicality quite literally becomes a site upon which the men try to impose their authority.

Such a stage image can be perceived in a broader context as a representation of the situation of women in Ireland in the 1980s and of the Irish attitude towards the human, and especially female, physicality dominant among the majority of male Protestant and Catholic authorities. Viewed from this perspective, the scene symbolically illustrates the way in which

"women's bodies often function in the postcolonial theatre as a space on and through which larger territorial and cultural battles are being fought" (Gilbert and Tompkins qtd. in Sweeney 155). The male characters act like possessive conquerors appropriating and idealizing Janet's body to serve the fundamentalist Catholic and Protestant agendas which define physicality as a source of sin. They treat her instrumentally as an object of their quest that inspires both fascination and fear.

It is yet the latter feeling that seems to prevail in their lives. Thus, paradoxically, neither her brother nor her husband can offer Janet any erotic satisfaction—Jack due to the social taboo against incestuous relationships, and Peter because of the fear of intimacy he experiences as a Catholic who married a Protestant woman in his pastoral mission of "doing something more positive towards peace and reconciliation" (Reid, *Belle* 210) or perhaps because of his implied homoerotic tendencies. The latter suggestion is supported by Mary Trotter, who puts forward the following reasons for the malfunction of the relationship between Peter and Janet:

> Janet grows up to rebel against her Protestant heritage by marrying a Catholic who is equally committed to transgressing borders; he is a member of the almost all-Protestant police force . . . Janet and her husband marry not for love but to escape the aspects of themselves that they fear. Janet tries to erase the fierce Protestant lessons her mother taught her before she moved in with her Aunt Dolly; her husband is running away from his homosexuality. (174)

According to Trotter, this failure to confront their individual sexual phobias is the reason for the couple having been stuck in a celibate relationship for fifteen years.

Trapped in a dead-end situation, Janet finally gives vent to the repressed anger and frustration, revealing her anxiety and unfulfilment resulting from the unconsummated marriage. Initially presented as immature, suspended between the role of the sister and the role of the wife, she gradually progresses towards self-knowledge and self-realization. Janet addresses Peter in an accusatory way: "I wanted you to take me . . . to teach me . . . I wanted to exorcise him [Jack] . . . to find out that it wasn't an act of sin and shame and pain and guilt" (Reid, *Belle* 210). The woman hoped that, through marriage, she could break away from the toxic relationship with her brother and start a new life as a wife and a mother. After years during which her hopes remained unfulfilled, she is finally able to openly voice her frustration.

The expressionistic scene ends with Janet's distress resurfacing with a double force; she shouts at Jack and Peter: "I am not your mother!

I am not your sister! . . . I am not your virgin mother, nor your virgin wife!" (Reid, *Belle* 210). She also repeats similar words in real life in her final confrontation with Jack. Stating: "I never needed you. I was only afraid of your need of me. And now I'm not afraid any more" (Reid, *Belle* 244), Janet discloses her brother's weakness and manifests her self-sufficiency. In doing so, the woman rejects the idealistic unattainable gendered role models that have been imposed on her since early childhood and asserts herself as an independent flesh-and-blood human being who has the right to seek fulfilment of her basic bodily and emotional needs.

Yet, to achieve full independence, Janet has to free herself of the fascination with her lover, Martin, for whom, after all, she is again a model of innocence, a projection of the male desire for pure and unspoilt femininity rather than a real woman. She has to realize that their erotic experience is not an end in itself nor a way directing her into another relationship, but a means towards a deep change. This involves stepping out of the historically motivated narrow confines of gender which Butler defines in theatrical terms as a much rehearsed act (526). Janet's case stresses the need for a revaluation and reinterpretation of the old script reinforced by the patriarchal society, according to which a woman can only realize herself as a man's subordinate. The character's erotic adventure is a life-enhancing experience, exploding the narrow confines of social gender constructs and redefining her identity. Große argues that in Reid's works:

> some of the female characters loosen the bonds consequent upon being just mothers, sisters, wives, [and lovers,] i.e. of being defined by their relationship to men, and thus lay the foundations for being just themselves. (399)

Janet is a perfect example of this when she eventually realizes that, instead of engaging in a relationship with another man who would take care of her and decide about her life, she should focus on herself. She has to accept her own feelings as well as physical and emotional needs. Janet's transgression of the rules is not just a temporary carnivalesque outburst of the repressed emotions but a rite of passage in the course of which she re-discovers her independent female identity. It is also an initiation into maturity understood as self-awareness and an ability to control one's life. Although Janet remarks that she would like to return to the safe times of her youth (Reid, *Belle* 208), she comes to realize that she can no longer act like a child "living in Never Never Land" (Reid, *Belle* 211). Towards the end of the play, Janet announces to Jack that she returns to London but does not leave her husband for Martin. She states: "I want a life of my own. My own!

Nobody else's! Not his, not Peter's. Not yours. Most of all not yours. I am walking away from this violence" (Reid, *Belle* 244), which serves as a sign of her ultimate transformation.

Another female character in the play to be mentioned is Rose, whose behaviour and attitude can be seen as transgressive in both professional and private terms. As regards the former, the woman is a photographer actively engaged in politics, a field that in Northern Ireland has been to a great extent reserved to men. As Tracie comments, "It is interesting that Rose moves from the sphere of domestic photography into photojournalism, a form of cultural production based on public images" (119), thus continuing her father's hobby and acting as an opponent of the extreme rightist movement and an advocate of the changing position of women in her country. As regards her private life, Rose openly resists the strict religious rules cherished by Jack. Her erotic life is perceived by her cousin and many people from Belfast who share his outlook as an offence to the Protestant morality, especially that it has been made known to the public, the proof of Rose's "disrespectability" being Belle, her daughter, whose skin colour gives irrefutable evidence of her mixed parentage.

Finally, the idea of rejecting the traditional model of femininity is not alien to Rose's elder sister, Vi, either. Although the woman, in many respects similar to Friel's Kate Mundy, seems to deeply cherish the Protestant ethos and be embarrassed by the rich erotic life of her parents, she admits to having once declined the marriage proposal of a well-situated man. Vi explains: "Maybe it's just as well that growin' up with the real thing made us . . . too choosy" (Reid, *Belle* 231), which shows that for her the rejection of the role of a wife and a mother was a conscious choice rather than an instance of failure.

Reid's presentation of the female characters sharply contrasts with the image of the erotically impoverished male *dramatis personae*. With the exception of Davy, who is more of a child than a man, and Dolly's deceased husband, the other male members of the family exhibit an inhibitive and restrictive approach to human sexuality and eroticism. The one who most openly manifests such an attitude is Jack. The man impersonates all negative impulses driving religious and political extremists in Northern Ireland. Reid locates the source of Jack's fundamentalist attitude towards the human body and its sexual aspect in his exceedingly rigorous Presbyterian upbringing. The resulting emotional and physical unfulfilment leads to frustration, anger and violence. As Bristow paraphrases Bataille's ideas:

> Put another way, the more Christianity sought to purge the world of sin, the greater pressure there was on the deathly power of sexual desire to transgress. In sum, Bataille believes Christianity bears the burden of

> responsibility for why sexuality has been associated with shame, filth, and even hatred. (126)

According to Bataille's philosophy, taboos aim at eliminating violence from our lives. Yet, this does not mean that either the sexual or the erotic can be totally eradicated from human existence, the former being necessary for the reproduction of the species and the latter, in its carnivalesque aspect, "sanction[ing] the existing pattern of things and reinforc[ing] it" (9), to use Bakhtin's words. In other words, eroticism can fulfil the role of a safety valve for all the forbidden drives and emotions. Hence, when the super-ego forces are too strong, frustration and violence accumulate and find an alternative outlet.

This observation appears particularly relevant in relation to the radical religious stance represented by Jack. Raised by his mother, a widow of a Presbyterian Minister, he has developed an obsessive fear of any form of physical contact, deriving from the perception of flesh as a source of impurity. Dolly describes her sister-in-law as one who "Goes to church on Sunday, an' prays to God to give her strength to beat her children" (Reid, *Belle* 196). Yet, as she further explains, these words do not denote physical maltreatment but rather mental abuse, beating "Into the ground. Not with a big stick. With words. Words like sin, the world and the devil. And the worst sins were the sinful lusts of the flesh" (Reid, *Belle* 196). Erotically and sexually inarticulate, due to the overwhelming fear of the body which manifests itself in the character's avoidance of any physical contact with others, Jack compensates for his limitations through his aggressive actions in the male-dominated field of sectarian politics.

Trying to find the reasons for Jack's anger and frustration, one could also point to his inferior position within Dolly's family, as discussed earlier, which appears deeply inscribed in the wider social context the play was written in. Shannon observes that the crisis of the male ego seems particularly discernible among the Protestant working class in Northern Ireland, since it was often the case that the woman had to bear the burden of being the breadwinner in the family when her husband was killed or imprisoned, or simply due to the fact that many factories employed only women.

> The paradox of women taking both the social and financial responsibilities of home away from the men turned those men into childlike figures. Idle, resentful, their sense of inferiority bred by generations of frustration, they were easily turned toward political violence. The gun and the bomb, or close proximity to them, gave them a sense of machismo that their everyday life denied them. (Shannon 11)

In this respect, Jack's engagement in the National Front can be perceived as emblematic of the situation of many men in Northern Ireland. Yet, it should be stressed that his feeling of being underestimated results not so much from the economic pressures but from the fact that he is psychologically too weak to win the position of the head of the family and is constantly reminded of his deficiencies by the female majority in the house. At one point, Jack states: "Women! That's always been the trouble with this house. Women having secrets, whispering, gossiping" (Reid, *Belle* 193), which reveals his inferiority complex and desperate desire to control the insubordinate women of the family. The only person who initially surrenders to Jack's dictatorial power is his sister, Janet, whom he wants to protect from what he perceives as external temptations. Again, one cannot escape the impression that the particularly strong wish to control his sibling may result from Jack's erotic fascination with Janet. The constant need to suppress his desires, in turn, leads to resentment and violence directed against other people: Irish republicans, people of a different skin colour and especially women, which is most conspicuous in his misogynistic remarks, such as: "Women! Women! Temptation! Deception! You're the instruments of devil! The root of all evil!" (Reid, *Belle* 205).

Reid is yet careful not to exaggerate Jack's Unionist and religious extremism to the absurd and the grotesque. She provides Jack with a measure of humanity through the words of Vi, the most composed and rigorous of all the women in the family, who is the only one truly able to sympathize with her cousin. The positive side of Jack's character is also revealed when he recalls joining Vi singing a humorous song about a Protestant who marries a Northern Irish Catholic girl and converts to Catholicism. The cousins re-enact their performance. This unusual moment of joy and unity is yet shattered when Dolly "*points to the* [family] *album and cracks with laughter*" (Reid, *Belle* 188), which reminds Jack that, while the two were singing the song, "Rose came sneaking in and took a photo" (Reid, *Belle* 188). Tracie explains this atypical reaction alluding to Marianne Hirsch's idea of the familial gaze, defining it in relation to family photography as "the powerful gaze of familiality [that] imposes and perpetuates certain conventional images of the familial and . . . 'frames' the family in both senses of the term" (qtd. in Tracie 110). Tracie states:

> Everyone in the family willingly enters into these group recreations [song, dance and theatre] with the exception of Jack. His aversion to having his picture taken, and in particular taken off guard, reveals his desire to keep the familial gaze functioning at all times rather than to lose face. (113)

Such inflated concern for propriety and respectability also finds a reflection in Jack's demeanour which even in the private context remains "*careful and controlled*" (Reid, *Belle* 182), serving as a manifestation of inhibition and a chronic unwillingness to surrender to the bodily instincts.

While Jack's erotic inhibitions bring him close to Janet's husband, Peter, and his sexual reticence, the character's male desire to control women is also discernible in Rose's former partner whom she met in London. At the time when the play is set, he is "a very respectable married man" (Reid, *Belle* 195) and an influential figure in the Baptist Church, greatly worried about his good name and thus fearing the fact that his having an illegitimate child could be made public. What sheds further light on his character and attitudes are Rose's recollections of the circumstances of their separation. She states: "What I remember clearly about Belle's father is how inadequate and dependent he made me feel. How outraged he was when I turned down his noble offer to make an honest offer of me" (Reid, *Belle* 208). Although the man has no connections with Northern Ireland, he represents the religious attitude based on the patriarchal idea of male superiority over women perceived as more bodily-oriented and thus more prone to corruption and immoral behaviour, which Rose so much detests. This only reinforces the strong juxtaposition of the sexes in the play.

To conclude, Reid presents Belfast, and metonymically Northern Ireland in the 1980s, as a place where one can notice a clear dichotomy between the private sphere of the household dominated by women and the public male sphere of politics and religion governed by appearances as well as anger and violence resulting from the underlying crisis of the male ego. Reid shows a distorted face of political and religious fundamentalism which leaves a deep mark on the private lives of her characters visible, for instance, in their dysfunctional marriages and erotic inarticulacy. Eroticism, as depicted in *The Belle of Belfast City*, has not been yet totally eradicated from the everyday reality. In fact, it is presented as having a decisive role in the lives of the female *dramatis personae* as a source of power and self-knowledge. Reid shows that, in the specific social and cultural context presented in the play, eroticism may help to redefine the female gender identity. One might feel tempted to perceive such a depiction of the transformative power of the erotic experience as closely related to the conventional binary opposition of the female physicality and male intellectuality. However, though the women in Reid's play indeed seem to be more in touch with their bodies, the men are far from representing a rational approach, their empty slogans and physical detachment suggesting emotional and sexual deficiency rather than intellectual sophistication. This can be seen as a result of what might be called the "cold religious and political climate" of the country where cruelty "comes from frustration

and depression, [where] people are forced to live within a very narrow boundary, with a limitation put on the expression of their own individuality" (Reid qtd. in Shannon 215), and where eroticism is seen as a source of sin rather than of self-fulfilment.

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Eroticism *in* and *of* the City: The Question of Approach

ABSTRACT

Discussions of eroticism usually commence with references to Georges Bataille and his *L'Erotisme*, whose first English edition was published under the title *Death and Sensuality: A Study of Eroticism and the Taboo* (1962), thus encouraging analyses in terms of transgression. This article opens with a quotation from Zygmunt Bauman's essay, "On Postmodern Uses of Sex," which reflects on the instability of the concept and emphasizes its contextualization. This openly declared incongruity raises questions of applicability. What is meant by *eroticism* today, i.e. in and after postmodernism? The article seeks to explore the relevance of the term in studies of urban drama and tries to suggest a workable approach that would differentiate between the commonly observable erotic material found on display within the premises of the city and the eroticism of the city itself. In the latter case the erotic relationship involves the materiality of the urban context and its user. The essay, focusing on drama, assumes that plays are written for the stage—their proper mode of existence—and deems it necessary to include the city/theatre and city/drama interdependence as well as the nexus of concepts such as urban drama and its genre restrictions into the following analysis.

ABSTRACT

"Eroticism . . . has become a sort of a Jack of all trades. . . . This circumstance makes it available for new kinds of social uses."
(Bauman 27)

Introduction

The following article seeks to explore the ways eroticism can be conceived and imagined in the context of cityness and urban drama in order to, further on, formulate a feasible approach for a prospective analysis. Looking for answers to questions generated within the broad scope of a rather complex subject requires that the pervasive synergy of terms and ideas the discussion involves be clarified, even though, at first sight, the individual concepts may seem traditionally obvious and transparent. Such a search includes a clarification of the concept of urban drama, which appears in the title of the essay, an elucidation of the relation between urban drama/theatre and the city and, finally, a differentiation between eroticism *in* and eroticism *of* the city. Whereas the former poses the urban milieu as merely a container or a backdrop, both providing space for various forms of erotic activity, the latter recognizes the actively dynamic part of the city in an erotically charged relationship.

Although, with a few exceptions, the term "urban drama" is used more frequently in reference to the broad spectrum of city-oriented dramatic productions which enter the stage in the late sixteenth-century, my intention has been to look for an approach that allows us to focus also on more recent developments. Still, the subject being both old and new, a recognition of the indebtedness of contemporary urban drama to tradition as well as the acknowledgement of some explicit connections between contemporary and past projects may be helpful in bringing to light more than just the past, historical context of the antecedents. Whatever the changes, it seems impossible to deal with the subject of urban drama and eroticism without referring to its significant sources that the present day plays are variously immersed in by their quoting, evoking intertextually, adapting or violently appropriating. For example, in *Serious Money* (1987), subtitled "City Comedy"—a play recording the virtual reality of financial market operations under Margaret Thatcher—Caryl Churchill quotes in the introduction a scene taken directly from a 1692 play by Thomas Shadwell, a traditional Restoration comedy entitled *The Volunteers, or The Stockjobbers* (Churchill 196–97), in which the characters speculate on patents. In the course of discussions with Stafford-Clark, Churchill decides to "move the extract from *The Stockjobbers* to the start, where it bec[omes] a kind of prologue" (Roberts 145). The contemporary

play develops creatively formal and thematic analogies between the two worlds driven by the adrenalin and excitement produced by the stockjobbers, brokers and shareholders whose world is turned by the penny and whose heart inhabits the city, that is the stock exchange. In this entrepreneurial world of the 1980s, British theatre became synonymous with the achievement of Lloyd Webber and the producer Cameron Mackintosh. They provided, sometimes in tandem, *Cats* (1981), *Les Misérables* (1985) and *The Phantom of the Opera* (1986), thus turning London into the Western world's leading song-and-dance factory. These made vast fortunes for their creators; greeted visitors, in poster form, at Heathrow; and had a profound effect on British theatrical culture. By adapting both the Restoration satirical material and the contemporary musical rhythms, Churchill bridges temporally distant realities and proves the validity of the early city comedy simply by revealing the grounds of its revival. Tanika Gupta, looking back to the Restoration theatre, writes an actualizing adaptation of William Wycherley's *The Country Wife,* originally set in London in 1675. Instead of the country "ignoramuses" invading London, the contemporary 2004 version concentrates on a multicultural, prevailingly Indian milieu entering and spreading all over the same city. So now it is not the country but the colonies that enter the metropolis, becoming indicative, like Churchill's *Serious Money*, of a prominent shift experienced by London inhabitants. Contemporary adaptations of cityness no longer involve a particular urban organism but embrace the global urbanity and economy instead.

Urban Drama? Theatre and the City: Materiality, Dramatic Text and Performance

The synergy of theatre and urbanity can be discussed simply in terms of location where theatre, according to Marvin Carlson, has been perceived as a prevailingly urban institution also in the Middle Ages (17ff). This becomes more tangible later on, with theatre houses moving, in the course of time, from the outskirts of the city and the other bank of the River Thames towards the centre. The city constitutes a social, political and cultural context, a milieu within which the theatre functions and thus affects its ultimate meaning. Jen Harvie reflects on how cultural materialism indicates the complicity of "Western urban theatre" with neoliberal capitalism and how this interdependence both limits theatrical creativity (25) and provides a comment on what appears on the stage. He refers to ideological priorities reinforced by the contemporary Barbican, whose social/cultural function has been ironically affected by the gentrification of its environment. The same applies to the commercialization of the Royal Court and

its effects bitterly commented upon by Max Stafford-Clark, who reveals details of the intricate policy in the context of staging *Serious Money* and "axing" Jim Allen's *Perdition* (Roberts 31). Thus, both in the earlier and in the contemporary context, theatre is immersed in the political, economic and material milieu of the conceived city and in its practice. This materiality affects and often limits the staging of dramatic texts, although the relation is to be seen as reciprocal.

Understanding the city in connection with the stage demands recognition of its materiality, on the one hand, and of its conceptually mediated appearance in the dramatic texts, on the other. The latter involves a whole spectrum of cultural media ranging from the static order-oriented concepts which focus on grasping what may be called the body of the city and constructing a picture, for example symbolic or metaphorical, to those accepting the resistant fluidity of shapeless cityness without maps where the dynamic urbanity cannot be easily contained—either textually or visually. Notwithstanding conceptual dissolution, the city may become "tangible" as often emotionally charged individual experience unrelated to complex, static, geographical, architectural or social structures and images.[1] Theatre may encourage its urban audience to participate directly in performative interventions, in site-specific walks or rides staged by urban artists, inspiring and facilitating a discovery of a seemingly familiar city. Site specific performance and theatre require separate treatment. Even though the primary interest of the present essay is limited to dramatic texts, an awareness of urban materiality and the assumption of its presence in the dramatic text remains ineradicable and, ultimately, significant for the appreciation of such urban plays as Gary Owen's *Ghost City* (2004), Ed Thomas's *Stone City Blue* (2004), *Cityscape* by Emily Steel et al. (2010), Mike Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London* (2010) or Stephen Poliakoff's *My City* (2011). According to Julian Wolfreys, the city appears to be a dynamically self-transforming battleground which "takes place" in response to the materiality of the urban by the materiality of language (5). In the theatre, which Wolfreys excludes from his discussion, the materiality of its complex language is even more prominent. The city, says Ben Highmore in *Cityscapes*, is "produced" and "lived" imaginatively (6). The approach assumed by the more recent studies emphasizes the importance of "materiality" as well as the fact that the city is written or produced rather than represented.

[1] David Harvey in *The Urban Experience* (1989) and, more extensively, Richard Lehan, in *The City in Literature* (1989), recall the various frames, such as the *Joycity* or the *City of Limits*, which encourage one to think about "images" of urbanity.

Urban Drama as a Sub-Genre: Limitations of a Genre-Oriented Approach

Apart from its reciprocal engagement in the materiality of the city context, "urban drama" can be treated as a subgenre or as a development of an earlier generic form, the comedy—and thus discussed in terms of genre criteria and conventions. An analysis along these lines, however, entails certain restrictions. Thus, earlier studies, for instance *Jacobean City Comedy* (1968) by Brian Gibbons, which follow the genre-oriented line of argument, seem to have been interested less in the materiality of the city and more in approaching the early modern dramatic texts in terms of their adherence to literary convention. Gibbons applauds the mere fact that Jacobean playwrights forged out a new form of "City Comedy." The mood of the plays was notably hostile to the earlier tradition of non-satiric, popular, often sentimental London comedies such as Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1). The scholar juxtaposes the two, vaguely indicating the inferiority of the amorphous and generically hybrid predecessor (Gibbons 1). Further on, disregarding the highly restrictive and selective genre of satire, Gibbons explains that Jonson has been so admired for his, what some believed to have been, true accounts of Jacobean life that, it has been even suggested, they should be taken as reliable documentary evidence of the actual historical situation (16). This conviction is scrutinized in later studies. Arguing in favour of generic templates, Gibbons seems to realize that satirical selectivity differs from an "objective or sociological scientific method" (16) or the realism of Henry Mayhew (3). Still, the impression that the rendering is accurate enough for the author prevails even though what is meant by "historical situation" boils down, mainly, to a catalogue of familiar vices. Yet, according to Gibbons, the materiality of the urban, the play's setting in the city of London, is "accurately achieved with many placing references to street and district names" (9). The same applies to the accurately rendered jargon. However, even according to Gibbons, both are reproduced to attract local interest. Accuracy, then, is a matter of some realism or accurate representation that, in itself, is more attractive than abstraction or straightforward allegorization.

In spite of this correctness, the city with its inherent heterogeneity is squeezed into genre conventions. Gibbons defines the "City Comedy" genre distinguishing two essential criteria. First, all the plays are satires providing a survey of folly and vice. The chief villain symbolizing ruthless materialism, aspiration and anarchy is the usurer. Second, they make use of urban setting completed with proper characters and incidents and exclude "material appropriate to romance, fairy tale, sentimental legend or patriotic chronicle" (11). The dramatists of the Jacobean Age, Gibbons hopes to

show, "articulated a radical critique of their age" (4), which implies that they diagnosed a state of social or political crisis and stigmatized its roots. "City Comedy," thus defined, represents the city as the legible setting for concerns related, for example, to the shift toward commodity capitalism and individualism. Under these circumstances, urban space itself remains deceptively transparent and thus beyond interrogation or mystery. This conclusion is corroborated by Ian Munro in his study of the crowd in early modern London. Munro suggests that the genre of city comedy avoids the emblem of the crowd—its multiple, infectious and grotesque body—focusing on a small repertoire of urban characters and situations conveying the city through synecdoche, not metonymy (48). This decision assumes a utopian construct and a panoptic scopic regime as a background concept. Focusing on character, on "city types," and defining the city as its people, Leinwand observes that discussions of the connection between the city and city comedy may resort either to abstractions or to social roles (19–20). Genre-oriented discourse is capable of revealing in relatively abstract terms eroticism *in* the urban context by showing relations among its inhabitants as literary types but precludes discussions reaching out beyond the text.

The Rhetoric of Socio-Spatial Drama: The "Spatial Turn"

More recent studies of urbanity in literature, including those of drama and theatre, conduct their research in terms of socio-spatial rhetoric. Rather than genre conventions, they study the imbrications of sociality and spatiality in text and performance. Referring to and re-reading Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences* (2003/1966) and "Of Other Spaces" (1986), Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1988), Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1988), Edward W. Soja's *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (1996) and *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions* (2000), they posit a particular synergy between the stage and the city. Jean E. Howard in *Theatre of a City: The Places of London Comedy, 1598–1642* (2007), recognizing the significantly changing function of specific places in the city of London in the first half of the seventeenth century and the synergy of theatre and city, organizes his discussion in accordance with the specificity—but also ambiguity—of urban locations including the Royal Exchange, Debtors' Prisons, Bawdy Houses, Ballrooms and Academies in West End London. As a result of this "spatial turn," the significance of purely generic categories is reduced. The author emphasizes their provisional rather than ontological utility (20) and finds the satiric approach to cityness in City comedy restrictive in its special attention paid to "attractive" details of setting on the one hand and typical occupations and fashion

as well as the vice/virtue dichotomy on the other (19). Thus Howard includes into the scope of her study what Gibbons carefully excludes: London comedy, chronicle comedies and London town comedies with their references to history, romance and the exotic. The scope of the book includes various "relational" sub-genres, such as London comedy where the subject-matter is urban life and negotiation of the presence of non-native inhabitants and commodities (for instance, William Haughton's *Englishman for My Money,* 1598), chronicle London comedies (Dekker, *The Shoemaker's Comedy*, 1599; *If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody, Part II*, 1606), and London town comedies focusing on places of urban leisure in the West End, where characters practise assuming erotic postures (William Cavendish, *The Variety,* 1649). The socio-spatial approach shifts the focus of study (among other things) from accurately represented fixed locations to *attitudes* towards change. Change means a general sense of mobility, the clash between the xenophobic and the cosmopolitan within the increasingly miscegenational space of the city where newcomers need guidance, transformations of economic and commercial conditions rendering the city a placeless market transgressing the historically recent but already traditional boundaries of the Royal Exchange.

Commenting on contemporary events in theatre, J. Chris Westgate believes that "what is written for the theatre, regardless of where or how it will be staged, is often intricately linked with conditions of urbanism" (1). He modifies the opening statement, admitting that it applies to times of transition and transformation in particular. Thus *Urban Drama: The Metropolis in Contemporary North American Plays* focuses on events staging various symptoms of such a transformative crisis reflected in the number of the homeless, in riot rates as well as in the gentrification of the 1980s and 1990s. Like in Howard's study of early modern comedy, the variety of multicultural backgrounds, perspectives and voices in contemporary drama becomes equally prominent here. Among the new voices are those of the immigrants as opposed to those of the native citizens, the voices of the hitherto often silent female, the outsider or the other as well as the voice of the private that surface in a city of *dissocia*. The shift from genre studies, which adapt the geographical locale of the city for settings, to studies understanding the city as a category of thought and experience, makes clear that, as Stanton B. Garner observes, theatre is but a mode of urban experience (97).

Eroticism

Re-opening a discussion on eroticism in philosophy and art, Paul Gregory (1988), like Alyce Mahon (2007) twenty years later and more openly,

refers to the views expressed by Georges Bataille (1957)[2] and paraphrases his views speaking of eroticism as the "quality of human sexuality in virtue of which it acquires a meaning that goes beyond and is separate from the pleasure or the procreative function of the sexual act" (Gregory 339). Both the philosophical and the aesthetic debate commence with and converge on the nexus of sexuality and eroticism. Later, in the discussion on art, Mahon puts emphasis on the varied and more multifaceted eroticism as transgression of taboos, aesthetic challenge through the acceptance of low culture (Mahon 16–17) or, in the philosophical texts, loss of sovereignty by the subject (Gregory 342). This expanding approach may lead in various directions, and thus Peter Michelson, writing on the triad of eroticism, taboo and transgression, defines them as key terms mediating between "social rationality" and "natural violence" (144). When referred to the urban as body, the formulation that opens the present discussion—juxtaposing sexuality and eroticism—may apply as a metaphor pertaining to the logic grounded in perspective-oriented ocularcentrism. There, space admits a fixed observer and a stable (immobile) field of vision, especially in a naturally inclusive study of eroticism *in* the city. Eroticism *of* the city, on the other hand, requires further explanation.

Eroticism as Meeting the Other

In the light of this need of further exploration of what eroticism *of* the city consists in, Marcel Duchamp's perceptive observations seem to be useful. The artist and theoretician of the *avant-garde* reveals his views on eroticism rendering the concept more applicable to urbanity. In an interview with Pierre Cabanne, Duchamp, when asked what personal definition of eroticism he would give, answers as follows:

> I don't give a personal definition but basically it's really a way to try *to bring out in daylight things that are constantly hidden*—and they are not necessarily erotic—because of the Catholic religion, because of social rules. To be able *to reveal* them, and to place them at everyone's disposal . . . it's the basis of everything. "Eroticism" was a theme, even an "ism," which was the basis of everything I was doing at the time of the "Large Glass." (Cabanne 88)

Thus Duchamp sees eroticism in the act of revealing the hidden rather than as a quality inherent in an object. Analogously, in his "Semiology of the Urban," published much later and never referring to Duchamp, Roland

[2] Gregory explains that his inspiration comes from Georges Bataille, especially from *L'Eroticisme*, 1957 (*Eroticism*).

Barthes writes on a dimension of the city he decides to call eroticism. He is at the same time certain of the fact that it is an idea he has "never seen cited, at least explicitly, in the studies and surveys of urban planning" (170). Barthes's idea of urban eroticism, assuming a mobile perceptual field, states that city is a writing and "[h]e who moves about the city, e.g. the user of the city . . . is a kind of reader who appropriates fragments of the utterance to actualize them in secret." They, i.e. the fragments, are "chains of metaphors whose signified is always retracting or becoming itself a signifier" (170). Barthes recognizes a close correlation between his proposition and the mechanism currently investigated by Jacques Lacan. Though there is no explicit reference to Lacan in Barthes, he seems to evoke the analysis of desire. "The eroticism of the city," Barthes says, "is the lesson we can draw from the infinitely metaphorical nature of urban discourse" (165). Eroticism, Barthes explains, is a "functional" and not a "semantic" concept. Therefore he uses "eroticism" and "sociality" (in the sense of a readiness to create a community) interchangeably, adding further on that "[t]he city, essentially and semantically, is the place of *our meeting with the other*" (171).

Both Duchamp and Barthes associate their much broader concept of eroticism with a discovery of the "hidden" or "secret," either in the visual or in the verbal, a discovery which amounts to "an encounter with the other." Similarly, Gregory notes that eroticism in individual relations means seeing through the eyes of the other and that "in . . . authentic encounter we are drawn intermittently into the perspective of the other" so that "our perspective is thrown in disarray" (340). The political philosopher, Iris Marion Young, has also picked up Barthes's notion of eroticism as a qualifying marker of city life (239). She gives a new twist to this concept by bringing it together with the idea of pleasure caused by the experience of social difference on the one hand and by aesthetic surprise on the other. Young says that erotic attraction derives from a strong sense of "commonality" shared by a political community. Whether Young's "commonality" is related to Barthes's "sociality" is not clear. In the ideal of community, the sociologist claims, people feel affirmed because those with whom they share experiences, perceptions, and goals recognize and are recognized by them: one sees oneself reflected in the others. Heinz Paetzold, in his comment on Young's proposition, is more sceptical, suggesting that "the idea of commonality . . . basically may have applied to smaller Republican communities of early modernity, say, a city like Geneva. It no longer fits with the scale of the modern big city that has become a city of strangers" (43). In the metropolis, argues Young, stressing the importance of pleasure, erotic pleasure consists "in being drawn out of oneself to understand that there are other meanings, practices, perspectives on the city, and that

one could learn and experience something more and different by interacting with them" (240). Young's understanding of commonality, then, is closer to a plea for participation as interaction rather than to a concept of a traditional, stable community.

Instead of a bird's eye view surveying the topography—like in a *Skeleton Ordnance Survey* of a city or a map of dirt, poverty and criminality classified, for example by Engels, in accordance with a colonial imaginary—the erotic view is not an expression of some a priori autonomous essence or theoretical assumption but seems to follow what Maurice Merleau-Ponty says in his *Phenomenology*:

> The fact is that . . . my experience breaks forth into things and transcends itself in them, because it always comes into being within the framework of a certain setting in relation to the world which is the definition of my body. . . . It is, therefore, quite true that any perception of a thing, a shape or a size as real, any perceptual constancy refers back to the positing of a world and of a system of experience in which my body is inescapably linked with phenomena. But the system of experience is not arrayed before me as if I were God, it is lived by me from a certain point of view; I am not the spectator, I am *involved*, and it is my involvement in a point of view which makes possible both the finiteness of my perception and its opening out upon the complete world as a horizon of every perception. (354–55)

Analogously, Steve Pile reflects on the experience of the city where the body of the viewer and the city become "intensifying grids" for social and psychic meaning produced in "the mobile, conflictual fusion of power, desire and disgust" (177). City eroticism is in the promiscuity which carries the danger of infection but generates a continually appropriated text and a spectacle the walker—whether they be a *flâneur* or a *dérive* remains debatable—discovers and experiences as fascinating and delightful. The underground, the dark continent or the de-regulated or unruly city are penetrated by the often regulated body of the walker. Whether covertly following Barthes and Bataille or not, Steve Pile refers to city walking as narration stimulated by intersections of eroticism and knowledge (225). Bataille explains this interaction in "Beyond Seriousness," stating that

> [e]roticism is the substitution of the instant or of the unknown for what we thought we knew. We don't know the erotic, we only recognize this passage from the known to the unknown in it; this passage raises us beyond our abilities, inasmuch as it is true that man aspires toward *what does not happen* from the beginning! (217)

Diversity/Sociality-Commonality/Erotic Social Activity

Inherent in Barthes's concept of "urban eroticism" are "diversity," "sociality" and "social activity" that he would call "almost erotic . . . in the broad sense of the word" (171). Young, as an urban philosopher who follows Barthes, and also Gerald E. Frug, identify these qualities as normative values indicative of ideal city life (Frug 117). Ideal, here, does not mean utopian. Joyful diversity is thus stimulated by people watching the "architectural and commercial variety" (Frug 117), by the very multiplicity of groups including the ethnic, gay, lesbian, religious, etc. as well as by the activity of neighbourhoods producing a sense of place in a promotion of intermingling. Eroticism stresses the pleasure and excitement which results from a surprising stimulation. In agreement with what Mumford states in his now classical study (*The City in History,* 1961), we can argue that the city's theatricality that comes to the fore in Barthes's proposition, generates "eroticism."

Apart from diversity, for Barthes, urban eroticism can be identified with the earlier mentioned "sociality" of urban life, a quality which implies that the city brings together and integrates[3] people with completely different backgrounds and entirely different intentions. Variety belongs to its very structure. The city is a melting pot of rather divergent people,[4] an idea some delight in as pleasurable while others consider a failure and a source of urban crisis (Westgate). Barthes locates "diversity," "sociality" and the broadly conceived "erotic activity" in the centre instituted by young people mainly—the centre being a "meeting place" and a space of subversive ludic forces where we/native inhabitants "ourselves are the other" (171), "inside out," and where the public may become private and the private may supplant the public. The centre, as opposed to residential periphery, is a place of "nourishment and purchase," "which are . . . really erotic activities in the consumer society" (Barthes 171). In Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, they are the cities of desire which, Ward writes, are "reorganised as sites of consumption, sites for the satisfaction of endless desire" (56)—sexual and economic—at times more important than identity. Stoppard provides a pertinent example in his film adaptation of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* where the two characters, increasingly overwhelmed by anxiety, try to "grasp" the legislation or grand narrative governing the reality they enter. Guil aptly comments on the fact that "the scientific approach to the examination of phenomena is a defence against the pure emotion of FEAR" (13). Still, the outdated scientific approach employing classical

[3] See: Henry Adam, *The People Next Door*; Stephen Bill, Anne Devlin and David Edgar, *Heartlanders*.

[4] See: *England People Very Nice* by Richard Bean, *Testing the Echo* by David Edgar.

physics cannot contain the postmodern dissolution of eternity, nor can Guil's anxiety be tamed. Ros, who is slower (everything comes to stasis including his intellect) but therefore better prepared, is content due to the prospect of total immersion in consumption/nourishment symbolized by the giant, multilevel hamburger.

Diversity of encounters involves sense experience, where the specifically organized materiality of the city—via the experience of a *flâneur/dérive*/surrealist wanderer/female sphinx whose inside/outside location guarantees access to the erotic underground located not necessarily below street level—meets the materiality of language (language as event). The individual stroller constantly negotiates the private and the public so that the public is folded inwards and "brought forth as a private space of erotic experience" (Utell 11). Juan Carlos Ubillúz compares the early on declared non-productivity of a thus formulated eroticism—eroticism differentiated from the procreation-oriented sexuality—to Barthes's call for transgressive, nonrepresentational literature, for a writing that exceeds the mimetic (ideological). In addition, he recalls Barthes's ideal, the diversity promoting a "merry tower of Babel in which languages coexist in peace" (39) and which I would complement with the ideas of a floating (placeless) market, of the hyperreal, or of a capitalist *dissocia* Fredric Jameson refers to in *Postmodernism* and Anthony Neilson supplies with his vision of dissociative disorder[5]—that is a city where romance, the gothic and the ghostly can freely inhabit the impalpable materiality. This postmodern free-floating eroticism of all of these images, as Bauman also notes, torn from sexual reproduction and love, becomes an unattached signifier capable of "being wedded semiotically to virtually unlimited numbers of signifieds" (230). Gender is chosen and parental caress may have its erotic aspect.[6] The unprecedented importance of the experience of *Jetztzeit* (*Erlebnis*), the encounter and its eroticization, may derive from what Bauman defines as the postmodern "deconstruction of immortality" cutting the present from both the past and the future (230).

Relieved from the obligation either to represent or to synecdochically indicate its particular source or the perfect city template, the erotic city emerges from the situationist, psychogeographical practice of encounters where, like in Ed Thomas's *Stone City Blue,* the character is a "hugger of streets" (9). The psychogeographical walker of the street-level resists the anonymity of the synecdochic, totalizing city where eroticism is contained within little theatres or other *loci* to re-establish what Marlin Coverley

[5] Jameson deals with *dissocia* in the society (43, 337), while Neilson concentrates on subjectivity and the mental state, here the Multiple Personality Disorder.

[6] See: Gary Owen's *Ghost City,* 2004.

defines as the emotional engagement with the surroundings.[7] Erotic consumption of the city consists in its promise of the pleasurable or even the ecstatic in the process of experiencing it, i.e. in encounters with urban evolution, transformation, creativity and desire (Rewers 337). The brevity of these encounters and the expectation that they be enjoyed here and now is affected by the terror of eroticism in mass culture, in a pressure resulting in the domination of notoriety, recordings and happenings as opposed to fame, duration and art.

The city of Wrocław has an officially registered logo which it grants to events taking place in the city. The logo says "Wrocław the meeting place," which epitomizes, I believe, a conscious marketing policy whose aim is to advertise the city as a city of encounters, of *Erlebnis*, a self-consciously erotic city. The city must be sexy! For the same purpose the city digs deliver material not so much for academic, historical investigation in search for truth as for creating "an atmosphere," a pleasurable emotional psychogeographical relationship with the here and the now. Where materiality fails in its eroticism, narratives are produced: literary, scholarly and material. They include gothic, crime and fairy tales.

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Pornography Debate, Gaze and Spectatorship in Sarah Daniels's *Masterpieces*

ABSTRACT

Masterpieces by Sarah Daniels has been described as a voice in the debate on pornography, expressing the anti-pornography position as opposed to the liberal feminist stance in this debate. Despite its ideological clarity reported by many reviewers and critics, the play has been commented upon as deficient or inadequate because of evoking conflicting interpretations and ambiguity. The paper argues that these deficiencies stem from the play's concern with the distribution of agency and passivity along gender lines as well as the influence of generic and essentialist notions of genders on the perception of social and individual power relations particularly in the domain of eroticism and sexuality. One of the key issues of the play is the question to what extent and in what ways human perception is conditioned by the place of the subject in relation to the agency/passivity dichotomy and his or her viewing/reading position in relation to erotic and pornographic material.

ABSTRACT

Introduction

In the 1980s debate on pornography a new category—the one of human rights—was introduced by some anti-pornography feminists. The question appeared whether for the sake of erotic pleasure such rights can be suspended. The liberal response to that position was the defence of freedom of the media to produce and distribute the materials that are not censored or controlled in other ways by authorities. This option rejects the belief in the direct link between pornography and violence against women, focusing on the positive function of most of erotic and pornographic images. *Masterpieces* (1983) by Sarah Daniels has been described as "an important contribution," taking in this debate the anti-pornography position (Aston, *An Introduction* 128) as opposed to the liberal feminist stance. Its direct political message is one of the reasons for Lizbeth Goodman's inclusion of the play in the list of "exemplary British feminist plays and performance pieces" (227). Goodman praises the play for "urging social thought and action" and refutes the criticism of "prioritizing of feminist politics above 'literary value,'" claiming that "this is hollow criticism that misses its mark" (227). Dimple Godiwala, noticing the play's "dramaturgical failings," quotes Deleuze and Guattari's definition of "a minor literature" to defend the value of such imperfect works in creating common consciousness, a sense of community and unity of ideas, describing the play as "a working out of feminist ideology, principles and practice with a dramatically radical feminist finale" (149).

Despite its ideological clarity reported by many reviewers and critics, the play has been commented upon as deficient or inadequate in several respects, contributing to conflicting interpretations and ambiguity. Taking into consideration a variety of interpretations developed on the basis of the play, its supposedly clear message is far more complicated than it seems. According to Michelene Wandor, "the effect—shocking, because it is the opposite of what it appears to be—is that the case against pornography is never made within the means of the play" (217). Wandor even suggests that the final message of the play—if we analyse its dramatic structure—might be contrary to what one expects it to be, for example, that "if you take action against pornography you end up in prison" or "if you take up feminism, you could end up as irrational, and the murderer of random male victims" (217). However, these ambiguities and emergent messages operate in the play only if we accept that the play's ideological statements should be received at face value. Even Tracy C. Davis, who also emphasizes the play's ideological merits, saying that the play is "message-oriented—it attempts to prove an argument rhetorically," contends that "it does this by fusing emotional responses to ideas that have been introduced but are not

necessarily answered within the fiction of the play" (152). Thus it is impossible to draw an analogy between ideological messages pronounced by or enacted by the characters in the play and the emergent interpretations, as the latter are a result of complex relationships between various elements in the play. What is, however, problematic in the play's ambiguity is that it merges the categories of the erotic and the pornographic, particularly in the attitudes of female characters, who classify any reference to erotic images as objectifying and violent. To them erotic images of women inevitably lead to pornography and abuse. This approach is contrasted with the view held by some male characters and those involved in erotic and pornographic industries that erotically explicit materials are "marital aids which enrich people's . . . romantic lives" or can have beneficial effects because "looking at pictures" can stimulate fantasies (Daniels 164).

Generic Perceptions of Genders

In order to see the play as producing a clear message, one has to ignore a number of techniques and relationships developed in the play, such as anachrony, Brechtian alienation effects, distancing and above all the questions of agency and generic perception. What the play seems to problematize is the distribution of agency and passivity along gender lines as well as the influence of generic and essentialist notions of genders on the perception of social and individual power relations particularly in the domain of erotic and sexual behaviour. One of the key issues of the play is the question to what extent and in what ways human perception is conditioned by the place of the subject in relation to the agency/passivity dichotomy and his or her viewing/reading position, which in the case of erotic images to some extent defines the border between the erotic and the pornographic.

One of the reasons for which the exploration of these issues is possible is the play's structure. The scenes explicit in their interpretations are interlaced with the situations supplying insufficient data, contrastive messages, interpretative fallacies and clearly subjective projections. It is possible to connect these elements into the general anti-pornographic feminist interpretation, even when taking into consideration the pro-pornography arguments delivered outside the play's fictional framework. However, the disruptive elements are employed here to diffuse the play's ideological clarity and unity. Therefore, what Daniels's play ultimately criticizes is not pornography as such but the impact of essentialist and generic perception of genders on social and individual interactions, which might lead in extreme cases to crime and psychological disturbance. In this layer the play suggests an uneasy analogy between what is the primary target on the ideological level—that is pornography and misogyny—and prejudice against

and hatred towards men. These are emphasized in the two apexes in the play constituted by two murders—one recorded as a snuff movie and the other committed by the main character. The snuff movie registers a pornographically tinged scene of a sadistic murder of a woman (an actress) by a male assailant (a film director). The other scene is shown onstage and presents the main character, Rowena, pushing a strange man onto the railway track in front of an approaching train. Davis's comment about the analogy between the two scenes seems to support the significance of generic hatred in both murders:

> By depicting what might be interpreted as the random, senseless, casual elimination of a man at the hands of a woman, Daniels shocks. . . . The shock registers because the slaughters are so similar: they are motivated by sexual loathing of a type, not an individual; they are witnessed; and they are truly arbitrary attacks by one sex upon the other. (144)

On the one hand, one can notice the subversive parallel between the two murders—the revenge of one sex on the other realized through individual acts of violence. However, the information about the snuff movie available in the play does not contain any reference to the generic hatred towards women experienced by the perpetrator of the crime. We do not even know whether the notion of hatred is applicable here as the murderer in the movie is depicted rather as the one focused on his own pleasure. The woman slaughtered in the movie is turned into an object, a doubly distanced tool to achieve satisfaction. Interestingly, the agent of the crime also turns himself into the object of gaze by filming his actions, as if his pleasure was based on scopophilia directed onto both the Other and the Same. Thus the idea of hatred of women attached to pornography is Rowena's interpretation of pornographic pictures she has been exposed to willingly. Her violence, devoid of sexual motivation, has been brought about by her generic misinterpretation or overinterpretation of individual pornographic and erotic images.[1]

Generic Identification and Victimization

In confrontation with pornography, Rowena loses her own individual identity, turning into the generic type of a woman as a victim of sexual violence.

[1] Although later in the play Rowena makes a connection between misogynist jokes and snuff movies, it seems that hatred of women is more directly represented in the former. Misogynist jokes contain in their formula generic concepts whereas generic reception of pornography belongs to the sphere of interpretation and does not have to be activated in its reading.

In order to make this transition possible, she also has to translate all the male characters she meets into the generic type defined through their sexually abusive and violent nature. Although in several cases male characters are presented in the contexts clearly suggesting misogyny and sexual violence towards women, in many others there is no evidence whatsoever to imply Rowena's interpretation of her contacts with men as threatening in terms of violence or sexuality (e.g. in the case of Rowena's husband, the man walking accidentally towards her in the street late in the evening, and the man at the station).

The correspondence between the two murders referred to in the play produces another ambiguity. Despite her unquestionable agency in the act of killing a man, Rowena tends to be depicted as a victim of pornography and misogyny. Along with the anti-pornographic feminist position, the woman's identity is defined through victimization and danger. At the same time, anti-pornography feminism "fuels essentialist notions of male sexuality as inherently 'predatory'" (Heise 413). The correspondence indicated by Davis exposes the imbalance in the interpretation of male and female sexuality and nature. To a certain extent, the murderer in the snuff movie is a victim of his sexuality and under proper legal conditions is likely to meet a suitable punishment for his crime.[2] Legally, he would be eliminated and confined similarly to Rowena. However, the play's subjective layer seems to overlook this aspect of the film crime, at the same time presenting the psychiatrist's, the prosecutor's and the judge's comments on the cruelty of Rowena's deed as biased and sexist. While the generic hatred of women in the snuff movie is disputable, the act of pushing the man onto the railway track in front of the approaching train without a direct reason certainly shows a generic fear of and prejudice against men. The psychiatrist's and prosecutor's accusations are in fact founded on the same fallacy as Rowena's fear and anger targeted at men.

The generic hatred of men which Rowena develops throughout the play culminates in the scene of her allegedly random murder. Through anachrony the link between this event disclosed early in the text and the snuff movie is established directly towards the end of the play, postponed to create the play's climax. It is at this stage that we find out that she killed the man just after having seen the snuff movie and it is also the moment when the film is summarized by her to the policewoman and the audience/readers. It is crucial that the audience's knowledge of the film is filtered

[2] However, taking into consideration essentialist notions of male sexuality and biological determinism, implying men's limited control over their libido and sexual aggression, the man's legal responsibility might be doubted, similarly to other instances of sexual abuse in, for example, rape cases (Whatley 123–25).

through Rowena's subjective perspective—we never get to know how it is interpreted by other characters apart from a short explanation from the prosecutor defining a snuff movie as "a film or films made in the United States where, according to reliable reports, the participant is actually killed in front of the camera" (Daniels 227). To the prosecutor "watching a film cannot be construed as anything but an objective experience" (Daniels 227), and as such cannot explain Rowena's state of mind when committing the crime. However, the play gradually confronts us with the growing subjectivity of interpretations that Rowena formulates on the basis of her experiences, with the rising domination of generic conceptualizations. The prosecutor's comment on the objectivity of the experience seems to deny the possibility of various interpretations of the same event or subjective and different viewing positions in a spectator or viewer. In fact, both the prosecutor and the judge refuse to accept the connection between the experience of seeing the snuff movie and Rowena's crime, although the judge appears to be shocked by the idea of real murder being filmed. His ironic comments on Rowena's motivation, "You are not at liberty to avenge the pornography industry in this country. We have censorship laws for that" or "So, on seeing this film you thought you'd go out and kill a man?" (Daniels 227), paradoxically expose some of the mechanisms behind Rowena's behaviour, but also show the judge's inability to understand how the different position of women in respect of viewing and acting can lead to irrational and violent actions.

Gaze and Viewing Positions

Although the readers or viewers of *Masterpieces* are not exposed to what exactly happens in Rowena's mind when watching the movie, the analysis of the processes involved in viewing the snuff film as described in the play according to Laura Mulvey's use of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of film images might show to us the available viewing positions and interpretations for Rowena as a viewer/spectator. If the woman displayed as a film image connotes the fear of castration, the destruction and mutilation of her body stands for liberation from that fear for the male assailant. The first strategy employed by the subject to avoid the castration complex, as Mulvey argues, is "preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object" (444). The man in the snuff movie literally investigates the woman's body, cuts into it, takes the insides out, punishes her with unbearable suffering and finally kills her. The act of cutting and sawing the body represents the symbolic re-enactment of castration on the body of the already castrated,

to deny any possibility of power or threat. Mulvey associates this voyeuristic strategy with sadism: "pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt (immediately associated with castration), asserting control and subjugating the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness" (444). Interestingly, the scene prior to the act of extreme violence features what Mulvey could describe as fetishistic scopophilia, which "builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself" (444). Lying on the bed, the woman is transformed into a fetishist object, passive, yet self-sufficient, outside the narrative framework. For a moment she suspends the narrative, freezing it in the male gaze, deceptively innocuous. One of the crucial moments that trigger the transition from fetishistic scopophilia to sadistic voyeurism is the woman's protest against her being filmed when she notices the camera. Her resistance to being turned into the object of gaze symbolically instigates in the man the other avenue of escape from the fear of castration.

The man by recording his actions projects himself as a different person—more idealized and powerful. His identity is filtered through the camera image—he enacts somebody else as if trying to live up to this projected image of himself. The look towards the camera might suggest a mixture of narcissistic and scopophilic relationships to the enacted image. The narcissistic reinforcement of identity, the arrival at some integrity of absolute power over the woman, is accompanied by the need to be looked at by others, to become the mirror image to the onlooker— possibly to himself—or the object of gaze. He is acting upon the body of the murdered woman but he is being acted upon by the camera at the same time. Despite this fetishistic aspect the man in the movie seems to confirm the general division between the woman as an object of gaze (scopophilia) and the man as the representation of the idealized and active ego (narcissism). When confronted with the psychoanalytic study of the castration complex, this dichotomy leads to the division between the woman as a passive but guilty object acted upon and punished by the man driven by his fear but possibly also hatred of women.

The general division between agency and objectification along gender lines makes women's spectatorship particularly complex and problematic also in the case of pornography or even erotic images. Referring to Fetterley's concept of "resistant reader," Jill Dolan defines the position of the resistant/feminist spectator as the one suspended between two positions offered and dependent on gender. Rejecting the identification with the passivity, invisibility and muteness of female characters, the feminist spectator, according to Dolan, "contemplates the option of participating in the play's narrative from the hero's point of view," having "a nagging suspicion that she has become complicit in the objectification or erasure of

her own gender class" (289). The resultant position is that of the cultural and political intervention exposing the processes of naturalizing ideologies related to gender (Dolan 289). But this position can be achieved only by an outsider who is able to notice the constructedness and limitation of each of the immediate spectator positions offered by performance. The lack of detachment imprisons the viewer in the choice between the two limited positions, both of which a female spectator might find unsatisfactory.

Rowena, as the main focalizer in the play, exemplifies an inability to reach this alternative detached position; she notices that women in film, pornography and everyday life tend to be objectified, but she accepts this as the only possibility of reading these representations. In this she accepts the authority and domination of the male reading and viewing position, seeing herself through the male objectifying gaze. She has not yet discovered the pleasures offered by opposing the dominant structures, such as evasion and resistance (see Fiske 2), which seem to be activated by Jennifer (her mother) in her carnivalesque, non-gendered laughter. Rowena cannot notice other viewing positions, nor can she perceive different representations, attributing to all male characters this dominant objectifying gaze, even where the viewers or the readers of the play can see evidence to the contrary. Hence she defines herself as the object of men's gaze in many public situations, "sexually assaulted" by erotic images in advertising (Daniels 207). Her decision to abandon her habit of wearing skirts, for example, is one of her attempts to gain some sort of invisibility and thus escape men's objectifying gaze (cf. Godiwala 147). Her strategies aim at escaping from the panoptic male supervision into the invisible zone where she paradoxically becomes more passive and limited. The act of pushing a strange man onto the track in front of an approaching train symbolically transfers her from the position of a passive object to an agent, using excessive violence towards the opposite sex. She inscribes herself into the major masculine narrative, whereas her deed is interpreted by others in generic terms echoing her earlier interpretation of male violence.

When we juxtapose Rowena's version of the film with the real coda of *Snuff*, we observe that several elements have been omitted, including the third character in the film—the second woman called June[3]—dark haired and dressed in black as contrasted with the lighter clothes of the blonde victim. Rowena's inability to notice the third viewing position in relation to pornography and relationships with men echoes a general omission of the third figure in the *Snuff* coda in criticism and feminist protests. Heller-Nicholas observes the significance of this omission for the misinterpretation of the film:

[3] Here I rely on the identification of the name made by Heller-Nicholas.

> The presence of June in the *Snuff* coda therefore rejects the simplistic "men versus women" scenario that it is so often purported to be, and upon which much of its ideological debate is based. Its sexual politics are far more complex. The female victim is not only at the mercy of a man, she is tortured by a man, and restrained by a smiling woman. (Heller-Nicholas)

The smiling woman might suggest, as Heller-Nicholas argues, the dark woman's participation in the sado-masochistic pleasure, but it even more importantly disturbs the viewing position and gaze relationships in the film. The third character stands away from the enacted scene of violence for most of the time, as she is busy taking notes and rearranging the objects on the two beds. She is aware, just like the other two characters, of the crew and cameras filming, sometimes looking straight into the camera. Her participation in the act of violence is detached and instrumental—she simply helps to hold the victim for a short time casually as a part of her off-screen duties. Her meta-fictional placement defines her smile rather in terms of aesthetic satisfaction at the efficiency of the actors' work. Whichever the case, she is placed in a position superior to both the male oppressor and the female victim in her meta-filmic distance as well as the third position of gaze. The cameras' changing perspectives, the *mise-en-abyme* technique of recording the image of the other camera in the act of filming the characters, the characters looking straight into the camera as well as a conspicuous mirror as part of the set reflecting the procedure of recording and gazing—all of these generate the complex network of gaze, complicating the relationship between victims and torturers, passivity and agency, as well as the subject and object of gaze. Rowena's interpretation of the film and her own viewing position are founded on the simplification of this network and erasure of some of its elements.

Fictionality and Authenticity

All the analogies and connections established in the play between the snuff movie murder and Rowena's homicide cannot obscure a basic difference between them, that is the mediated nature of the film and the direct real dimension of Rowena's deed within the fictional world of the play. Although the prosecutor's definition suggests that the snuff movie registers a real act of murder in front of the camera, it might be only a promotional strategy that tries to introduce the element of authenticity to the branch of film that might suffer particularly because of its fakeness and acting. Even if the film is a recording of a real murder, it uses

a number of film techniques which frame it into a fictional matrix. While it seems that Rowena can notice the moment the film changes from its fictional to authentic dimension, she finishes her summary of the film with a rather uncertain statement: "And I kept forcing myself, to pretend that it was only a movie" (Daniels 230). The comment that she receives from the policewoman, "No. It happens. I've seen photos, hundreds of photos of little girls, young women, middle-aged women, old women . . . mutilated beyond recognition" (Daniels 230), does not dispel this uncertainty as it contains two contradictory implications; on the one hand, a photograph as a testimony of "having been there" (Barthes 23) appears to show to us what really happened but on the other hand, the expression "beyond recognition" undermines the denotative capacities of photographs. The photographs thus testify to something that happened but the picture's denotation cannot be established—its representation is unrecognizable. The phrase "beyond recognition" in conjunction with the policewoman's final comment "I try not to think about it" (Daniels 230) implies a possible rejection of recognizing oneself in the images. In contrast, Rowena interprets both the film and pornographic pictures as representations in which she recognizes herself, into which she translates herself, forming a generic category of the woman as a victim.

Another issue related to the question of the difference between fictional representations and reality is a general tendency in the discussion on pornography to disregard its fictional quality. For example, in the work of the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, as Vance reports, "the conventions we use to decipher ordinary images are suspended when it comes to SM [sadomasochistic] images" (447). The Commission failed to recognize that erotic images or fantasies do not have to exert a direct effect on human behaviour or that "sexual images could be used and remain on the fantasy level" while human imagination and "the symbolic realm" could have "autonomous existence" (Vance 447). In this respect, the discussion on pornography resembled the debate on the representation of violence on television, in which two positions were confronted—one claiming that violence on TV has a direct impact on human behaviour and thus contributes to the general increase in violence, and the other seeing violence on television as a strongly coded reflection of social and cultural values, in which violent behaviour is symbolic and rather instrumental (Fiske and Hartley 178–79). Rowena seems to be unable to perceive sexual violence represented in a snuff movie as fictional and encoded, neither is she able later in the play to accept a possibility of varied responses to pornography, eroticism and jokes. To her, pornographic and erotic images and jokes are authentic manifestations of hatred towards women and realizations of sexual violence against them.

Her slippage from fiction to reality in the act of murder is a consequence of this interpretative fallacy.

In fact, the play abounds in situations representing slippages from fiction to reality, ranging between such trivial transitions as the one between the joke about tiling and the discussion on house repairs and investment that emerges from it, more serious shifts from the boys' looking at pornographic images of women and comparing their teacher with them, and the possible transference from these images into reality in the form of rape as well as the links between the jokes about rape and real violence against women. All of these ambiguities, fallacies or slippages seem to derive from the very nature of the snuff movie as one exploring the possibility of authenticity while being overtly fictional. The *Snuff* coda plays with this possibility while engaging in the metafictional game of multiple viewing positions, each distancing the filmed act more and more from the notion of reality.

Laughter and Agency

Apart from the two acts of murder which polarize the play in respect of agency and generic perception, the play contains a number of less noticeable references to these issues. The contrast between generic and specific thinking and agency and passivity are first problematized in the initial scene of the dinner party, particularly in the reactions of various characters to the jokes told during the dinner. Yvonne's (Rowena's friend's) absence of reaction testifies to her inability to detach herself from identification with any women referred to. Jennifer's spontaneous reactions to jokes both about women and men is the first evidence of her ability to exceed gender identities. As a post-menopausal creature, she moves beyond inhibitions and prejudices based on sexual experiences and gender definitions. Marginalized and carnivalesque, Jennifer distances herself from references to sexual abuse, as these seem irrelevant to her condition. In contrast to many other reviewers, who criticize Jennifer's complicity in male laughter against women and her lack of feminist awareness, Aston rightly notices Jennifer's ability to go beyond divisions and classifications: "it is a laughter which de-familiarizes the common position of women who are forced into the position of laughing in spite of themselves. It is a laughter which speaks the 'but I am not that'" (*An Introduction* 130). Jennifer's laughter signals a non-generic reception. In another article, "Gender as Sign-System," Aston describes laughing in spite of oneself experienced by a female competent reader or spectator as unpleasurable ("Where is the pleasure of finding yourself the object of the joke?", Aston 60) and deprived of *punctum* ("a mode of painful and compulsive pleasure," Elam

qtd. in Aston 58). Jennifer's reactions to the jokes contrast with this type of laughter as her response is depicted in the play text as excessive and spontaneous: "Jennifer laughs uproariously and rather disconcertingly so," "Jennifer who laughs even louder," "Jennifer laughs raucously," "Jennifer laughs genuinely" (Daniels 166–69). Thus in her ability to go beyond generic reception, Jennifer can distance herself from the spectator/reader position available to women in most texts and situations. She is even capable of turning herself into an object of laughter when she tells about her excesses in a women's flower arranging guild "infiltrating exhibitions with [their] outrageous arrangements" (Daniels 175). She embarrasses male characters by describing the flower arrangements that she and her friends made using diaphragms, empty pill packets and a sanitary towel to grow plants in. In their subversive flower compositions, Jennifer and her friends deconstruct conventional femininity expressed in the activity of flower arranging connoting delicacy, good taste and beauty. The substitution of some of the materials used in flower compositions evades conventional definitions of femininity and redefines identities. It marks the presence of a category of a menopausal woman disregarded in the general notion of femininity. Jennifer and her friends' decision "to act mad" in order to "get [their] revenge on society for writing [them] off" (Daniels 175) places them outside social categories in the liminal non-gendered space. The critical distance towards herself manifested by Jennifer makes it possible for her to experience the *punctum* as well as to enjoy turning herself into an object of a joke. However, perhaps most importantly for the main theme of the play, the act of displaying publicly objects intimately related to female sexuality and biology generates anti-erotic effects. The viewer or listener, especially of male gender, is exposed unwillingly to the intimate attributes of the female body which cannot be easily turned into a pleasurable fetishistic object of gaze. A woman or her parts are no longer available as the source of pleasure, while the onlooker is denied the power of authority and agency. Jennifer's artefacts refute and offend the male gaze. Thus Jennifer is capable of creating for herself an alternative viewing or reading of the position in which she both escapes objectification and subverts male authority.

Rowena's "rather hesitant" joining in laughter in her reaction to the jokes told during the dinner seems to hint at her trapped position as a reader/receiver. Rowena feels that there is no other option but to unwillingly comply, which already prepares the ground for her later development. In contrast to her, Yvonne's negative response to the jokes suggests her ability to evade the dominant reading of the joke message. Yvonne even tries to reverse the power relationship by telling a joke about men in which the undertones of violence are more pronounced and do not belong to the

text's presupposition (as in the case of the jokes about rape, in which rape as a violent sexual act is totally disregarded).

The joke contributed by Yvonne: "How many men does it take to tile a bathroom? (*Pause*.) Three but you have to slice them thinly" (Daniels 169) is the only one after which there is no reaction of any kind even from Jennifer. In a number of ways the joke refers back and forth to the culmination points of the play presenting murder—the description of the snuff movie and the act of pushing a stranger onto the railway track. The pleasure of the joke resembles the one experienced and displayed in the snuff movie—slicing corresponds to cutting up the woman's body in the film. In both, the person acted upon is depersonalized and objectified. However, the joke is reticent about the suffering and violence involved in the act. Its concise and matter-of-fact statement precludes sadistic satisfaction. A number of reversals activated in the slicing joke make it an instance of carnivalesque topsy-turvyism—a temporary suspension of social rules and gender roles. In contrast to the snuff movie, the context and the purpose for fragmenting the victim's body is absurd and trivial. The Man's body is totally inadequate as a tiling material. Furthermore, the joke reverses the man's position as an agent in the context of tiling, making him the object or rather material acted upon. From the domain of agency a man is pushed into the domain of receptivity and passivity. The number three as well as the reservation that you have to slice them thinly further suggests the deficiency of men in the discussed context. At the same time, the activity of slicing, conventionally belonging to women's household chores related to cooking, makes a woman the hypothetical agent. There is then a transition from the masculine domain of tiling to the feminine domain of cooking accompanied by the objectification of men and activation of women.

Even in the earlier jokes about rape and women as sexual objects with a largely misogynist message, one can notice foregrounding and ambivalence of the notion of agency and passivity. Two of the rape jokes told during the dinner depend for their effect on paradox. Rape in its legal definition is based on the use of force or threat by the oppressor and is performed against the will of the victim (Heise 418, Table 3), thus implying the aggressor's agency and activity and the victim's passivity and lack of contribution. The jokes told in the play define the situation initially as rape, but the second part of the jokes suggests the victim's contribution or control over the act. Going back the same way, knowing that the rapist might attack the women again, or telling the "idiot" rapist what to do, are actions that transfer the decision or control from men to women. And it is this transfer or paradox that makes the jokes laughable to Jennifer. In fact, in her laughter, one can notice a gradual degradation of men, their control, value and masculinity. Her contribution to the jokes told seems to imply

that what she laughs at is the discrediting of men and their authority. Even in the joke that most visibly objectifies women—the ideal date as a combination of a sexual object and a pizza—the target of laughter is not the fact that women serve as sources of satisfaction for men but rather that men's needs are primitive and simplistic. However, the lack of response from Rowena and the negative reaction on the part of Yvonne derive from the initial imbalance of powers in the jokes; even if a woman enjoys the sexual experience with a rapist, he has no right to violate her independence and freedom, or even if we laugh at male primitive nature, there is no justification for objectifying women to prove the point. Nevertheless, the other characters seem to ignore the presuppositions contained in these jokes.

The absence of a response from the listeners to the tiling joke indicates that the presuppositions activated in the process of receiving it make laughter impossible; it yields to deconstruction more effectively as it denaturalizes the dominant distribution of agency and objectification. The act of slicing seems a more evident manifestation of violence and objectification than the implied abuse in the other jokes, making the analogy to the snuff movie more pronounced. Nevertheless, the absence of response from the characters might denote another imbalance of distribution of attention and sensitivity: sexual violence against women suggested in the reference to rape is received as far more acceptable than the absurd abuse of the man's body. In fact, it is possible to notice the analogy between the degrees and types of violence used in the joke scene and the other more serious situations in the play. Yvonne's joke as her answer to the earlier largely misogynist jokes corresponds to Rowena's murder of a stranger as her response to pornography and sexual abuse. In both cases the female characters' reaction is perceived as too extreme and irrational in comparison with which stories about rape and the sadistic treatment of women appear natural and almost justifiable as they are more in tune with the essentialist notions of what women and men are like. If even in anti-pornography feminism women are defined through their victimization and men through their violence and domination (Vance 443), violence committed by women emerges as something far more unnatural and punishable than the same deed committed by men against women.

Conclusion

Considering Rowena's generic identification with women as victims of patriarchy and misogyny as well as her transition from passivity to acting and agency, it is possible to interpret Rowena as a character acting on behalf of all women, taking responsibility for other women-victims and identifying with them to the extent that she could be attributed with

heroic functions. In fact, some critics see Rowena as a character who decides to act against misogyny and violence against women although she personally has no direct experience of violence towards her. Davis, for example, praises the play's "social purpose to instruct and improve" (148), claiming that "when Rowena acts, she acts for other women, not just herself, and sees the action through to completion" (147). In this way, as Davis argues, the play "suggests that people can and should take action against the offenders [violent and misogynist men]" (148). However, such an interpretation disregards the personal perspective that is established in the play and contrasted with other views and objectified data gathered by the readers/spectators. The play seems rather to illustrate the destructive effects of male violence, pornography, and misogyny on women, leading to interpretative fallacies, misapprehension, wrong assessments and mistakes, as well as to fear, hatred of men, and finally murder. In this context, Rowena remains a victim, not a victor, as her isolation from men realized in her imprisonment cannot be interpreted as a victory or a radical action, but as an escape and social annihilation.

Masterpieces might also illustrate another difference in gendered readership/spectatorship. One of the male reviewers of the play, Robin Thornber, writes: "The play made me angry and filled me with hate for men. But then I am one" (qtd. in Aston, "Gender" 65). In this comment one can notice the generic reception of the play that is parallel to Rowena's point of view. Nonetheless, hatred and anger are further qualified by the reviewer's individual identification with his gender class. Instead of hating himself, however, the reviewer appears to reject the legitimacy of the hatred discourse dominant in the play. If he is a man then the feeling of anger and hatred cannot be directed at men in general. Rowena's case suggests the opposite strategy of reading. Instead of seeing a difference between herself and women's images in erotic and pornographic images, which would enable her to notice that women tend to be victimized and objectified, but that she is not a victim or an object, she identifies with these representations. Rather than qualify generic perceptions, she adjusts her identity to be accommodated within the generic category of the woman as a victim and an object. Her desperate act of defence is misguided and misdirected and thus cannot be described as a constructive battle against misogyny and gendered violence manifested in various spheres of cultural and social life. In this context, *Masterpieces* can hardly be classified as a radical play advocating anti-pornography feminism if we take into consideration the values and positions held by its main character. Although anti-pornography feminism introduced a revolutionary discourse into the pornography debate—the discourse of violated human rights as contrasted with the conservative discourse of decency and morality (Vance 444)—its concentration on essentialist notions of women's

victimization and men's sexual violence seems to some extent to perpetuate women's passivity and objectification (cf. Heise 413–14). Sarah Daniels confronts in her play a number of discourses on pornography without advocating particular ideological positions. In fact, by presenting a transformation of one character under the influence of indirect confrontations with violence and direct viewing of pornography Daniels shows the traps of essentialist and generic perceptions on genders as well as exposing the problem of viewing or reading positions available to and negotiated by women in pornography, humour and everyday life.

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Eroticism and Justice: Harold Pinter's Screenplay of Ian McEwan's *The Comfort of Strangers*

ABSTRACT

A careful analysis of Harold Pinter's screenplays, notably those written in the 1980s and early 1990s, renders an illustration of how the artist's cinematic projects supplemented, and often heightened, the focus of his dramatic output, his resolute exploration of the workings of power, love and destruction at various levels of social interaction and bold revision of received values. It seems, however, that few of the scripts did so in such a subtle yet effective manner as Pinter's intriguing fusion of the erotic, violence and ethical concerns in the film *The Comfort of Strangers* (1990), directed by Paul Schrader and based on Ian McEwan's 1981 novel of the same name.

The article centres upon Pinter's creative adaptation of McEwan's deeply allusive and disquieting text probing, amongst others, the intricacies and tensions of gender relations and sexual intimacy. It examines the screenplay—regarded by many critics as not merely an adaptation of the novel but another, very powerful work of art—addressing Pinter's method as an adapter and highlighting the artist's imaginative attempts at fostering a better appreciation of the connections between authoritarian impulses, love and justice. Similarly to a number of other Pinter filmscripts and plays of the 1980s and 1990s, the erotic and the lethal alarmingly intersect in this screenplay where the ostensibly innocent—an unmarried English couple on a holiday in Venice, who are manipulated, victimized and, ultimately, destroyed—are subtly depicted as partly complicit in their own fates.

ABSTRACT

In the 1980s and early 1990s, while Pinter's playwriting was confined mostly to one-act plays and sketches, his interest in writing for the cinema surged, as did his political engagement. During the eighties, Pinter authored more filmscripts than in any previous decade, mainly adapting other writers' novels for the screen. His cinematic translation of John Fowles's famous novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman,* described by Gale as the dramatist's "most inventive and imaginative screenplay" ("Harold Pinter" 98), was released in 1981. It was soon followed by the film version of his own play, *Betrayal,* directed by David Jones. In 1982, Pinter wrote the screenplay of *Victory*, based on Joseph Conrad's novel published in 1915 (still unfilmed); *Turtle Diary*, adapted from Russell Hoban's book of the same name, was produced in 1985. The late 1980s brought Pinter's adaptations of Margaret Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale*, Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day*, and Fred Uhlman's *Reunion*. All three films were concerned with violence and authoritarian urges: *Handmaid's Tale* in the future, *The Heat of the Day* in wartime Britain, and *Reunion* in Germany at the beginning of the Nazi era. Furthermore, in 1989, Pinter started working on the screen adaptation of Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, made into a film in 1993, and wrote the script for Ian McEwan's short novel *The Comfort of Strangers*, tackling the causes of violence and oppression on both the public and private level of human interaction.

Rather than providing a digression from the artist's playwriting career, Pinter's screenwriting seemed to supplement, even heighten, the dramatist's recurrent preoccupations, reworking them in imaginative and challenging ways. Already in his first film, and his first cinematic success, *The Servant* (1963), adapted from Robert Maugham's 1948 novella of the same name, Pinter creatively developed his favourite theme of dominance and subservience—the "battle for positions" (Pinter, "Art" 61) which appears repeatedly in his own plays from the stage debut, *The Room* (1957), onwards—offering an original insight into class and gender relations and expanding on what he had confronted in his dramas. What is significant, even though the films tended to diverge from the scrupulous fractal geometry of Pinter's theatre, they consistently investigated the intriguing links between the political and personal realms, exposing injustice and championing love, friendship, empathy and freedom from tyranny as the highest goods.

A closer look at the screenplays of the 1980s yields an illustration of how Pinter's choice of cinematic projects enhanced the focus of his political theatre in that decade, his relentless enquiry into the workings of power,

love and destruction and bold challenging of inherited dogmas. It seems, however, that few of the scripts did so in such a simple yet effective way as Pinter's disturbing fusion of the erotic, the political and ethical concerns in *The Comfort of Strangers*. The script, which, on the face of it, might seem a slight work in Pinter's canon, portraying the luridly perverse behaviour of an Italian couple who ensnare and brutalize naive English holidaymakers, in the end, fosters a better understanding of the relationship between love and justice. Similarly to a number of Pinter plays of the 1980s and 1990s, the erotic and the lethal become alarmingly intertwined in the screenplay where the ostensibly innocent, who ultimately fall victim to extreme cruelty, are depicted as, at least partly, complicit in their own fates.

Directed by Paul Schrader and released in 1990, *The Comfort of Strangers* is based upon McEwan's complex, deeply allusive text probing, among other things, the intricacies and tensions of gender relations and sexual intimacy. Many critics agree, quite rightly it seems, that Pinter's screenplay is not merely an adaptation of the novel, first published in 1981, but that it creates another, perhaps more powerful, work of art which can be analysed in its own right (Hall 87). According to Grimes, Pinter the screenwriter essentially respected the integrity of his sources and sought to preserve the author's original vision in the medium of cinema (145). Nevertheless, as the critic further emphasizes, "translation from text to screen is necessarily a co-authoring, permitting, if not requiring, interpretive shadings and outright changes on the part of the adapter," and the dramatist's "interpolations sometimes add topical or political edge to his sources" (145). Indeed, as Pinter himself insisted, commenting on his approach to screenwriting: "I don't just transcribe the novel; otherwise you might as well do the novel . . . these are acts of imagination on my part!" (qtd. in Gale, "Harold Pinter" 98). The alterations that Pinter effected in adapting *The Comfort of Strangers* for the screen provided him with some flexibility to pursue his characteristic interests and clearly added topicality to his source. The article will look at certain aspects of Pinter's ingenious adaptation, demonstrating, amongst others, how the dramatist's political conscience, integral to his artistic imagination, manifested itself in the screenplay of McEwan's novel.

The film centres upon Mary and Colin, an unmarried English couple on a holiday in Venice, capturing the novel's sense of claustrophobia experienced by a tourist entrapped in a foreign city, sequestered in a hotel room, secluded in a relationship with only one other person. The couple's dream of escape in the hope of reviving their failing union drives them into a relationship with an older couple, Robert, an Italian, and his Canadian wife, Caroline, which eventuates in Colin's macabre death. In Pinter's adaptation of McEwan's text—whose title ironically alludes to the final claim

of Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire* that she has always depended on the kindness of strangers (Williams 89)—The Venetian couple lure Mary and Colin into their destructive erotic fantasies, murder Colin and have sex over his body in front of the narcotized and incapacitated Mary. Unlike McEwan, Pinter in his script does not allow the murderers to escape but has them captured and incarcerated, provoking some compelling questions about the nature of justice.

It is no surprise that, with its atmosphere of menace emerging from apparently mundane circumstances and its disquieting conjunction of political and sexual themes—intimated already with the Adrienne Rich epigraph preceding the novel: "How we dwelt in two worlds / the daughters and the mothers / in the kingdom of the sons"—McEwan's text appealed to Pinter's imagination. The adaptation remains largely true to the feminist orientation of the source material by tracing Robert's fanatical sexism, his complacent commitment to oppressive patriarchal culture and glorification of the past, allegedly more stable and secure than the unsettled present. Importantly, Pinter also examines here the relationship between domination, cruelty and erotic pleasure, a perverse sadomasochism that culminates in Robert's horrific slaying of Colin, whose handsome physique attracts both Caroline and Robert and serves as a catalyst to the couple's sexual gratification.

It is worth noting, perhaps, that in contrast to Pinter's script, the city in McEwan's text is never specified, though clearly it is Venice. Indeed, as Malcolm insightfully observes, "[h]owever teasingly imprecise the novel's setting is, it does involve a complex intertextuality, allusive to a whole range of twentieth-century and earlier texts that have chosen Venice as a setting" (76). Above all, the novel could certainly be seen as an intriguing postmodern response to *Der Tod in Venedig* (1912), Thomas Mann's famous novella dealing with the interwoven themes of desire, forbidden passion, self-knowledge and (self-)destruction. But the Venetian locale and Colin and Mary's artistic background are also reminiscent of Pinter's own contemporary play *Betrayal* (1978). Moreover, the novel's holiday city alludes to one of the most controversial Pinter plays, *The Homecoming* (1965), which, similarly to *Betrayal*, associates Venice with romantic adventure, infidelity and threat. Like *The Homecoming*, *The Comfort of Strangers* connects sexuality to violence, and, similar to Pinter's subversive drama, McEwan's book garnered for the novelist a number of negative reviews: it was decried by some critics as sadly disappointing, "definitely diseased" and "quite hateful" (qtd. in Slay 72).[1]

[1] For a more detailed discussion of the novel's rich intertextuality, see, for instance, Malcolm 66–87.

Near the beginning of Pinter's screenplay, Mary and Colin wake up at night in their hotel room in Venice and decide to go out to look for an open restaurant. They quickly lose their tracks but, all of a sudden, Robert, dressed in a tight-fitting black shirt unbuttoned almost to the waist, a chain with a golden imitation razor blade and a camera round his shoulder, "*steps out of the dark into a pool of street light,*" and, blocking their path, volunteers to act as their guide (Pinter, "Comfort" 262). When Mary examines wall posters put up by Venetian feminists postulating the castration of convicted rapists, Robert ridicules feminist demands: "All these—are women who cannot find a man. They want to destroy everything that is good between men and women. They are very ugly" (263), and then he offers to take the hungry couple to a place where they could taste some "beautiful Venetian food" (263). Even though Mary is clearly impressed by the radicalism of Italian feminists, she does not object to Robert's sexist vilification of their political struggle and acquiescently follows him. And despite the fact that Robert ultimately fails to provide Colin and Mary with the nourishment they seek—as they soon discover there is no food in the bar recommended by their Venetian guide—rather than free themselves from Robert's oppressive company, the couple stay with him and question the man about his wife.

McEwan's text and Pinter's adaptation both highlight the familial origins of Robert's obsessive preoccupation with patriarchal domination and misogyny. Asked about Caroline, Robert relates a childhood incident, which, along with Sarah Woodruff's disclosure of her past in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (Pinter, "French Lieutenant" 57–60), stands as one of the most elaborate narratives in Pinter's screenplays. Robert recounts how he once informed on his sisters after they wilfully used their mother's cosmetics and tried on her lingerie, which resulted in a severe punishment by their father, who beat the girls with a leather belt "without mercy" and made his son look on (Pinter, "Comfort" 269). A month later, the sisters avenged themselves in a grotesque way. They manipulated Robert into gorging himself on forbidden sweets, lemonade and an emetic, and then locked him in their father's study, which he stained with vomit and excrement. The boy incurred the wrath of his "revered" and "feared" father, who "nearly killed" him and then did not speak to the son for six months (270). The man's grim recollection is capped with a sinister assertion: "I have never forgiven my sisters" (270). In his adulthood, Robert becomes fixated on patriarchal authority, victimizing women and abiding by the morals of his despotic father whose indignation and unbending severity still haunt his memory.

The novel's emphasis on the authoritarian father figure is markedly enhanced in Pinter's screenplay. As rightly pointed out by Burkman, while

in McEwan Robert relates his story only once, Pinter accentuates the significance of the relation by interspersing partial narrations throughout the script (39). It is noteworthy that the son's tendency to idolize the father, as well as the male dread of sexual ambiguity, are recurrent themes in Pinter's playwriting. Similarly to Max's father in *The Homecoming* or the father of the country in *One for the Road* (1984), Robert's father, a respected Italian diplomat, can be seen as one of Pinter's representations of the powerful father figure who is looked up to for his personal and social authority. The father inculcates the son with traditional values that guide his personal and political life and shield the son from sexual "confusion" (Pinter, "Comfort" 291).

Significantly, Robert's repressed anger, initially directed at his sisters, later finds release in his relationship with Caroline. When the two get married, they indulge in violent sexual pleasures that result in Robert's breaking his wife's spine while making love. At one point in Pinter's script, Caroline divulges to Mary the "strange things" (318) that she and Robert used to do before Robert's extreme aggressiveness turned her into an invalid:

> Soon after we were married Robert started to hurt me when we made love. Not a lot, enough to make me cry out. I tried to stop him but he went on doing it. After a time I found I liked it. Not the pain itself—but somehow—the fact of being helpless before it, of being reduced to nothing by it—and also being punished, therefore being guilty. I felt it was right that I should be punished. And I thrilled to it.
> It took us over totally. It grew and grew. It seemed never-ending.
> But there was an end to it. We both knew what it was. We knew what it had to be. We knew it. We wanted it. . . .
> My back happened—suddenly—one night. It was very bad indeed. . . . So I'm like this. . . . He's terribly strong, you see. When he pulled my head backwards I blacked out with the pain—but I remember thinking: It's going to happen now. I can't go back on it now. . . . This is it. This is the end. (316–17)[2]

Alarmingly, Caroline's disability and the acute pain she experiences do not put a halt to the couple's liking for sadomasochistic acts but only propel their search for other sources of erotic stimulation.

Robert's unwavering commitment to the patriarchal order founded on male violence is effectively demonstrated in the scene where the host displays his father's personal items to his guests during Colin and Mary's stay at his Venetian apartment. Robert makes his views about male-female

[2] Where sentences have been omitted in the passages quoted from Pinter's filmcript, the ellipses are indicated by four periods (. . . .); three periods (. . .) represent the original suspension points within Pinter's text.

relations explicit in words which Pinter transcribes, almost verbatim, from McEwan's text:

> My father and his father understood themselves clearly. They were men and they were proud of their sex. Women clearly understood them too. Now women treat men like children because they can't take them seriously. But men like my father and my grandfather women took very seriously. There was no uncertainty, no confusion. (Pinter, "Comfort" 291)[3]

When Colin jokingly describes his host's residence with its precious paternal paraphernalia as "a museum dedicated to the good old days" (291), Robert strikes him hard in the stomach with his fist, sending the young man jack-knifing to the floor. Again, rather than react to Robert's use of brute force or part company, Colin chooses to brush the whole incident aside and accepts the invitation to dinner.

When the couples discuss the concept of freedom, Robert expounds his disturbing political stance and his vision of a "pure" society that needs to be guarded from "perverts":

> ROBERT. So how is England? Lovely dear old England? Hampshire! Wiltshire! Cumberland! Yorkshire! Harrods! Such a beautiful country. Such beautiful traditions.
> MARY. It's not quite so beautiful. Is it, Colin?
> . . . .
> ROBERT. In what way? In what way not beautiful?
> MARY. Oh, I don't know—freedom . . . you know . . .
> ROBERT. Freedom? What kind of freedom? Freedom to do what?
> MARY. Freedom to be free!
> ROBERT. You want to be free? (*He laughs*.) Free to do what?
> MARY. You don't believe in it?
> ROBERT. Sure I believe in it. But sometimes a few rules—you know—they're not a bad thing. First and foremost society has to be protected from perverts. Everybody knows that. My philosophical position is simple—put them all up against a wall and shoot them. What society needs to do is purify itself. The English government is going in the right direction. In Italy we could learn a lot of lessons from the English government.
> COLIN. Well, I'm an Englishman and I disagree violently with what you've just said. I think it's shit.
> ROBERT. I respect you as an Englishman but not if you're a communist poof. You're not a poof, are you? That's the right word, no? Or is it "fruit"? Talking about fruit, it's time for coffee. (292–93)

[3] To compare with Pinter's source, see McEwan 73.

It could be argued that through the character of Robert, stigmatizing homosexuality and yet apparently fascinated with Colin's physical appearance, Pinter suggests a coincidence between sexual insecurity and authoritarian tendencies. According to Grimes, like in the fascistic societies depicted in the dramatist's political plays and sketches of the 1980s and 1990s, Pinter draws here "an equivalence between suppressing civil liberties and an attitude that violently fears and castigates anyone who transgresses socially enforced binary distinctions" (153). In Robert's political view, couched in a moralizing discourse, violence supplants reason; "hatred and fear are the true basis for relating to the social other" (Grimes 153).

The ominous idea of "purifying" the society postulated by Robert features strongly in Pinter's political playwriting exposing, and opposing, political tyranny and persecution. In *The Hothouse*, written in 1958 and first staged two decades later, in 1980, Roote, preoccupied with tradition investing life with a sense of order and exalting the integrity and chastity of dead forbears, supplies a metaphor with truly unsettling implications that resurfaces in Pinter's post-1980 political theatre. He insists that the world should be "kept clean for the generations to come" (248), antedating Nicolas, the self-righteous interrogator-*cum*-persecutor in *One for the Road*, as well as Lionel and Des, the duo of oppressors in the political sketch *The New World Order* (1991), who—shortly before inflicting torture upon an unnamed blindfolded victim—feeling "so pure," ecstatically congratulate each other on performing the moral duty of "keeping the world clean for democracy" (276–77).

The scene focusing on the characters' discussion of freedom interpolated in Pinter's screenplay is interesting in other ways, too. It aptly conveys the artist's mounting dissatisfaction with the radical socio-political changes that were taking place in Britain after the election of the Thatcher government in 1979. Pinter's biographer, Michael Billington, stresses that "[c]oncern at growing intolerance, at the tendency towards intellectual conformism and at the low level of political debate was . . . widely felt in Britain in the late 1980s" (307). The area that especially vexed the dramatist was the undermining of what he regarded as fundamental liberties taking place "under Mrs Thatcher's regime" (Pinter, *Various Voices* 229). In the script, Mary's deploring of a diminution of freedom in England effectively invokes the subject of civil rights being "challenged and corroded" in the 1980s (qtd. in Billington 306). Robert's offensive comments about "perverts" and "poofs" apparently allude to Section 28, known as Clause 28, of a proposed British government bill which sought to forbid public authorities, including schools, "to promote homosexuality" or to advocate "the acceptance of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship" (Billington 307). By comparison,

Pinter's source lacks such topical political references; McEwan refrained from associating Robert so explicitly with a concrete right-wing agenda. "By foregrounding timely sociopolitical issues," as Burkman has perceptively noted, "Pinter . . . makes the screenplay less general, more immediate, more urgent than the novel" (51).[4]

Rather than tackle Robert's destructive instincts, Mary and Colin, once again, recklessly disregard the host's verbal aggressiveness, as well as some other alarming indications that herald the tragic ending. Instead, on their return to the hotel room, the couple indulge in their own violent erotic fantasies:

> MARY. (*casually*) Oh, I forgot to tell you. . . . I had a rather good idea. . . . I'm going to hire a surgeon—a very handsome surgeon—to cut off your arms and your legs. . . . Yes. And then you'll be quite helpless, you see. I'll keep you in a room in my house . . . and use you just for sex, whenever I feel like it. . . . And sometimes I'll lend you to my girlfriends . . . and they can do what they like with you. . . .
> COLIN. Yes, I've come to this decision. . . . I'm going to invent a machine . . . you see . . . made of steel. It's powered by electricity. It has pistons and controls. . . . It has straps and dials. It makes a low hum. . . . And you'll be strapped in . . . you see . . . quite securely . . . tight . . . and the machine will fuck you—not just for hours and weeks but for years and years and years. For ever. (300–02)

During their teasing exchange involving images of brutality inflicted upon each other, from which the lovers clearly derive sexual titillation, Mary pictures having her partner's limbs amputated, retaining Colin "quite helpless" to serve as a sexual object for her and her girlfriends' gratification (301). The apparently innocuous objectification of Colin by Mary foreshadows the man's literal victimization in the script, for on the last day of the couple's stay in Italy, Colin will, indeed, have his body mutilated by Robert, who will cut the young man's throat to increase his sexual arousal with Caroline. It seems noteworthy that Mary and Colin's rekindled interest in the erotic and their intense lovemaking is induced, as suggested in Pinter's screenplay, by their encounter with Caroline and Robert. It is after their first visit to the Venetian couple's house that the two cocoon themselves for a few days in the privacy of their room, excluding the rest of the world. They carelessly engage in a feast of narcissistic and erotic pleasures, shunning the normal duties of adult life.

[4] To learn more about Pinter's strong views on the suppression of freedom effected by Clause 28 in 1988 which could be related to Robert's disturbing political stance in the screenplay, see, for example, Gussow 68–69.

Even though the two couples conspicuously differ, Pinter also probes here, and undermines, the conventional polarities between good and evil, or innocence and culpability. Robert and his wife may be driven by destructive urges, but their victims, Colin and Mary, are not entirely without fault. Both couples seem to be equally limited in their perception of what love is, or what it should be. However, unlike Robert and Caroline, Mary and Colin come across as rather disoriented and unable to commit themselves to a definite course of action, which precipitates the final horror. After the couple's first meeting with Robert, Mary, feeling entrapped in Venice, compares their stay in Italy to "a prison" and suggests returning home (275). While it is, to a degree, a prison of circumstance—they are a couple of tourists in a foreign city—the seclusion is also of their own making.

Robert's recollection of his childhood disobedience and his father's cruel retribution, repeated three times in the screenplay, is paralleled by Mary's narration of "the worst thing that ever happened" to her (255). As a little girl, she was excluded from a gang of kids because, without bothering to find out that she was seen as an inadequate member, Mary inadvertently applauded her own rejection and voted herself out. It could be argued that Mary's story reflects, to a certain extent, the decisions she and her partner make, or fail to make, during their Italian holiday, revealing how the characters' painful pasts still haunt them through their adult lives, affecting the present. Such self-involvement proves as numbing as the opiates used by Caroline to stupefy and paralyze Mary when she and Robert ensnare and attack Colin. The actual narcotic, in turn, accentuates Colin and Mary's isolation and their sleepwalking-like conduct. The couple's blatant disregard of the alarming evidence at their disposal and failure to act prudently ultimately cost Colin his life.

While Pinter largely strove to remain faithful to his source material—exploring the novel's linkage between patriarchy and violence—he also used his position as a screenwriter to illuminate questions implicit, yet undeveloped, in McEwan's text, introducing additions and alterations that corresponded with his own political concerns. Mary's "terrible" story of expulsion, which is Pinter's own invention, is a case in point. According to Grimes:

> In Pinter's imagination, exclusion was a political motif, perhaps the one in which his entire statement about politics might be condensed. To exercise power is to exercise the power of exclusion; groups "integrate" themselves . . . by defining some of their members as unworthy. To banish is a primal urge, and to be banished is an unforgettable experience. The tendency to form groups, with their innate desire to produce conformity and exclusion, is a central manifestation of human cruelty. Thus the pattern of exclusion running through Pinter's work . . . has meaning on both psychological and political levels. (150)

The unsettling portrayal of social groupings and group ethics in Pinter's "committed" drama from the 1980s onwards has been noted by Mark Batty (117–19). Indeed, the complacent leaders of the well entrenched systems dramatized in Pinter's political plays and sketches legitimize the repressive measures they employ by professing their adherence to moral codes and shared values ensuring communication and safeguarding social order. During his gruelling cross-interrogation at the end of Act One in *The Hothouse*, the hapless Lamb is asked whether he wants "to join a group of people in which group common assumptions are shared and common principles observed" (237). Nicolas in *One for the Road* assures the tortured dissenter of his authority, flaunting his patriotic feeling: "I feel a link, you see, a bond. I share a commonwealth of interest. I am not alone. I am not alone" (232). Batty suggests:

> Throughout his political plays, Pinter sought to demonstrate that the seemingly innocent desire to belong to a group and play one's part in an ordered society can never be wholly free of political exploitation, and that the impulse to participate and the comfort of sharing ethical values can easily degenerate into the rejection and castigation of those who dare to question the motives behind that participation and the basis of those ethical values. (118)

While the desire for commonality is understandable, coexisting within a society necessarily entails a range of mature responsibilities, and Pinter's writing of the 1980s and 1990s, both for the stage and for the screen, invariably sought to sharpen his audiences' awareness of such challenges.

The novel and the screenplay may initially lead one to believe that Mary will be the potential victim. As Hall argues, "In typical patriarchal narratives a man attempts to win, save, seduce, and overcome a woman in order to demonstrate his prowess. He is the actor; she is merely the means by which he demonstrates his ability to act" (92). However, the later scenes in which Caroline drugs Mary, leads her to their bedroom and shows her the wall covered with dozens of photographs of Colin taken secretly by Robert make it apparent that Colin is the object of the couple's desire, "the spectacle to be viewed to facilitate their voyeurism and . . . sadomasochism" (Hall 92). Caroline confesses: "We became so close, incredibly close. Colin brought us together. It was my idea to put him here on the wall—so that we could see him—all the time, as we fucked" (320), while Mary eventually comes to realize that Robert had followed them in Venice and intentionally lured Colin to his apartment. "It was as if God was in on our dream. I knew that fantasy was passing into reality," Caroline adds (320). The woman's comparison of Colin to God is a mere

projection, since the young man generally comes across as rather infantile and ineffectual, but it sheds light on the imaginary fuel that incites Robert and Caroline's consuming desire.

Colin's desperate pleading with the duo of his victimizers to fetch a doctor for Mary and reveal their intentions is answered with Robert's sinister "I'll show you what we want" (323); the man takes a razor from his pocket and slits Colin's throat. Next, as Colin is sliding slowly down the wall to the floor, Robert begins to make love to Caroline, while Mary, dazed by the narcotic, sits across the room staring at the twitching body of her lover (324). The woman cannot move or speak, but what she registers as a numb, catatonic onlooker is the dangerous underside of the erotic world that she and Colin have misinterpreted as a remedy for the problems in their own relationship. Their final sitting positions facing each other—Mary's paralyzed body in a chair, Colin's shrunken corpse slumped by the wall—further reinforce the sense of the couple's lethargic passivity, their practically acquiescent participation in Robert and Caroline's intrigue and lethal fantasy.

Interestingly, unlike the bewildering cross-examination of Stanley Weber in Pinter's early comedy of menace *The Birthday Party* ("Birthday" 57–63), premiered in 1958, or the vicious interrogation scenes in the torture plays of the 1980s and 1990s, the questioning of Mary by the Italian police in the screenplay of *The Comfort of Strangers* has a valid point. The officer's legitimate queries: "What did you want from these people?" (325), "Why did you come to Venice? What were you looking for?" (326), and Mary's vacant, confused responses expose the couple's limited self-awareness and their dilatoriness in taking steps that could have personally saved them.

Whereas Robert and Caroline appear to be perversely resolute in pursuing their desires, however aberrant, Mary and Colin lack a clearly acknowledged purpose to their lives, or find it difficult to openly verbalize their desires. While, at first, Mary seems inclined to sustain her relationship with Colin, when he, rather begrudgingly, suggests cohabitation, ineptly professing his love for her, the woman just smiles and remains diffident: "Yes, but . . . we don't have to . . . commit ourselves to all that . . . just now. I mean . . . it's such a lovely day. . . . [W]e'll see. Shall we?" (308–09). Mary's hesitant answer may spring from her disillusionment at the man's failure to propose marriage, as well as be motivated by her recognition of Colin's inadequacy as a life partner or the insufficiency of their union. Whichever the case, the scene makes the couple's immature reluctance to commit themselves acutely palpable.

Even though Pinter's people generally perceive themselves as affable and well-intentioned beings impelled by love, in fact, they all share a reduced view of love that does not develop beyond physical fascination and becomes a destructive passion eventuating in estrangement from others

and, thus, detrimental to relationships and communities. And while it is Caroline who, at one point in *The Comfort of Strangers*, relates how her husband injured her when they were making love, in the end, all of the characters in the script turn out to be crippled or destroyed by lust which they mistakenly interpret as love.

The final scenes in Pinter's adaptation, which dramatizes the failure of erotic attraction and sexual desire to evolve and bring about action effecting positive change, prompt one to reflect upon the nature of justice. In contrast to McEwan's novel, where the murderous couple eventually abscond unpunished, in Pinter's screenplay, Robert and Caroline are apprehended and subjected to police interrogation. According to Prentice, while "the happier ending" of Pinter's version might have contributed to the film's commercial success, it also raises some vital questions concerning the workings of justice, and, in particular, retributive justice (302). "The traditional happy ending of seeming-evil people getting a just reward is challenged as resolving nothing at all," the critic suggests; clearly, no punitive measures administered by the judicial system can redress the loss of life (302). What is important,

> [t]he crime here is not entirely of two perverted, evil people plotting against two innocents, nor is the point to promote distrust of strangers . . . But rather, the screenplay dramatises survival predicated on a need to trust one's own best insights, coupled with some knowledge of what one wants, and what one ought to want. (Prentice 302–03)

Indeed, in *The Comfort of Strangers*, like in a number of Pinter's grim political plays and sketches, only those liable to aggressiveness and tyranny openly articulate their ominous aspirations and efficiently turn them into reality. Crucially, in neither couple portrayed in the screenplay does love reach out beyond the individuals concerned to include others.

The last word in Pinter's script is given to Robert. Interrogated by two detectives about the crime he has committed, the man shows no remorse. Pinter calls here into question "the cherished Western masternarrative" that confession has a cathartic value, or that it can convincingly account for one's present doings (Prentice 303). When probed about his motives, the perpetrator only smiles and, with the same self-righteous assurance he displayed earlier, once again, reverts to his account of the punishing father figure, a story whose credibility by now has been considerably undermined. The man's recitation, which could serve as the author's final statement on the limits of language and psychoanalysis to supply a past cause for the present state of affairs, calls to mind the dramatist's early defiant protestations concerning his audiences' "desire for verification," which is "understandable but cannot

always be satisfied" (Pinter, "Writing" 11). The narrative delivered by Robert to exonerate himself elucidates little and, thus, typically of Pinter's *oeuvre*, the responsibility for finding answers to any troubling questions that remain is assigned to his audiences.

The majority of plays and screenplays authored by Pinter from the 1980s onwards reflect the artist's preoccupation with the evils that human beings are capable of visiting on one another in their relationships on both the micro and macro level of social interaction, frequently in the name of love and justice. In the adaptation of McEwan's *The Comfort of Strangers*, reconciling the small scope of presentation with a much larger scope of implication, through his depiction of love reduced to erotic desire and its dangerous conjunction with violence and abuse of authority, Pinter tackles the question of love's necessary correlation with justice. What the script attempts to impress upon us, similarly to his political writing of the 1980s and 1990s, is the necessity to reconsider the misguided, or narrow, view of love—and of justice—to which his characters, as well as his audiences, tend to adhere. While Pinter, alarmingly, suggests individual complicity in exclusion, suffering and oppression directed at persons and groups, he also implies our capacity for compassion and sustaining life, seeking to further the importance of accepting a deeper and wider understanding of love, conducive to renewal rather than annihilation of life.

Whether writing for the stage or the screen, Pinter consistently sought to awaken his audiences to the disquieting realization of human potential for cruelty and complacent disinvolvement by confronting us with a set of events that elude a facile explication and teasing with disturbing ambiguity. He skilfully transferred agency from the stage, or screen, to the viewer, compelling us to ask questions, and, in questioning, to begin to look for answers, and to act. Both his playwriting and filmscripts urged his audiences to recognize our own self-absorbed individual isolation and passivity, to make conscious choices, and, most importantly, to counter the habit of moral apathy and assume responsibility for decisions and actions that perpetuate violence and injustice. Such recognition, in Pinter's ethic, could result in an attitude and action indispensable for survival and "restoring what is so nearly lost to us—the dignity of man" (Pinter, "Nobel" 17).

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On Not Being Porn: Intimacy and the Sexually Explicit Art Film

ABSTRACT

Since the mid-twentieth century, we have passed from a time where sexual frankness was actively obstructed by censorship and industry self-regulation to an age when pornography is circulated freely and is fairly ubiquitous on the Internet. Attitudes to sexually explicit material have accordingly changed a great deal in this time, but more at the level of the grounds on which it is objected to rather than through a general acceptance of it in the public sphere. Critical objections now tend to be political or aesthetic in nature rather than moralistic. Commercial cinema still seems wary of a frank exploration of sexuality, preferring to address it tangentially in genres such as the erotic thriller. In Europe, an art house canon of sexually explicit movies has formed, starting with Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris* (1972) and the French-produced *In the Realm of the Senses* (1976). This article looks at the steps taken since the 1970s to challenge out-of-date taboos and yet at the same time differentiate the serious film about sex from both pornography (operating in parallel with mainstream cinema but in its shadow) and the exploitation film. After reviewing the art film's relationship with both hard and soft core, two recent films, *Intimacy* (2000) and *9 Songs* (2005), are analyzed for their explicit content and for the way they articulate their ideas about sex through graphic depictions of sexual acts. Compulsive and/or claustrophobic unsimulated sexual behaviour is used as a way of asking probing questions of intimacy (and its filmability). This is shown to be a very different thing from the highly visual and staged satisfactions of pornography.

ABSTRACT

Cinema, understood as a form of mass public entertainment, has had a very vexed relationship with sexuality. It has consistently failed to address issues in sexual behaviour and its range of possible meanings because of a generally hostile censorship climate. That climate has been predicated on the general prevalence of patrician moral values and anxiety about social taboos. The dominant American studios have not wanted to alienate powerful moral and religious lobbies or to produce products which in any way jeopardized their access to large and heterogeneous audiences. This led historically to the industry's adoption of the Production Code from 1930 onwards, a set of voluntarily-entered-into constraints in many domains but particularly in the field of sexuality, which engendered a striking lack of frankness in these matters, what Linda Williams calls "the long adolescence of American movies" (*Hard Core* 21). Perhaps symbolic of this anxiety is the ubiquity of twin beds in films representing the lives of married couples. It can and should be observed that film-makers became very adept at the art of suggestion to deal with and overcome these often mind-numbing constraints. But one of the few areas where indirection and subtlety were not to much avail was in the film addressing sexual mores and the complexity of physical relations.

A second order of problem for this type of film was the challenge represented by the pornographic film industry. Living in the shadows for the first half of the twentieth century, the porn industry gained immensely from libertarian movements and the slackening of social taboos. However, the public maintenance since then of strictures on explicitness has to some extent created the niche in which it operates. Explicitness is pornography's answer to the problem of authenticity of desire:

> Hard core desires assurance that it is witnessing not the voluntary performance of feminine pleasure, but its involuntary confession. The woman's ability to fake the orgasm that the man can never fake (at least according to certain standards of evidence) seems to be at the root of all the genre's attempts to solicit what it can never be sure of: the out-of-control confession of pleasure, a hard core "frenzy of the visible." (Williams, *Hard Core* 50)

Williams's imperative, "the frenzy of the visible," but applying to both sexes, crossed over into the mainstream, because the same anxiety about the nature of desire applied there too. Pressure to reform no longer tenable codes of what might constitute "the visible" was building, in the form of

Kinsey (1948 and 1953),[1] Masters and Johnson (1966),[2] the Playboy Organization, American stag and nudie flicks and the European cinema *avant-garde*. The years 1970–73 are often considered a watershed for American cinema, when films flaunting their explicit violent and sexual content broke into the national distribution system and attracted large mixed audiences. From a strictly commercial point of view, audiences were significant but not industry-changing. By the mid-1970s, America had reverted back to a generally more middle-of-the-road set of film-making practices. However, first the home-entertainment revolution in the 1980s and then the explosion of the Internet in the 1990s made the question of access to sexually explicit material no longer essentially a question of censorship and public morality, but rather one of consumer choice. Censors began to lose confidence in their mission and to concentrate on protecting children, since the defence of public morals, as evidenced by efforts to regulate the preferences and activities of private citizens, was felt to have become unmanageable. So, the question is raised in Linda Williams's edited collection *Porn Studies* (2004), what new forms of explicit material have now emerged and where the serious film of sexual exploration can go in the age of ubiquitous porn. There can scarcely be a computer-possessing person who has not stumbled upon caches of this material, both commercialized and amateur self-exhibitionist. It is difficult to register the same levels of shock and outrage as when the sight of full frontal nudity or scenes of sexual congress were rare and/or only the result of strenuous searching or much expenditure. Deregulation of media industries has thrown up multiple channels for the dissemination of sexually explicit material (including occasionally the serious film about sex). This has helped to muddy some already murky water. The validity of distinctions here is problematic, since, given the heat which attends this debate, many interest groups do not tend to adopt a nuanced approach to the subject; even when they do, distinctions appear arbitrary.

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[1] Alfred C. Kinsey and his team of researchers at the University of Indiana produced two seminal studies, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953), collectively popularized as the Kinsey Report, which enlarged understanding of sexual conduct in the general American population and had the effect of normalizing and legitimizing a lot of behaviour considered taboo. Kinsey's research methods were largely based on extensive interviewing.

[2] William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson were sexologists at Washington University, St Louis, who carried on the work of Kinsey by concentrating on the psychological and physiological aspects of sexual behaviour. Their two main publications were *Human Sexual Response* (1966) and *Human Sexual Inadequacy* (1970). In tune with the greater latitude of their times, their 1957–65 research was observational and consisted of arbitrarily pairing sexually active men and women under laboratory conditions. Their results shed a great deal of light on many physiological aspects of sexual intercourse and masturbation.

Discriminating the film about sex from pornography and from the exploitation film (one using sex but not fundamentally about sex) has insisted on a number of quite unworkable distinctions between what is arousing (porn/exploitation) and what is not (the art film). The other charge levelled at the art film about sex, that it is intellectually pretentious, is also subjective. The writings of Georges Bataille, and analyses of his ideas by intellectuals like Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag, are often cited in this context. Like Bataille's work, such films have been identified as controversial, have aroused extreme critical reactions and have been dismissed as both preposterous and sick. One thing is clear, however. The grounds for attacking or rejecting these works have been shifting over the last forty years. Moral revulsion has largely given way to aesthetic, philosophical and political objections.

The film which was first to respond to the new censorship climate internationally was Bernardo Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris* (1972). Indeed, according to Lewis (194–95), 1972 was the pivotal year for the breakthrough of sexually explicit material into the mainstream, being also the year of *Deep Throat*, *Deliverance* and *A Clockwork Orange*. In many respects, *Last Tango* is a benchmark for all the art films about sex that followed (not that, numerically speaking, many did follow). An essential feature is a certain concentration on the heterosexual couple and on the degree of impersonality and intensity that attends their coupling. Most attention has been given to the explicitness of this film's sex acts when in fact they are not at all explicit. Instead, the film *makes specific reference* to a variety of acts (notably sodomy) by speech and context and then suggests them by simulation. But by focusing on the variety of acts, and making their execution dramatically meaningful, the film was laying a claim to being exploratory rather than exploitative. Looked at from this side of the pornography explosion, the film can be seen to be rather coy. It does not attempt parity of male and female nudity, for example. Except for one scene, Brando is fully clothed throughout. Maria Schneider, on the other hand, is seen on camera fully and partially naked for entire scenes. Brando's presence confers prestige on the production, making a statement that the sex is performance, enactment. It also has an unbalancing effect of making Schneider, the twenty-year-old actress playing Jeanne, both his professional and his erotic subordinate. Brando's Paul establishes and enforces the rules of the tryst, exclusively out of his own needs, until the moment late on in the film when he chooses to abandon them.

Another benchmark element is the film's Frenchness—its Parisian locations, its use of the French language, its *louche* social settings and more relaxed social values. Paul manages a cheap hotel or flophouse, which is home to a variety of addicts, musicians and whores. These figures, amongst

whom we find Paul's wife's lover, establish an ambience of bohemianism. Frenchness is a filter for Anglo-Saxon audiences for the film's unconventional attitudes to sex. Paul meets Jeanne when they happen to see an empty apartment at the same time. This apartment becomes the *locus* for their first animalistic coming together, and for subsequent meet-ups. The bareness of the setting is metonymic of the elemental nature of the encounter of male and female. It is *de rigeur* that the location and the preliminaries of sex are not aestheticized, although the film equivocates on this somewhat with the casting and decorative wardrobe of Maria Schneider.

A third benchmark feature is psychological damage. It is axiomatic that you cannot break through to the sorts of discoveries in sex that these films seek unless you are lifted out of the plane of bourgeois normality. Paul is deeply traumatized by the suicide of his wife Rosa, whose body still remains laid out in one of his hotel rooms. The heavily theatrical scene in which he berates and apologizes to the corpse is one of the film's rawest. There is a suggestion that Paul was as emotionally closed before his wife's suicide as he is after, but this is a minor note in the film's philosophy of sex. Psychological damage is the conduit by which you can come to understand the essential identity of *eros* and *thanatos*. Paul schools Jeanne in the need for degradation before there can be understanding. This takes the form of bodily violations and fantasies of exposure to filth and bestiality. In this respect, a clear demarcation is established between the pretensions to pleasure and recreation and revelation of pornography and the quest for knowledge and understanding (always obscure and occluded) in the art house sex film, which is almost without exception grim in tone. A consistent but not invariable feature of the genre is the drive towards death itself, where one partner kills or is coerced into killing the other. Extreme, excessive or obsessional sexual behaviour is thereby represented as a kind of suicide, and Brando seems at the end to goad Schneider into shooting him.

Another product of 1970s liberalism which manages to establish a credible separation between itself and porn is Oshima Nagisa's *Ai no korida* (*In the Realm of the Senses*) of 1976. This is odd for two reasons. The iconoclast in Oshima was not at all offended by the ascription of the term pornography to his film; in his desire to attack a range of Japanese taboos, he positively welcomed it. Secondly, although it contains perhaps the most disturbing and graphic content, it is in many respects the least glum of the art house sex films. The fact that it is set in Japan in the 1930s, in a culture which has very different expectations of sexual relations than we are used to, creates a significant distancing effect for Western audiences. Its effect on Eastern audiences is harder to gauge because it was banned outright in Oshima's native Japan (and has since been the object of zealous censorship). Although shot there, it was edited in Paris and

is for all practical purposes a French film, enjoying a long and successful run in Parisian cinemas in 1976. Another important difference is that although the main story concerns the obsessive sexual relationship of a pair of lovers, they are not monogamous and sexual activity is very far from being a private affair. One of the film's shocks is the extent to which the love-making goes on under the gaze of a number of other persons, nor is that gaze necessarily the prurient one of voyeurism. The domestic arrangements in a house with small rooms and paper sliding doors mean that very little is secretive; indeed the sway which Kichi holds over his household is such that he does not have to apologize for or explain his sexual appetites. Indeed, the erotic seems much more integrated with the social in this world. His fancy eventually settles on Sada, who becomes drawn into a jealous and increasingly passionate tryst. Sada, as a servant courtesan, is herself relatively liberated and responds to Kichi's requests for ever more *outré* sexual experiences. These eventually build to games of erotic asphyxiation in order to heighten and prolong sexual pleasure and lead to Sada's strangulation of Kichi. One of the factors that facilitated acceptance of the film was its being based upon a well-reported case from the period. Unlike Jeanne's killing of Paul, it is the mutually desired end of a relationship that can have no other outcome. The film contextualizes the lovers' sensuality by implicit comparison with grotesque images of ageing and debility. And in another scene, the most discordant in a film of many startling images, we see Kichi walking apprehensively down a street in 1937 when massed lines of Japanese troops are heading in the other direction. Clearly he opts for a personal erotic suicide over the militaristic collective suicide that the scene clearly anticipates.

Aesthetically, as Linda Williams argues, *Ai no korida* draws much inspiration from Japanese *Shunga*, woodcut engravings of erotic scenes from the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries (*Screening Sex* 190–97). Sexual intercourse is clearly visible in both the woodcuts and Oshima's film, and there is no disavowal of the intention to arouse. As I suggested earlier, most defences against obscenity laws, as they have been applied to film production and exhibition, rest precisely on denial of an artwork's tendency to arouse. The key differentiation from pornography here would seem to be the disinclination to pander to the desire to see all. Acts take place clothed, semi-naked and naked, from a variety of angles, some of which facilitate voyeurism and others do not. The camera reveals or withholds according to principles which do not obey the rigid dictates of "the frenzy of the visible." Body positions seem haphazard, unexpected, and sometimes awkward. Nor is clothing and drapery used according to the artful contrivance of soft core. Maureen Turim makes this same point in the context of general observations about the performative elements of sex in the film:

> In the scene early in the film in which Sada is presented as having sex with Kichi while she plays the samisen, *Realm of the Senses* does not separate sex from music, dance and theater. It stages the sounds, gestures, and rhythms of sex as the equivalents of these other performances, capable of being blended with them.
>
> This simply extends a visual metaphor present throughout the film in which the kimono acts as a theatrical curtain whose drapes can be drawn to reveal the sexual organs as the actors in the spectacle. (Turim 130)

Sada begins the film as the more passive of the partners but she is always associated with a certain wildness. She is introduced rejecting the advances of a fellow servant and then engaging in a public brawl with her. During the flirtation and courtship phase of the relationship with Kichi, she is frequently seen bearing a knife. As she becomes the more active of the sexual partners, so she asserts her desire for gratification in more forceful ways. Turim records that the film is usually read as progressive in its "liberating female desire" but notes that Sada becomes more subtly demonic as the film reaches its climax, when the knife is used to castrate her dead lover (139). At no point is what happens less than consensual. However, Oshima appears to want to suggest that sexual exploration is not without deadly risk. The alternative to ecstatic self-extinction is slow decrepitude, and another strong point of contrast with conventional pornography is the presence in the film of old people as desiring but dysfunctional sexual beings. Sada meets an old man who asks her to arouse him but without result, and later she sleeps with a client who cannot achieve coitus and so asks to be struck as a means to stimulation. Kichi has sex with two women much older than himself, in the second case, as it were, experimentally, with Sada watching. This confirms to them the eventual futility of their sexual project, the maintenance of high and ever improving erotic satisfactions. Sado-masochism is at first an aid to sexual stimulation, then a desperate remedy and finally a welcome exit strategy. It is a *datum* of the sexually exploratory art film that no state of equilibrium or harmony between male and female can be reached.

Ai no korida has only been screened in expurgated versions in Japan. It suffered a similar chequered fate at the 1977 New York Film Festival, when it had to be pulled from the programme after New York Customs threatened to impound all copies as imported obscenity (Williams, *Screening Sex* 189). Litigation and counter-litigation followed before a victory of sorts was reached. It was allowed to be screened, significantly, at the New York Museum of Modern Art, and then more widely at selected venues in major US cities. It was never submitted to the MPAA and so was left to award itself an "X" rating.

A Supreme Court judgment in America in June 1973, *Miller v. California*, brought to an abrupt end the brief convergence of the pornographic and the adult-themed film (Williams, *Screening Sex* 260–65). The court confirmed an individual state's right to enforce stricter rules against obscenity than those applied by the federal judiciary. Few studios thereafter would risk prosecutions or bans on films given anything more severe than an "R—restricted" rating. Sexually explicit films were either confined to the "X" rating and thus marketed as pornography to restricted audiences, or they were re-edited to receive an "R," or they were by definition made outside the USA and had to take their chance with the notoriously censorious CARA (Code and Rating Administration) of the Motion Picture Association of America. I would argue that the Home Entertainment revolution beginning in the early 1980s, led by video, DVD and cable channel networks, defused the loaded issue of public licensing. Straight-to-video and straight-to-cable sexually explicit filmed narratives did not have to meet public morality criteria because they were sold or rented directly to customers or delivered to subscribers only. Rating restrictions applied only to new films that went on general release. In a long overdue upgrading of the system, the MPAA introduced an "NC-17" rating (No children 17 or under to be admitted) in October 1990, to distinguish the adult-themed film from the X-rated porn film. The strategy backfired, however, for advertizers refused to carry promotion for such films which they still identified as "dirty," Blockbuster declined to stock them and so producers strove as keenly to avoid them as they had to avoid "X" ratings. This rating was given, for example, to critically successful and serious films *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* and *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (both 1989). The first film to receive an NC-17 rating was the October 1990 release *Henry and June*, Philip Kaufman's story of Henry Miller's sexual adventures in Paris. Although about pioneers in sexual exploration, it was the *avant-garde* of at least two generations earlier and did not aspire to the degree of explicitness of many other films, and so failed to engage audiences. For the industry, in any event, the fundamental issue had become not moral but economic: did anyone want to make a film that would not be available to the crucial 13–17 age demographic? When Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), Verhoeven's *Showgirls* (1995) and, most absurdly of all, *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut* (1999) fell foul of the NC-17 rating, it was clear that no one knew what it was for anymore.

It is worth while looking briefly at two films which attempted to make adult-themed cinema within the rating-regulated commercial system, Kaufman's *Henry and June* and Schrader's *The Comfort of Strangers* (both 1990). *Henry and June* is set in Paris like *Last Tango* and in the 1930s like *Ai no korida*. But there the resemblances end. *Henry and June* betrays

its kinship with the contemporaneous soft-core productions of Zalman King (*9½ Weeks, Wild Orchid* and *Red Shoe Diary*). It is technically soft too, with lush music, pretty close-ups, costumes and compositions, artful fades concluding love scenes and a rhetoric of desire articulated through lascivious looks and reaction shots. Sex is frequent but it is subordinated to its two principals' (Henry Miller and Anaïs Nin) supposed creativity ("writers are just hungry for experience, they steal everything," says June). Dialogue is hackneyed, of the "Be careful, Anaïs, abnormal pleasures kill the taste for normal ones" kind; the final voice-over might have come from the *Emanuelle* soft-core franchise ("I wept because the process by which I had become a woman was painful") and declarations of love are much commoner than in the art film about sex genre. Art films about sex do not mention love much, any more than they are about the travails of marriage. Most unconvincing of all are the film's clichés of Parisian eroticism: the brothel scenes, the risqué paintings and cabarets, the connived-at affairs. Self-consciously naughtier, it is nevertheless tonally closer to Minnelli's *An American in Paris* (1951) than it is to Bertolucci's *Last Tango*; Kaufman's is a Paris where Parisians either speak English or, lovable bohemians that they are, do not speak at all.

In terms of its explicitness (some nudity and some simulated sex), *The Comfort of Strangers* deserves its "R" rating. Much of the film takes place in holiday mode in ravishing Venetian settings. But the core of the movie is tougher, more probing, than *Henry and June.* A young couple find a new intimacy triggered in their flagging relationship after a chance encounter with an older Venetian couple who are addicted to sado-masochist practices in the bedroom. The young couple interrupt their sight-seeing to take to their hotel room and seem to turn into lovers in a French art house movie: experimenting sexually, discussing their orgasms, and "muttering . . . stories that produced moans and giggles of hopeless abandon, that won from the spellbound listener consent to a lifetime of subjection and humiliation" (McEwan 81). Schrader's film, which overlays McEwan's book with Armani style, is nonetheless true to his vision of violence opening the doors to intimacy. Colin and Mary are both progressive liberals; Robert and Caroline, whom they meet, are both predatory biological essentialists. McEwan therefore makes a direct association between heterosexual sexual passion and a latent but "structural" pathological imbalance between men and women. This is the "knowledge" that the surviving partner Mary takes from her experience, and which she tries unsuccessfully to communicate to her dead lover in a mortuary.

> She was in the mood for explanation, she was going to speak to Colin. . . . tell him her theory, tentative at this stage, of course, which explained how

> the imagination, the sexual imagination, men's ancient dreams of hurting, and women's of being hurt, embodied and declared a powerful single organising principle, which distorted all relations, all truth. But she explained nothing, for a stranger had arranged Colin's hair the wrong way. She combed it with her fingers and said nothing at all. (McEwan 125)

It still remains a little enigmatic why the liberals succumb; after four days of delight and total immersion in one another in their hotel room, they return to Robert's home to sacrifice Colin to his murderous erotic urges.

Most of the films mentioned in this article are notorious but have been little seen by general audiences. Asked what they think is the most sexually daring of mainstream movie genres, most would point to the erotic thriller, of which there have been dozens made in the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed, films like *Fatal Attraction* (1987) and *Basic Instinct* (1992) have reached such wide audiences that they are deemed significant for the commentaries they offer on gender relations, the threat of AIDS and homophobia. But with the fleeting exception of the famous "bare crotch" shot from *Basic Instinct*, films so conspicuously about sexual desire are wary of being explicit about it. What they offer instead is full, or partial, female nudity. The American market is open to graphic violence but remains coy about sexual behaviour. William Friedkin, the director of many controversial films including *Cruising* (1980) and *Jade* (1998), when asked about the likeness of the latter film to Buñuel's *Belle de Jour* and whether it could have been made without the crime plot replied:

> Yeah, sure. But the change would have meant that it would not have gotten made, except as a French movie (laughs) . . . *Jade* had to be masked as a crime melodrama, with the secret life of a woman as the background. It would only get made in America as a crime melodrama, as a thriller. It would not get made if it was just a pure examination of a woman's sexuality. (140)

In the erotic thriller, excessive or exploratory sexual behaviour is positioned as a sub-set of violent behaviour; once it is pathologized, it can be brought within a moral framework and resolved by crime-and-punishment plot trajectories. These plots seek to tidy and discipline the unruly aspects of such conduct. There is an implicit pathology within the art-house sexually-explicit film but it is not ultimately moralistic. The resolution of these films is melancholy, defeatist, but not retributional. This is why *Comfort of Strangers* is more art-house film in disguise than erotic thriller.

The examples chosen thus far are perhaps enough to show that the focus guiding these art-house explorations of sexuality is a searching

interrogation of heterosexual intimacy. Radical feminist cinema, like that of Catharine Breillat, in her *Romance* (1999) or *Anatomy of Hell* (2004), affirms that at the present time this is just not possible between men and women. However, more liberal approaches such as we find in the last two films discussed below still want to cling to this possibility, even if they are not optimistic about the outcome. These are Patrice Chéreau's *Intimacy* (2000) and Michael Winterbottom's *9 Songs* (2005). It is important, however, to distinguish between the ideological and intellectual work which a film does and the buzz and marketing around it. These films have both suffered from too much commentary about the sexually explicit film arriving in Britain, and about actors and actresses having real sex with each other. I would prefer to stress how, like *Tango* with its metaphor of dance and *Realm of the Senses* with its referencing of a range of Japanese performance arts, both films foreground sex as performance as well. *Intimacy* manages a running commentary on acting and the theatre alongside its investigation of anonymous sex. *9 Songs* punctuates a love affair from pick-up to break-up with the practice of concert attending. Their common point seems to be, both in form and content, that both types of performance be raw, naked and authentic, not just acting in the conventional sense. We know enough about the stop-go process of movie-making, and the onsite presence of crews, whether they be mainstream or grindhouse, to doubt whether onscreen intimacy is achievable. Indeed the whole enterprise seems to hinge on the connotations of those two words: "intimacy" as both a synonym for the closest possible understanding and/or fellow-feeling between two human beings and as a euphemism for sex, and "act," as in "to do or to execute" (in for example "the sexual act") and as in "to simulate or fake" a feeling or a behaviour. I would argue that a powerful artistic desire to over-ride the inauthenticity of "acting," the euphemistic aspect of "intimacy," drives these sexually explicit films.

But, leaving aside the hype about who did what to whom, what that is new emerges from these two post-millennial films? The first thing to notice is that neither has any truck with death. The sex-to-extinction motif seems to have been dropped. One is tempted to observe that the reason for this is that both films are at least partly British. *Intimacy* has been called "*Last Tango in Lewisham*" (Falcon 20) because it is read to some extent as a French film made in London, set in Mike Leigh-type locations with a grungy aesthetic and casting Leigh alter-ego Timothy Spall in a major role. The source text for *Intimacy* is the Hanif Kureishi novella of the same name, spliced together with one of his short stories, "Nightlight." Although these works are in the territory of the unfaithful husband and his dalliances with other women, they sadly ruminate on what is lost when the family is broken up, particularly in respect of a father's relations with

his children. This is only a background in the film, which focuses on the intensity of an ongoing afternoon affair with an unknown woman during which only minimal communication takes place. It has the same presupposition as *Last Tango*, that in a sense all that matters is in the room with them, is in the sex itself. This premise breaks down in the middle of the film however, as Jay begins to stalk his mystery lover; he finds he needs that extra-sexual information. His investigations continue and he begins to obtrude himself into her family life, disturbing it and trying to break it up. This only succeeds in making everyone, already unhappy, even unhappier. The affair terminates at the point where Jay demands (and gets) an explanation from Claire for her conduct. Jay's bitterness and provocation make his behaviour seem like acts of revenge. Naturally, some have read the film as deeply misogynistic, as wilfully misrepresenting the nature of female sexuality in order to castigate it. In other words, Jay leaves his wife and kids, is unhappy about the situation he has engineered for himself and so proceeds to destroy the marriage of a woman who has accepted him on the only terms he offers. Jay is a head bartender and his lover Claire is an unsuccessful actress and teacher of acting. Her behaviour is explained to some extent by her need to rekindle the well-springs of her feeling so that she can perform better. The film equivocates on whether her behaviour is just another unconvincing performance, a willed rather than a felt act. Her relationship with Andy (Spall as her husband) is unsatisfactory because he is conventionally supportive, but when the affair comes to light, he takes the opportunity to tell her what a lousy actress she is and always has been. Ironically, Andy seeks out Jay to tell him that he loves his wife more and more each day, one of the film's few uses of the word "love."

Reaction to the film has mostly been to the sex scenes. Outrage at the film's philosophy seems displaced onto its settings. In particular, the sordid squat in which Jay lives falls well below the barren but chic apartment in *Tango*—one critic remarked that the film's dishonesty is most manifest in denying what would be Claire's more primal desire to tidy this basement flat up. Other critics have suggested that its commitment to impersonal sex is more characteristic of the lifestyle of gay artists like Patrice Chéreau himself. Indeed Chéreau and his screenwriter have interpolated a gay French bartender, Ian, into the plot to comment on Jay's prevarications. On the sex itself, commentary has been skewed and unkind, about the body types of Mark Rylance and Kerry Fox as Jay and Claire (he too thin-set, she too thick-set), when all that this betrays is the extent to which pornography's representation of sex is dominated by the stereotypes of the buffed and sculpted body. The second line of attack is brutishness. Even more than in *Tango*, the sex is a preamble-less collision of bodies, without ceremony and followed by Claire's hasty departure. Neither protagonist

offers a credo for what they are doing on Wednesday afternoons and neither seems to understand it very well. Sex starts in awkwardness and finishes in confusion. There are seven sex scenes in all, most of them intense but relatively brief. One is a flashback to Jay masturbating during the final stages of his marriage. Another is with a young girl he picks up, who never stops chattering and whom he cannot wait to leave. The others are with Claire. Most of them entail full nudity and leave little doubt that both principals are performing in both senses of the word. However, this is passion born of need, not the pursuit of pleasure. It fully meets the condition of art-house sex, since it is clearly grim and uncompanionable. It seems both protagonists doubt their ability to feel. As Wednesday afternoons falter, explanations are sought and Jay accuses Claire thus in a showdown in her changing-room:

> At some point, just to make it very clear where I'm coming from, at one point I thought if what we did together was all that you wanted, it was because you knew more than me. I thought you had found something. I thought you were ahead of me, and that in the end you would tell me what you knew. That was the really great thing. That at some fucking point in the future, you would tell me what you knew. And of course you just keep your gob shut.

Sexual intercourse is therefore a form of arcane knowledge, a type of immersion, the meaning and mutuality of which may only be communicated retrospectively. Claire of course has only a hazy idea what this is and seems to need the sex to rediscover her own authenticity for professional reasons. At the end, when they meet in the squat, now stripped for Jay's departure, he implores her to stay with him in what is a declaration of love in all but name, but she declines. They then make love fully clothed, against a wall, exactly as in the first coming together of *Last Tango*, a clear homage to that film but also a statement that this film finishes where the other one starts. It resembles *Realm of the Senses* in its use of other partners, confidantes and onlookers (barman Ian, druggy friend Victor, Claire's actress friend Betty and Andy, of course) to round out and critique the social consequences of their solipsistic behaviour. The gloomy Mike Leigh milieu and many London street scenes ground the film in the story of a man who has unhappily left his wife having an affair with a woman who unhappily won't leave her husband, denying it the doom-laden resonance of these earlier films. The film has, it seems, been harshly attacked from both sides. It was banal for some and pretentious for others. It remains possible, however, to believe that Jay and Claire have achieved a state of intimacy, but that the baggage from their earlier lives has made the survival

of that intimacy problematic. It is possible because their "performances" are naked and strong.

Intimacy has a soundtrack of bleak and alienated British pop and rock from the 1990s, dominated by David Bowie's "sarf" London drawl. *9 Songs* is melancholy but it is not miserabilist. The reason for this is, I believe, because although the story is narrated after the affair is already over, the male protagonist is young and the story is therefore subsumed within an implicitly longer narrative of growing and learning and resigned acceptance, rather than the existential mid-life crises that characterize the experiences of men in most of the other films discussed here. *9 Songs* uses music not to overlay narrative with emotion, as movies do, but to space out and signpost the lives of its principals with cultural events. Kieron O'Brien's Matt meets Margo Stilley's Lisa at a gig at the Brixton Academy. They have sex immediately afterwards and their relationship begins. It is an avowedly small and experimental film (at sixty-six minutes, this is the shortest of what is often a long-drawn-out genre). Winterbottom says (DVD interview) that he had made previous relationship stories without the sex; now he wanted to tell the story exclusively through the sex, something that perhaps Cronenberg is trying to do in *Crash* (1997). O'Brien and Stilley spent a day in a hotel room with a camera crew getting used to each other's bodies before any commitments were made or any shooting schedules drawn up. In the absence of a script, difficult and demanding sex scenes were broken up with long days spent filming concerts around London. In all, some one hundred and fifty songs were recorded on camera, of which only nine made it into the finished film.

Winterbottom does not expose the relationship to pressures or temptations from without; once again, all that is essential is in the room with them and present in the sex. Far from investing in the idea of mutual obsession, this film takes the view that there is always asymmetry in relationships. Matt's early voiceover characterization of Lisa as "21, beautiful, egotistical, careless and crazy" is therefore ominous. If Matt has the authorial position, Lisa is more dominant in the bedroom. She is more sexually pro-active and adventurous than him, and what begins in pleasure and mutuality shifts towards the more inscrutable nature of Lisa's desires. Matt risks the word "love" but Lisa does not reciprocate. Lisa shows signs of boredom and irritation after the third concert. After the fourth, Matt initiates an erotic bondage game, which she takes over and turns to her own purposes and which becomes increasingly masturbatory. After song five, it is clear she harbours some resentment towards him. Lisa is fully involved in a visit to a lap-dance club while Matt seems somewhat removed from the goings-on. We later see her alone on the bed using a dildo. Matt contemplates the scene for a while and then retreats. This is not just

another long drawn out break-up film, however. Matt attends concert six on his own, and then they have their only brief row in the film, over her use of prescription drugs, but shortly afterwards they are shown making love with renewed vigour. In a film of explicit sex acts, the *fellatio* and ejaculation scenes are graphic but edited to avoid the climactic rhythms of pornography.

The piano music of Michael Nyman, at the eighth concert, precedes her announcement that she is leaving to go back to America and what constitutes the last sex scene of the film. At the beginning of the film, Matt had casually asked her if they would ever make love without a condom; she replied no. We therefore duly see the last act of penetration, the condom still in place, because it symbolizes Lisa's control over events. There is only the faintest hint of an instability in Lisa, but her wildness is indissociable from her allure. We learn that until the day of her departure, she has never let Matt visit her flat. Ultimately, we (and Matt) find her nature unreadable: every orifice of her body has been explored by Matt (and the camera) yet her nature remains occluded, private. The sex acts themselves finally remain unrevealing, they are opaque, they fail to define the state of the relationship—we cannot discriminate sexual abandonment from consolation or pity sex, if that is indeed what is going on. In that sense, *9 Songs* enacts the detachment of sex from emotional commitment or economic and social manoeuvrings, two domains in which it often operates in narrative cinema. The film posits a state of post-intimacy, beyond sex. Matt's familiarity with her body leads to neither possession nor knowledge. His lack of progress is symbolized by the ninth song, "Love Burns," sung by the same performers as the first, Black Rebel Motorcycle Club. Lisa's privacy is more represented by her inviolable apartment and her unshared friends than by her body, which she has readily shared. *9 Songs* demystifies and materializes sex as a social practice, putting it alongside the many acts of eating, drinking, drug-taking, dancing and concert-going which constitute normal, even mundane, behaviour. It singularly fails to ascribe to it the redemptive or transcendental features, or the will to those features, that we find in most art-house treatments.

Instead the film naturalizes the stages of loss of affect. It is assisted in this by the film's other metaphor, apart from song. Matt is a polar scientist and his work takes him to the Antarctic wastes. Metaphors of blankness and coldness are laid over the functioning relationship, as well as during its demise. Over images of Matt snowshoeing over a hill in Antarctica, he says of the place: "Claustrophobia and agoraphobia in the same place, like two people in a bed." Later on, relationships are likened to icebergs. When attached to the icecap, they trap for perpetuity the climatic record of all lived human history; once detached, they take just two weeks to melt in open

sea. This detachment is the enemy of all intimacy. The art-house film looks to find intimacy in confinement to and absorption in the physical act itself. But, discovering themselves thwarted by a natural abatement of sexual desire, even in the face of multiple and ingenious techniques of arousal, or by its unavoidable dilution in life's other social claims, our sexual pioneers have been driven towards death. More recently, however, a moody shrug is all they can manage. Nothing much has been learnt or seems "knowable" from sex in these films; their achievement is partly to show that they have no time for the clearly false gratifications of pornography.

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Sex-speare vs. Shake-speare[3]: On Nudity and Sexuality in Some Screen and Stage Versions of Shakespeare's Plays

ABSTRACT

The article attempts to address the issue of nudity and eroticism in stage and screen versions of Shakespeare's plays. Elizabethan theatrical conventions and moral and political censorship of the English Renaissance did not allow for an explicit presentation of naked bodies and sexual interactions on stage; rather, these were relegated to the verbal plane, hence the bawdy language Shakespeare employed on many occasions. Conventions play a significant role also in the present-day, post-1960s and post-sexual revolution era, whereby human sexuality in Western culture is not just alluded to, but discussed and presented in an open manner. Consequently, nudity on stage and screen in versions of Shakespeare's plays has become more marked and outspoken. Indeed, in both filmic and TV productions as well as stage performances directors and actors more and more willingly have exposed human body and sexuality to the viewer/spectator. My aim is to look at such instances from the perspective of realism and realistic conventions that the three media deploy and the effect nudity/sex can have on the recipient. The conclusion is that theatre is most conventional and stark realism and directness of the message need to be carefully dosed. Similarly to the theatre, television, more specifically television theatre, is, too, a most direct genre, as television is inherently a live medium, the broadcasts of which occur here and now, in the present tense (ideally). Film is markedly different from the two previous forms of art: it is narrated in the past tense, thus creating a distance between what is shown and the viewer, and allowing for more literalness. Naturally, particular cases discussed in the article go beyond these rather simple divisions.

ABSTRACT

[3] During the recent 15th Shakespeare Festival in Gdańsk, theatrical events as well as the reconstruction of the Fencing School Elizabethan theatre have been advertized as "Shakes in the city" ["Szeks w wielkim mieście"]. The title of my article is certainly indebted to this pun.

The article is an attempt to address a rather controversial and debatable issue in Shakespearean criticism: the explicit presentation of sexually-informed (suggested) nudity. Shakespeare's plays abound in references to sexuality, both overt and covert. Eric Partridge's now classic book *Shakespeare's Bawdy* testifies to the critics' acknowledging that Shakespeare's morality did not meet the stereotypically Victorian standards. Even on the Elizabethan stage, subject to the strict political and moral censorship, verbal imaginings of nudity and sexuality, not only in the form of jokes, were paralleled to an extent by a visual representation of actors dressed in costumes imitating naked human skin. A faint echo of this practice can be found in present-day theatre when actors put on flesh-coloured apparel which stands for nakedness. Early film versions of Shakespeare's plays appear to perpetuate the Victorian approach to the touchy sexual innuendoes in the Bard's *oeuvre*: in Percy Stow's *The Tempest* (1908) Caliban, rather than attempting to rape Miranda, declares his love of her by placing the palms of his hands on his heart (it is quite curious why the director decided to include this scene in his rather short film, a scene that is only *reported* in the play). In Sven Gade and Heinz Schall's silent *Hamlet* (1921) with the then famous Danish actress Asta Nielsen in the role of the Prince even gender switching does not hinder a by-the-book treatment of love and sexuality (no explicit nudity allowed, of course), yet one of the final scenes presents unsuspecting Horatio placing his hand on the dead Hamlet's heart (i.e., breast) and discovering to his horror that Hamlet is a woman! Here, we deal with a fairly explicit sexual reference, actually shown on screen. In the post-sexual-revolution era the directors of Shakespeare's dramas have been granted greater freedom in the treatment of nudity and sexuality. Yet, there is allegedly a marked difference between representing sexuality on stage and on screen; furthermore, cinema and television do not treat sexual nudity, or nudity in general, in the same way. On top of it, one needs to consider the canonical, indeed, special status of Shakespeare in Western culture: on the one hand, the tradition of Bardolatry, on the other, approaching his works as litmus paper helping sound the contemporaneous problems. If it so happens that among them is human sexuality, so be it.

As a result, I would like to address the issues of realism and convention on screen and stage, the (ab/mis)use of sexuality in screen and stage versions of Shakespeare's plays, as well as crossing and/or maintaining the borders of filmic/televisual/theatrical provocation by exposing the viewers/spectators to scenes of nudity and/or explicit sexuality. I will

exemplify this discussion with a selection of screen and stage productions of Shakespeare's plays containing post-1960s treatment of sex and nudity. As one may expect, it would be rather difficult to cover the rich variety of both stage and screen productions and thus offer any conclusive inferences. One should be especially cautious in view of the frequent practice of blending media on both stage and screen whereby conventions become blurred, which opens room for a more or less explicit presentation of sexuality. Therefore, I have excluded from the discussion productions in which such blends prevail, focusing on examples which allow for a more unequivocal generic/media allocation, which—consequently—helps establish the kind of realistic conventions deployed in them.

I would like to begin the discussion of Shakespeare and nudity and sexuality with a brief overview of the concepts of realism and conventions and their applicability to stage performances, TV theatre productions and films. There are many definitions and understandings of the concept of realism in art in general and in literature in particular. A rather tentative and general idea concerning the use of realism in art has been proposed by Corner and Ang: "empirical realism" (likeness of setting, social action and ostensible theme) and "formal realism" (formal conventions). Ang also lists one more form of realism: "emotional realism" which he defines as "deep-level resonances with the emotional organization of the viewer," helping to "link the text and experience in a way which fits the data" (Ang 44; qtd. in Corner 101). Ang's concept becomes a useful tool in the present discussion in which I will often need to refer to the recipient's emotional response to the production, or his/her acceptance or rejection of the deployed realism convention and its generic/medial suitability.[1]

Film and television are not equally realistic; paradoxically, it is film that is less realistic than television in that the ideal function of the latter is to show in a live coverage what happens in front of the camera lens, without any other intervention or preparation for the shooting. Now, behind such an approach there lies an assumption that TV material does not undergo any editing (which is not true, of course) and is always broadcast live, happens in the now, the present (which is only partially true). Furthermore, even if a broadcast is aired live, it is transmitted by a number of cameras, as is the case with sports events, and the director of the show decides which perspective will be presented on screen. So, in fact, the broadcast is edited although—unlike the cinema—the editing occurs in front of our eyes.

[1] I am aware of the fact that any debate about reception should call for at least a survey of the spectators'/viewers' opinions. Yet, a critic is also a recipient of a production who should moreover be conscious of his/her prejudices and limitations. It is from this position, occasionally assisted by reviews, that I will interpret the productions discussed in this article.

Nevertheless, such editing is markedly different from a filmic montage. In other words, we could treat television as a live report of certain events. It is its convention (formal realism) and perhaps a more profound form of empirical realism than film (again, in its ideal form). If we borrow Ang's concept of "emotional realism" and modify it, we could then say that television brings about a sense of directness, so well illustrated by the metaphor of television as a window which overlooks the real world surrounding us. This sense of directness is even present in those telegenic forms which lie halfway between stage and cinema, such as television theatre, even in its latest, rather cinematic form (with the more extensive use of cutting and montage and the productions being first filmed/recorded and shown at a later date). When comparing film and television theatre, Limon remarks, "With the television's theatre's 'artificiality' and conventionality it [paradoxically] becomes as if more real, since it produces an illusion of the now (and, in this way, an illusion of voyeurism)" (96). Consequently, the presentation of nudity on television is more real (or: realistic) than on the big screen; the basic reason for it is that the viewer is constantly aware of the double status of the fictitious figure: that of the character and that of the actor/actress playing the character in the quasi-theatrical performance that is relayed by television (which thus makes it doubly fictitious, without, however, enlarging the distance!). The enhanced sense of the presence of the actor results from the directness of the medium.[2]

On stage the situation is quite similar: the spectator directly faces a figure and the actor/actress playing them (the empirical persons). As a result, one more aspect of the television art must be considered here, too: the distance between the viewer and the set. It is rather close; the contact is termed by TV theoreticians as intimate, which of course is concordant with the idea of the directness of the viewer's exposure to the performance. Accordingly, explicit nudity on television should be viewed as rather unwelcome, as it may be a source of discomfort for the viewer since they do not conform to his/her horizon of expectations and sense of emotional realism. The viewer finds him/herself in the position of a voyeur secretly watching from a close distance what is considered in Western culture a most intimate and private aspect of human life (of course, the situation is even more difficult when a sexual activity is shown).

Television theatre is a very specific medium also in that its convention leaves room for such an unrealistic and artificial element as verse dialogues that "pretend" to reflect everyday communication, which is also true about the theatrical stage. The symbolism of the stage and television

[2] Conversely, on film the distance is greater and the recipient is focused more on figures impersonated by actors than actors themselves.

set (no matter whether studio-, location- or stage-based) runs rather counter to an explicit and realistic presentation of violence, nudity or sex (or the three of them). A good example illustrating this thesis can be the scene of Lavinia's rape in Monika Pęcikiewicz's production of *Titus Andronicus* (2006) from the Gdańsk Teatr Wybrzeże, in which music and symbolic movement of the actors, not even faintly reminiscent of the overt brutality of rape, conveys a message shocking enough for the audience. Lavinia is dragged up a ladder by Demetrius and Chiron to a dark opening above the stage, where they finally, after a great deal of physical effort, disappear. In this case, the reliance on Shakespeare's language and a unique manner of showing both physical and psychological pain caused by the rape and mutilation contribute to the effect of emotional realism expected and accepted by the audience.

Alternatively, the presentation of Desdemona getting ready for bed before she is strangled by her husband in the 1981 *Othello* directed by Andrzej Chrzanowski is more explicit—Joanna Pacuła is stripped naked by Emilia before she puts on her nightgown behind a semitransparent veil. In the case of this particular production, due to a financial crisis sweeping across Polish television, the set was exceptionally bare (which, incidentally, was quite concordant with the television theatre aesthetics) and in the scene in question it is partitioned by loosely hanging veils delineating the space of Othello and Desdemona's bedroom. It should be emphasized, however, that Desdemona's nudity is only to a degree marked sexually (hers and Othello's marriage is to be finally consummated) and the image of the naked woman is blurred by the veil, which makes it less explicit.

This is not the only instance when nudity appears in Polish telegenic productions of Shakespeare's plays. Two other teleplays, both original television theatre productions rather than filmed stage performances, were shot on location: Łukasz Barczyk's *Hamlet* (2004) set in the milieu of the old Wieliczka salt-mine and Jan Englert's *Julius Caesar* (2005) set in, among others, the main library of the University of Warsaw. The setting matters here as the teleplays clearly move away from the television studio into location, which apparently may facilitate a departure from the conventions prevalent so far. Now, the fact that Barczyk decided to shoot his *Hamlet* in the shafts and pits of an old salt mine does not affect much the rather traditional poetics of television theatre and the conventions it relies upon as well as the sense of directness, signalled above. For these reasons, Kamila Baar's Ophelia appearing stark naked in the scene of her madness seems definitely strange and out of place. This has been noted by critics, too: Olga Katafiasz cannot find any explanation for exposing the character's nudity (112). If it were meant to signify Ophelia's madness and vulnerability, then the sign is rather crude and unconvincing. One could recall

here the Elizabethan practice whereby madness was marked by dishevelled hair and a nightgown, not nudity; indeed, a naked body in television theatre is too literal, it affects the sense of emotional realism and produces the effect of voyeurism, due to the illusion of directness and intimacy caused by the medium. This particular scene in Shakespeare's text is loaded with sexual innuendoes; an explicit presentation of the naked body of a young woman is quite superfluous on stage or television set.[3] At the same time, the idea of sexuality is presented in the production in other, less ostensible ways: before his departure for France, Laertes enjoys the company of prostitutes, while one of the Players is a drag queen. These aspects of sexuality, however, are only signalled, perhaps suggesting the moral corruption of Denmark, a sense of decadence, whereas Ophelia's madness is rendered in a manner which the viewer may find difficult to accept, mainly because the medium (television theatre) prefers synecdoche and symbolism over literalness, which is true in more general terms about any stage.

Before we proceed any further, a remark is due: madness in Shakespeare's plays put on screen and stage has been marked by nudity: I would like to mention here, for example, Peter Brook's *King Lear*, in which Edgar when assuming the identity of Tom O'Bedlam, doffs his clothes and covers his naked body with mud. Likewise, in Lev Dodin's stage version of the same play, Lear's party, after the king goes mad, walks on stage stark naked (men only), which may function as a token of a world where traditional values are turned upside down and the characters search for new identities.[4] In a Spanish stage production of *Hamlet* directed by Jarosław Bielski (Réplika Teatro)[5] Ophelia's death is shown by the actress walking across the stage naked with a long veil on her body which, when she is about to leave the stage, slips off her body to the ground. Although both Brook and Dodin employ different media, Brook's film lacks the lavish use of many elaborate settings and comes close to what one may associate with both television art and, naturally, his theatrical experience. In other words, in both productions nudity appears as a special sign which draws attention to itself. Thanks to low-key lighting it is not exposed so obviously as in Barczyk's teleplay and thus makes the viewer/spectator shift their attention to what it could possibly signify. In the case of Bielski's small-scale performance, paradoxically, nudity is subjected to the symbolic convention that

[3] In the production of *Hamlet* directed by Jan Englert and shown on Polish television in 1985 (shot in a studio with filmic added scenes) Ophelia (Ewa Domańska) is dressed in a soiled nightgown; however, when she offers rue to Gertrude she thrusts it onto the latter's bosom and crotch, thus marking female sexuality. In this case, we deal with a sign rather than an explicit representation.

[4] The performance was presented at the 11th Shakespeare Festival in Gdańsk in 2007.

[5] Shown at the 12th Shakespeare Festival in Gdańsk in 2008.

the theatre deploys: the dying Ophelia, or to be more precise, her "dead" body, is clothed in a shroud, which subsequently functions as the figure's earthly remnants. The body (of the actress) that substantiated Ophelia is gone and what is left is only the veil/shroud on the ground, a metonymy of the character's corpse.

The above discussion shows that the concept of madness can be illustrated by mad characters in the nude. It seems that it works for *King Lear*, less so for *Hamlet* (should the Prince go naked, too?).[6] Interestingly enough, in her version of *Hamlet*, Monika Pęcikiewicz also had her Ophelia strip half-naked; however, under different circumstances: she appears such to Hamlet in the nunnery scene. The idea is that Polonius uses his daughter as a bait to elicit from Hamlet the reasons for his strange conduct. Pęcikiewicz's Polonius, dressed like a Catholic priest, prostitutes Ophelia to achieve his ends[7]; he makes her take off her bra and then pushes her towards Hamlet. In turn, in the scene of madness Ophelia wears a long, white gown (quite Elizabethan in nature) and kills herself with a dagger; that is, she attempts to do so: the gown is soaked with what looks like blood; a huge puddle is soon formed on the stage. Ophelia does not die, though; instead, she takes off her gown only to reveal underneath plastic bags that contained the blood-looking liquid. This scene is a good illustration of the director's (and actors') distance to both the play and the characters, a sort of metatheatrical comment on how to transform an Elizabethan play into present-day popular culture. Due to this distance, which is characteristic of the whole of the performance, Pęcikiewicz keeps at bay the viewer's possible emotional response, which thus becomes more detached, while nudity appears to be less controversial.

Such a distance is necessary in a theatre which relies on convention and symbolism; in the case of this production, Pęcikiewicz appears to experiment with convention and "empirical realism" as well as "emotional realism." But this experiment does not cross the bounds of the kind of realism called for on the stage: by providing the parenthesis of distancing devices the director was given some room to introduce a more direct representation which is treated by the recipient as yet another sign and not a literal demonstration. Consequently, it does not violate the theatrical conventions. Furthermore, Ophelia's nudity is justified in the production because the character after the encounter with Hamlet hurriedly picks up

[6] As it was actually the case in Nicolai Kolyada's and Radosław Rychcik's *Hamlet*s shown at the 15th Shakespeare Festival in Gdańsk in 2011; in both cases, however, it is difficult to explain the figures' nudity by means of real or pretended madness.

[7] It is congruent with Hamlet's equivocal address to Ophelia's father: "You are a fishmonger," which may suggest that Polonius prostitutes his daughter.

articles of clothing to cover her bare breasts and leaves the stage, thus clearly ashamed of the humiliation caused by Polonius.

Perhaps a similar idea underlay the overall concept of the television version of *Julius Caesar* (2005) directed by Jan Englert, already mentioned above. On the one hand, Englert draws on the poetics of television theatre in stressing the verbal plane and the dialogues and using synecdoche, as in the scene of Caesar's murder in which senators wear over their modern suits long scarves draped to resemble Roman togas. Likewise, the vast spaces of the Library of the University of Warsaw function as the Forum Romanum. This symbolism is intertwined with a more literal realism: the interior of a television studio (for the sake of a political debate), a shopping mall, a pub, etc. where Roman/Polish citizens spend their time. One such location is Caesar's villa, with a small swimming pool, a token of Caesar's status, on the one hand, and Roman-ness, on the other. It is in this swimming pool that Caesar takes a swim,[8] surrounded by the senators, before he sets out for the Senate, where he will be murdered. In the Roman fashion, the actor is stark naked; he quickly slips into the pool so the nudity is not much exposed, yet it is quite palpable and realistic. The special nature of the scene is the fact that the senators are there all along and wait patiently for Caesar to finish swimming. The scene, thus, by employing nudity in a specific context, is another extension of Roman-ness, perhaps a kind of cliché, yet one which effectively conveys this notion to the viewer. The idea of Roman-ness provides a distancing device whereby the nudity can be acceptable to the viewer and may be concordant with the spirit of Shakespeare's original. At the same time, it needs to be stressed that nudity in this particular production is not associated with sexuality; rather it points at a different approach to naked human body in ancient Roman times (thus informing the illusion of Roman-ness).

These examples clearly suggest that stage theatrical and television theatrical conventions rely to a degree on symbolism, or, shall we say, formal realism, whereby the artist and the recipients of their work agree on certain forms of artistic expression which are meant to stand for reality. Such conventions do not call for literalness, in spite of the fact that both types of theatre belong to performing arts which show rather than tell (which of course can also be contested when one recalls the significance of the verbal plane in drama, especially Shakespearean drama, as well as the narrative element provided by the camera in television theatre).

[8] Which reminds one of the executive swim the CEO of the Denmark Corporation (Kyle McLachlan) had in Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000) in the presence of both Gertrude and Polonius.

Before proceeding to film proper, I would like to discuss yet one instance from stage theatre—Monika Pęcikiewicz's (again) *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Some critics hailed it as "post-sexual" ("Postseksualny i postuczuciowy")[9]; Aneta Kyzioł in her review called it "a gymnastic erotic layout"; one could enumerate more such responses to the performance. All of them appear justified: what is almost a handbook version of a romantic comedy is entirely deprived of its romantic appeal.[10] Instead, we have a film set, allegedly providing a distancing device, and an introduction, which in fact turns out to be a film.[11] In the film the spectator/viewer witnesses the process of casting for the roles in the play, in which candidates are exposed to rather extreme ends: they are coupled and told to undress as well as express their sexuality. A film is set in the past; it uses the past tense, which—in the theatre—is particularly important. Such a device allegedly provides a most powerful distancing device. Yet, a spectator does not go to the theatre to watch characters in films but live actors on stage. When the former is translated into the latter, we are in trouble: Pęcikiewicz does her best to make the viewer believe that they are not *in the theatre*, yet she fails. Since the principle is "rape whatever can be raped," physical violence, this time without nudity, yields to something one would associate with the screen, not the stage. Nevertheless, the spectator is watching a stage performance, not a film; the effect, thus, is rather discomforting.

Nudity does appear in another production, presented at the 14th Shakespeare Festival in Gdańsk in 2010. When Viola in *Twelfth Night* directed by Michał Borczuch (the Jan Kochanowski Theatre from Opole) crossdresses to protect herself in Illyria, she actually exchanges clothing with one of the sailors—they both strip naked and she puts on his attire. One could question the necessity for such a solution in a performance in which symbolic representation is very often employed. However, the director used a kind of distancing device for this particular scene: since the acting area includes part of the auditorium, he has the actors occupy the most distant rows of seats, distant from the spectators' perspective. A possible explanation for introducing nudity into this performance could be an attempt to highlight Viola's vulnerability, the fact that she, a young, lonely girl, is truly exposed to a most serious danger in Illyria. The change of clothing is both asexual and sexual, in that the figure undresses only to put on men's apparel, which in turn is to protect her against rape, a motif that haunts Shakespearean

[9] No indication of the author in the electronic sources I have consulted: see bibliography.

[10] Which may be a result of a problem a present-day reader of Shakespeare may have with the very serious threats Egeus issues with reference to his daughter, Hermia, or the confusions which the Athenian lovers partake in (I will return to this problem later on).

[11] Pęcikiewicz quite willingly resorts to multimedia performances; cf. her *Hamlet*.

crossdressing but is never fully articulated. Paradoxically, then, the actress's nudity (Aleksandra Cwen) becomes a token of the violation of the character's intimacy in order to avoid a more grievous intrusion into it.

Furthermore, this scene (and another, in which Viola appears half naked) serves a most concrete purpose: to make the spectator realize that Shakespearean romantic comedy is quite different from its Hollywood counterpart, and to rid the performance of the fairy-tale-like atmosphere that is sometimes generated in stage or screen productions (cf. Nunn's film).

It seems that no justifications for the introduction of more explicit nudity and/or sexuality are needed when it comes to film, which—like a photograph—records what is past and narrates in the past tense, just like the novel (the same is true about a television film, see ShakespeaRetold[12]). As a result, the distance between the viewer and the film is by definition, as it were, quite safe. Yet, critics even in the post-sexual-revolution era find it difficult to deal with overt sexuality and nudity; the late Kenneth Rothwell in his seminal *A History of Shakespeare on Screen* quotes a reviewer who referred to Celestino Coronado's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1985) "as having 'plenty of uninhibited nudity' and 'a fairy king and queen [who] are splendidly campy characters'" (194). Nudity—that of the fairies as well as of the Athenian lovers—is not the only element that characterizes this anti-Hollywood and anti-establishment voice in the cinema of the 1980s. Coronado and Lindsay Kemp (who plays the part of Puck) cast the blind Incredible Orlando as Titania (drawing on the actor's homosexual reputation) and have Lysander and Hermia actually make love in the Athenian wood. They go even further: after Puck's intervention, the naked Lysander successfully chases Demetrius (because he saw Demetrius first after waking up), while Hermia makes love to Helena! The camp and sexually loaded atmosphere of the film is, however, framed in the milieu of ballet and operatic conventions: Titania and Oberon virtually sing arias, and there are many ballet sequences, especially in the scenes with the fairies. These conventions shed a strange light on the use of nudity and sexuality; being highly symbolic (opera), the conventions may appear to run counter to the literal presentation of the naked bodies. However, the language of ballet is not human voice but human body whose shape and form is only underlined by the tight ballet attire. As a result, it seems only natural that naked human body be fully exposed, which runs counter to traditional opera relying so heavily on signs rather than literalness. The introduction

[12] ShakespeaRetold is a BBC miniseries produced in 2005 and comprized of four films based on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Macbeth*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. The idea of the series was that Shakespeare's plays were modernized and their action set in modern Britain. For the purpose of the present discussion, ShakespeaRetold is an example of television films rather than teleplays.

of the elements of opera and ballet, both defying, as it were, typical filmic realism, renders the atmosphere of the movie eerie and unrealistic, most suitable for the feats of magic which the play abounds in. Consequently, nudity and sexuality can be more explicitly shown in Coronado's film, not only thanks to the realism the medium deploys but the distancing devices it uses as well.

Interestingly enough, another camp-movie that Coronado's film certainly looks back and is indebted to, Derek Jarman's (in)famous *The Tempest* (1979), also resorts to certain conventions, shall we say, musical ones. As Kenneth Rothwell reminds us, "several dozen men in white sailor suits along with [Elisabeth] Welch [a black blues singer] as soloist do a ragged song-and-dance routine of 'Stormy Weather'" (197). This scene concludes the film, but expresses quite well a most eerie and oneiric atmosphere that pervades the movie. It is in such atmosphere that the viewer sees Caliban (the Incredible Orlando, or Jack Birckett, again) watch half-naked Miranda washing. When she spots him, they exchange meaningful glances and laugh. The musical conventions function as a distancing device, preventing the viewer from assuming the state of "willing suspension of disbelief" and thus making them treat the events shown on screen as unreal, whereas any scenes containing at least a hint of sexuality, scenes of nudity, are relieved of such potential thanks to such distancing devices, often leading to comic effects. The scene discussed above certainly can be considered comic; to a degree, the spectacular image of naked Caliban sucking on naked Sycorax's breast (Sycorax is stylized here like the Venus of Willendorf) is comedic, also in that it can be treated as a parody of motherhood.

The most explicit and conspicuous example of nudity shows, however, Ferdinand, walking out of the sea, cold and wet, who—when he reaches Prospero's mansion—curls up shivering on the floor. Let me emphasize the fact that this scene, and the ones presented above, are further framed in the specific atmosphere (after all, at the very beginning of the film we learn that it is conceived of as a projection of Prospero's dream),[13] which, too, distances the viewer from what is shown; as a result, the presentation of nudity appears to be by all means acceptable. Prospero's dream is marked in the film by the specific low-key lighting, use of chiaroscuro and the aesthetics of ugliness and decay. The latter aspect of the film's aesthetics is another element ensuring the viewer's distance to nudity and sexuality: since Jarman contested the mainstream culture, including Hollywood cinema, he explicitly deprives his characters of the traditional

[13] A similar device is used by Coronado in his *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—it is Puck who dreams what we see on screen.

sexual appeal. Ferdinand's body is additionally desexualized by the use of the blue filter whereby the shots on location, which constitute a sort of a dream-within-a-dream, are monochromatic and evoke an illusion of cold and gloominess, leaving hardly any space for sexuality.

Certainly this is not true about Kenneth Branagh's epic *Hamlet*, in which, "Alas, poor Ophelia," one might like to paraphrase the Prince's exclamation, Kate Winslet is shown making love to Branagh's Hamlet in one of the numerous flashbacks (the director does not use nudity to indicate madness). Although Branagh transposes the action of the play to the nineteenth century (which may remind the recipient of Victorian morality), he produces a film for the sake of the late-twentieth-century viewer, who, as a result of the director's decision, has no doubts about the nature of Hamlet and Ophelia's relationship. However, since the film was meant to be screened to the widest possible audience, nudity is rather suggested than explicitly presented, in a Hollywood style and practically limited to flashbacks, a filmic convention which defies empirical realism, constituting a film-within-a-film sequence.[14]

Nudity and sexuality are also deployed by Oliver Parker in his *Othello*, in which the Moor of Venice is haunted by flashbacks of his wife's allegedly having sex with Cassio. In order to emphasize the effectiveness of Iago's scheming and the state of Othello's mind the scene that the Moor imagines must, too, be visualized for the viewer realistically. Where Branagh used flashbacks to inform the viewer about the "state of affairs," Parker exploits them in a different way: to mark off the filmic reality from Othello's imaginings of what never occurred between Cassio and Desdemona. Both ways of employing flashbacks, however, are filmic devices showing the working of a character's mind (memories and imagination),[15] providing the viewer, too, with a distance to presented events.

One could say that Franco Zeffirelli was in this respect less conservative, as he did not hesitate to show the teenage Olivia Hussey's breasts or Leonard Whiting's buttocks in his highly realistic version of *Romeo*

[14] Branagh's film abounds in flashbacks and flash-cuts, which Bernice Kliman referred to as "flashcut excess." The flashbacks and flash-cuts are, however, quite congruent with the epic dimension of the film and do provide a distancing device for the viewer.

[15] There is a fundamental difference between the presentation of memories in Branagh's film and Othello's imaginings in Parker's movie, which affect the kind of distance produced by the flashbacks. In the former, the viewer sees both Hamlet and Ophelia making love, although it is suggested that these memories are recalled by *one* character only, so a more realistic shot would include a limited perspective and a hand-held camera, for example. Consequently, the viewer's distance to the presentation of sexuality is enhanced. In the latter, Othello may imagine both characters making love as his perspective is that of an observer, not participant, a kind of voyeur. However, the viewer is aware of the fact that this does not belong to the film's reality.

and Juliet (1968). Zeffirelli did that, however, in the height of the sexual revolution, which ushered in greater freedom in the manner sexuality was presented in Western culture, including film. The director drew on the revolution in two ways: one, he presented two very young characters rebelling against the establishment and, two, implementing this rebellion in the realm of love, also physical love, which—in the case of the film—needed to run counter to the thitherto prevailing Hollywood norms. Another reason for introducing nudity and sexuality in the film is Zeffirelli's reputation as an utter realist; consequently, one is not surprised to find not only teenagers cast in the eponymous roles but overt sexuality of the young lovers as well. The presentation of nudity and sexuality in the film is thus justified, too, by the overall poetics of the director's style.

Zeffirelli sought realism in his film productions also in that he paid attention to historical details, which he combined with, shall we say, modern morality and latest film trends.[16] Realism is what Michael Radford attempted to achieve in his *The Merchant of Venice* (2005). Unlike Zeffirelli's, however, Radford's style appears utterly conservative, in the vein of most traditional Hollywood industry, combined with a care for political correctness.[17] In his search of a convincingly realistic image of Venice, the director, having researched the historical material, introduces prostitutes onto Venetian streets, who—as a sign of their profession—walk bare-breasted. These characters are introduced into the movie not only to symbolize the moral corruption of Venice and to satisfy the director's desire for historical accuracy, but also to highlight Shylock's plight: when he walks around the city desperately looking for Jessica, it is only the prostitutes who feel pity for the distraught father (as opposed to the well-off Venetian citizens, their clients). Here, the sexuality of the prostitutes is toned down by, on the one hand, the historical facts that the director refers to and, on the other, the tearful and simplistic presentation of Shylock's misfortune.

Film is a very realistic medium, therefore nudity and sexuality are often presented in an explicit manner. Interestingly enough, it is a convention that a viewer has long got used to. Today, one accepts the actor's or actress's naked body on screen as a natural and obvious element of the film and expression of, among others, human sexuality. The changes in

[16] This is visible, too, in his version of *Hamlet* (1990), in which he recreated a medieval castle, set action in the austere scenery of the North of Europe and cast an action-movie actor, Mel Gibson, as the Prince.

[17] This was perhaps Radford's way of dealing with a difficult play in the post-Holocaust era; according to Małgorzata Sugiera, "two plays by Shakespeare are in particular controversial now, calling for ideological corrections . . . *The Taming of the Shrew* and . . . the anti-Semitic *Merchant of Venice*" (7, my translation). For more, see Fabiszak ("Are We Being Politically Correct Yet").

the Western approach to sexuality following the sexual revolution of the 1960s as well as the distance that the camera provides and the nature of film as a narrative in the past tense contribute to our acceptance of scenes of overt nudity and sex. It is less obvious, as I hope it transpires from the discussion above, in the case of stage or television theatre, which rely to a greater degree on artifice and symbolism; but for anybody who has been following the development of the Polish theatre, for example, it has become obvious that nudity is employed more and more often to a better or worse effect. When combined with Shakespeare's classic drama, one is not surprised that the Bard goes bawdy; after all, his plays must be updated in performances and screen productions, made topical to help directors address present-day issues. Let us note that such changes are not only characteristic of how Shakespeare's plays are shown on stage or screen but also how the texts of the plays have been altered or translated into other languages, in the case of productions in languages other than English. When it comes to Polish, translations have been most of the time quite Victorian in nature, with the exception of Maciej Słomczyński's and Stanisław Barańczak's ones, although only to a degree. My guess is that the degree results from Victorian-like morals, on the one hand, and, on the other, the genuine meaning of the terms in Early Modern English, a meaning that cannot be completely determined.

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Body, Sensuousness, Eros and the New Aesthetic Order from Schiller to Rushdie[1]

ABSTRACT

In the present article, I look into the culture-building power of Eros from Schiller's ideas of "the aesthetic state of mind" in *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, through the Pre-Raphaelites' eroticism to the nineteenth-century *fin de siècle* aestheticized homoeroticism and beyond. I argue that eroticism is a reaction to the increasing sense of alienation brought about by bourgeois modernity. The "moments" and texts used to illustrate the thesis that eroticism shaped an alternative order are far from exhausting a very large list which could add nuances to the argument. The body is one of the essential aspects tackled, since eroticism cannot be conceived in its absence. The body may be an object of desire around which imagination weaves its yarn, or a blank page to be inscribed, or a danger zone, or a hypertrophied space projected by the lover's longing for fusion. Eroticism in Salman Rushdie's novels is the focus of my approach after a survey of some landmarks of erotic imagination. I argue that his novels are a new stage of the imagination infused by Eros. The article probes into how two centuries of aesthetic modernity have been shaped by the reality principle proposed by Schiller and how that essentially erotic model has suffered changes in time.

ABSTRACT

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The Perils of the Modern Age and the Aesthetic Reshaping of Civilization

The modern age is marked by a growing sense of insecurity, disorder and looseness, which reach severe forms of violence and oppression lurking under the glossy surface of order, justice, democracy and progress. There are even moments and longer periods when the dark side of the modern seems to prevail.

In *The Gay Science*, first published in 1882, through the parable of the madman searching for God, Nietzsche declared that God was dead at the hands of human murderers, and in the aftermath of this affirmation the predicament of the modern individual and society has been to manage without a transcendental dimension in an age plagued by two world wars, conflicts, a cold war, followed by many other local and global outbursts of violence. A less overtly pernicious side of the modern is insidious consumerism, whose "collateral damage"[2] is analyzed by Zygmunt Bauman in his most recent book.

Long before Nietzsche, in 1795, Friedrich Schiller had felt and expressed the urgent need that modern civilization be reshaped according to a new reality principle. In *Eros and Civilization,* Herbert Marcuse argues that in *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Schiller, under the impact of Imannuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, aimed at "a remaking of civilization by virtue of the liberating force of the aesthetic function" (180). Marcuse shows that this aesthetic solution to the problem of the modern individual and civilization, which started to take shape in the mid-eighteenth century with the emergence and development of aesthetics, was a reaction to the predominance in European culture of Prometheus, "the archetype-hero of the performance principle" (161). Being such an archetype, Prometheus crystallized centuries of a culture which valued productivity, progress and reason through the repression of any truths that ran contrary to its principle. In opposition to that, the discipline of aesthetics and the aesthetic dimension, which is so crucial in Kant's philosophy, rely on sensuousness. The archetypes of this dimension are, according to Marcuse, Orpheus and Narcissus, who are "symbols of a non-repressive erotic attitude toward reality" (167).

When Schiller wrote his *Letters* in late eighteenth century, the pressing need for reshaping, and thus healing civilization was also voiced by Herder, Hegel and Novalis, who developed the concept of "alienation" in order

[2] In *Collateral Damage: Social Inequalities in a Global Age* (2011), Zygmunt Bauman furthers his theory of "liquid modernity," launched in 2000. Bauman shows that consumerism liquefies the solidity of the individual and of community by seducing us in a very insidious way.

to draw attention to the alarming dehumanizing effects of a mechanized system. Against alienating technology, only a new liberating model could heal the wounds of the modern individual and civilization. Therefore, all these writers and philosophers embarked on a quest for an aesthetic solution to a political problem. Indeed, if viewed from this angle, their aesthetics had deep political implications. In the nineteenth century, the modern continued to develop along these two contrasting principles, which in *Five Faces of Modernity* Matei Călinescu considers to be two sides of a dualistic modernity: one is bourgeois and the other aesthetic.

Orpheus and Narcissus, Eros and Creation

Orpheus, who is at the same time committed to the underworld, and therefore to Thanatos, has the power to set the world free through song. Thus, he becomes the archetype of the poet as both liberator and creator. According to Marcuse, Narcissus, and the whole set of attitudes deriving from his archetypal stance which is called "narcissism," "denotes a fundamental relatedness to reality which may generate a comprehensive existential order" (169). It is through this liberating and non-repressive principle and through these two archetypes that aesthetics opposes the performance principle, which underpins technological progress, whose consequences proved to be gradually and seriously dehumanizing.

The discipline of aesthetics installs an order of sensuousness, which is essentially corporeal, against the order of reason; its underlying logic is the logic of gratification against that of repression. However, as Marcuse argues, the fatal enemy of lasting gratification is time, and the Orphic and Narcissistic model is one of beauty which cancels the flow of time, arresting and transfixing its flux.

The Orphic and the Narcissistic complete each other in a model of erotic harmony and fusion: a balance is struck between the objective and the subjective world, between the individual and nature within and without. Through song, Orpheus defeats death, the great enemy, "so that the constrained and constraining matter releases the beautiful and playful forms of animate and inanimate things" (Marcuse 194). Marcuse argues that, by reinforcing the logic of gratification, the liberating function of the aesthetic and its playful nature, Narcissus typifies "the erotic surrender to beauty" (194).

The Body, Sexuality and Eros

Marcuse speaks about the "self-sublimation of sexuality," which "implies that sexuality can, under specific conditions, create highly civilized human

relations without being subjected to the repressive organization which the established civilization has imposed upon the instinct" (204). The German philosopher argues that when sexuality is seen beyond its function of reproduction as a means of "obtaining pleasure from zones of the body," "the primacy of the genital function is broken" (205) and thus sexuality is conceptually transformed into Eros.

Thus, the whole body becomes the playing ground of Eros. Being a source and substance of Eros, its receptivity must intensify, its sensuousness must grow and its erogenous zones must be activated through play. As Marcuse shows, Plato's *Symposium* celebrates the sexual source and substance of spiritual things. Diotima alleges that Eros makes one beautiful body desire another and eventually all beautiful bodies. Relying on Plato's arguments and making the necessary connections, Marcuse contends that "there is an unbroken ascent in erotic fulfilment from the corporeal love of one to that of the others, to the love of beautiful work and play, and ultimately to the love of beautiful knowledge" (211). Eros has a culture-building power, which is non-repressive sublimation, and "the biological drive becomes a cultural drive" (Marcuse 212).

Eroticism, Death, Fusion, Dissolution and Transgression

According to Georges Bataille, erotic activity is the highest form of play and the very antithesis of work. Bataille sees it not only in opposition to work but also to reproduction. To a very large extent, the views of Marcuse and Bataille in what concerns Eros meet in the idea that Eros expects no return and is a form of self-surrender to a moment which, as both philosophers suggest, transfigures its temporariness, almost freezing the flux of time out of a desire to restore a lost unity.

Bataille argues that eroticism springs from our awareness of death, which is at the same time an awareness of our incompleteness, and this urges us to look for the only fusion we may achieve this side of the grave, in which both body and soul enter. Being fusion, erotic love is also dissolution and mingling. While animals respond to reproductive instincts when they have sex, humans crave for a deeper and more complex fusion through eroticism, which is an essential and defining human attitude. Both Marcuse and Bataille argue that eroticism is inextricably tied in with death. In a very subtle and ambivalent way, eroticism gives us an intimation of death and through it a glimpse into an imagined space beyond life and death.

Bataille insists on the transgressive nature of eroticism, which must break social order and conventions. Its transgressive spirit associates it with sorcery, and both are in "opposition to the established sacred order" (97). Since the lover feels the strong need to possess the beloved, and if

that is not or no longer possible, to kill rather than lose the object of one's passion, or even kill oneself, eroticism is intimately intertwined with violence and sacrifice. In rich metaphorical language, Bataille says that "the woman in the hands of her assailant is despoiled of her being. With her modesty she loses the firm barrier that once separated her from others and made her impenetrable" (102).

Nineteenth-Century Aestheticized Eroticism and Homoeroticism

The nineteenth century built on Schiller's ideas. An important landmark of its aestheticism was the Pre-Raphaelite movement. Set up in 1848, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was interested in literature and the arts at the same time. The Pre-Raphaelite artists contended that the British arts of their times were stale and boring, and their aim was to renew them and to restore their lost meaning. Not only did the Pre-Raphaelites emancipate painting from its academic conventionality, but they also freed the body from its prison. Religious scenes were rendered in a way in which Virgin Mary and Archangel Gabriel, for instance, appear as corporeal, as bodies under thin garments.

John Everett Millais's painting *Ophelia* draws on Shakespeare's *Hamlet.* After the death of her father, Polonius, mad and abandoned Ophelia, who gathers flowers and slips into a brook, is eventually dragged down to the murky depths by her garments. In Millais's painting, Ophelia's dressed body is almost completely immersed in water, her loose hair is under, flowers are swimming around, and only her face, the upturned palms of her hands and her breasts are above. In this painting, Ophelia's drowning body, and the "bodies" of the floating flowers soon to drown, immersed in the larger "body" of nature, express Ophelia's tragic fate, beautifying it. The body's immersion into water may be the equivalent of an erotic cosmic fusion and a return to the womb. The self-annihilation Ophelia could not achieve by fusing her body with her lover's is achieved through this self-annihilation into the larger body of nature, which is also a form of fusion.

In "Life-in-Love" Dante Gabriel Rossetti celebrates life in the body, and that body is not one's own but the lover's: "Not in thy body is thy life at all / But in this lady's lips and hands and eyes" ("The House of Life"). Rossetti echoed this eroticism in his paintings, and as the century progressed, Aestheticism grew more and more articulate in the views of the late-nineteenth-century artists.

Baudelaire's desire for sensuality, his constant probing into the relationship between art and life and into the nature of modern art in his

essay *The Painter of Modern Life*, and later Walter Pater's book *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry,* provided *fin de siècle* artists with an outline for their aestheticized eroticism. Baudelaire portrayed the charming, refined, seducing and decadent *dandy*, and in 1884 Joris-Karl Huysmans wrote *À rebours*, a refined novel of *fin de siècle* decadence, which emulated a whole generation of artists in "the naughty yellow 1890s" and whose lascivious and cynical aestheticism was echoed by Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a key text of art for art's sake and homoeroticism, which came out in 1891. The erotic desire in these *fin de siècle* novels was, in the Victorian cultural and social context dominated by homophobia, alarmingly transgressive. Basil in Wilde's novel aestheticizes homoeroticism in a codified manner, by relating it to a cultural ideal exalted by Walter Pater. He speaks about his desire for Dorian Gray filtering it through the Greek ideal of male beauty:

> Unconsciously he defines for me the lines of a fresh school, a school that is to have in it all the passion of the romantic spirit, all the perfection of the spirit that is Greek. The harmony of soul and body—how much that is! We in our madness have separated the two, and have invented a realism that is vulgar, an ideality that is void. Harry! If you knew what Dorian Gray is to me. (10)

Basil pleads for a new idealism, which draws not only on non-mimetic principles, but also on an essential homoerotic ideal of fusion between body and soul.

Body, Eros and Eroticism in Rushdie's Novels

In *Midnight's Children*, the novel where Rushdie felt he had found a voice through Saleem Sinai, the novel's narrator, there is a close connection not only between the individual and history, but also between his body and history, his body and the nation's, so that history leaks from Saleem's. However, the nation is divided, and so is the body. In the opening of *Midnight's Children*, Saleem's birth, a very corporeal act, coincides with "the precise instant of India's arrival at independence," but "there were gaps" (9). Through those gaps, Saleem's body "tumbled forth into the world," "mysteriously handcuffed to history." This first page is a retrospect: now Saleem is thirty-one years old, and his body feels "crumbled" and "overused." He tells his story against the clock to give it a meaning, which also means synthesis across gaps, fissures, crevices and new frontiers, because he admits that absurdity is what he fears most (9).

In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, the body of the Moor, the main character, who is also the novel's narrator, is a "megalopolis." In the hyperbolic key

which is possible in Rushdie's novel of magic realism, the Moor grows at the same pace as the city of Bombay and as fast as India, anyway too fast for a human body's biology to cope with the speed, echoing the nation's similar problems of coping with speed, hybridity and change. Sensual Aurora Zogoiby, the Moor's artist mother, portrays her son in a series of paintings, a lot of them murals which are palimpsestic evocations of an India as fantastic and hybrid as the Moor. When he describes Aurora's paintings, which are imaginary projections of a country called "Palempstine" or "Mooristan," the author uses ekphrasis on a large scale in order to aestheticize this imaginary place of the mind.[3] *The Moor's Last Sigh* is the novel in which Rushdie aestheticized his fiction through sublimation for the first time, a project he continued with self-conscious zeal in *The Ground beneath Her Feet* and *The Enchantress of Florence*.

The Ground beneath Her Feet is pervaded by the myth and model of Orpheus. Ormus Cama, the novel's key figure, is a rock'n'roll guitarist of Indian origin, who travels to England, starts a career there, and then leaves England for America to pursue it with his lover Vina Apsara by his side. Ormus is a mid- to late-twentieth-century Orpheus, whose music fuses the gaps of the novel's space, which is under permanent threat of devastating calamity. If Saleem in *Midnight's Children* fears absurdity, Ormus in *The Ground beneath Her Feet* fears the disaster of worlds in collision. He develops "double vision," and when he stops seeing the two worlds as separate, he imagines an apocalyptic end of the two colliding worlds. Ormus and Vina are in symbiotic connection, and it is only in song that they unite beyond tension, only through song that they manage to fuse a world full of crevices, fissures, gaps, and shaken by literal and metaphoric earthquakes. Vina herself is not only Eurydice, but a female Dionysus and Orpheus at the same time. The consuming passion of the two Orpheuses (Ormus and Vina) is the novel's core of meaning and strength. Ormus's developing asceticism sublimates their largely unconsumed sexual passion into song, while Vina's voice on the stage shouts her carnal desire, sublimating it into music. Apart from their passion sublimated into Orphic song, there is the sexual liaison between Vina and Rai Merchant, the novel's narrator, who sublimates it into his photographs and especially into the narrative of the novel. There is also the problematic but eventually triumphant love between Rai and Mira, a younger version of Vina.

Eroticism in the novel is polymorphous; sexuality is sublimated through the aesthetics of rock'n'roll, the soundtrack of the last decades

[3] For a more detailed approach to this aspect, see Dana Bădulescu, "Bolovanul istoriei se rostogoleşte în opera lui Salman Rushdie" at http://www.sferapoliticii.ro/sfera/164/art11-Badulescu.php.

of the twentieth century, which both shakes and fuses the world, which unites Vina and Ormus beyond this side of the grave, and which throws Mira into Rai's arms to love. *The Ground beneath Her Feet* sees the art of rock'n'roll not just as what it was in the last decades of the twentieth century, but it transforms it into a new aesthetic order. It is this order with its mythic Orphic roots that governs the world of the novel not through repression but through rock'n'roll performance and gratification.

In *Shalimar the Clown,* the potentially happy love between Boonyi and Shalimar the Clown, whose actual name is suggestively Noman, ends tragically. Their love starts as consuming passion, a form of Eros as Georges Bataille conceived it. Bataille argues that "above all it is *consumption* that joins individuals most closely" (100). Boonyi and Shalimar the Clown are attracted so inescapably and at such an early age that they defy and break all social norms. Their secret trysts are preceded by moments of erotic longing, and in the love-making scenes their bodies fuse with each other and also cosmically with nature, fulfilling the erotic dream of recovering a lost unity. Eventually, their secret is discovered and the community has to decide the measures to be taken against their transgression. The answer is marriage, but Boonyi is not happy with a limiting horizon, and she looks for satisfaction in a mirage offered by Max Ophuls, the American ambassador. Boonyi's infidelity sets Shalimar the Clown in a killing mood, which he projects as a possibility in their most passionate moments. The possessive need, which Bataille sees as linked with the idea of death, urges Boonyi's husband to pursue a carefully planned series of killings which ultimately lead him to his wife, his most wanted victim. As Bataille argues, "if the lover cannot possess the beloved, he will sometimes think of killing her; often he would rather kill her than lose her" (103).

The body itself is a danger zone in the novel. Although India/Kashmira's young and fresh body is caressed by her father, and the daughter treasures those memories, the shadow of death and the spectre of terrible danger hang over the father-daughter love. Indeed, Max Ophuls's life is cruelly terminated by Shalimar the Clown, leaving a large amount of their love unconsumed. Boonyi translates the geography of Kashmir into her love for her husband Shalimar the Clown's body, speaking about "his valleys, his gardens, his flowing streams, his flowers, his stags, his fish" (197). Echoing this way of encoding declarations of love and erotic pleasure into the charted geography of maps, Max's love for Boonyi, never reciprocated, turns her body into a map of his world, over which he makes public political declarations which put his career and even life in jeopardy. Boonyi's body when she is forty-four, just before she is killed by Shalimar the Clown, is "the story of her life" and she wants her husband "to read the book of her nakedness, before he did what he had come to do," and when he comes, Shalimar the

Clown reads her body and holds it "in his hands" (317–18). Boonyi strips herself naked for her husband, waiting for him, knowing that he will come to take his long-promised revenge and kill her. As Bataille argues, there is a close connection between love-making and sacrificial acts. It is this erotic connection that urges Boonyi's husband to cut his wife open with his knife, which is the killing weapon of his choice. Indeed, the knife is a weapon redolent with erotic symbolism since, as Bataille shows, eroticism "seeks intimate knowledge of nakedness—knowledge of the wound of physical being—whose opening deepens with each contact" (102). Boonyi's stripping herself naked in preparation for this sacrificial ritual is completed by Shalimar the Clown's stabbing of her body, which becomes an equivalent of love-making. In Bataille's terms, "the lover strips the beloved of identity no less than the blood-stained priest his human or animal victim" (102).

Rushdie's Ghostly Bodies

Bodies also dwell in other bodies in Rushdie's fiction. Parents' bodies can dwell in their children's bodies until their own bodies become ghostly. The ghost of a character can dwell in the body of another, turning it into a phantom. In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Aurora Zogoiby is "her dead mother's phantom, doing her deeds, speaking in her departed voice" (10). Belle's

> night-walking daughter was keeping her mother alive, giving up her own body for the departed to inhabit, clinging to death, refusing it, insisting on the constancy, beyond the grave, of love—that she had become her mother's new dawn, flesh for her spirit, two belles in one. (10)

The body of India/Kashmira in *Shalimar the Clown* is described as a beautiful reflection in the mirror. Mirror effects multiply in the sense that while looking at her own reflection on the glass surface, the young woman discovers that her body is the feminine version of her father's, and that frequently turns her on. Later in the novel, Shalimar the Clown sees Boonyi the mother in India/Kashmira the daughter, and he is deeply moved and perplexed. When she changes India for Kashmira, the name she finds out her mother gave her at birth, Kashmira discovers her mother's body inhabiting hers in moments when she grieves the loss of the mother. In other scenes she feels that both her now dead mother and father dwell in her body, and her double name seems to reflect their coexistence in her body. This capacity to accommodate several bodies in one makes the bodies of Rushdie's characters metamorphic, which is a condition the writer considers to be an essential feature of his hybrid and migrant characters. Indeed, it is important and charged with meanings: this doubleness or even

multifariousness of the body may also be read as palimpsestic, and the palimpsest has aesthetic and political connotations. Related to the body, the palimpsest is a metaphor of layers of meaning coexisting in the body of the text, in which the colonial past and postcolonial present coexist. Thus, the "ghostliness" of the characters' palimpsestic bodies adds to the rather sinister sense of the past haunting the present as a corporeal presence.

Rushdie's Eroticized Geography

Countries and cities read as lovers' bodies in Rushdie's fiction. In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, India is figured out as a mother, or else as the male character's first love, which can never be forgotten, no matter how hard one may try, and despite the bitter-sweet experiences it offered him in the "disorienting" story of *The Ground beneath Her Feet*. In the same novel, England is seen as a clutching lover called "Tar Baby," which keeps you in her strong grip, and never lets you go. Ormus calls it "stuck love" (276). However, urged by his woman-lover Vina, Ormus extricates himself from Tar Baby's strange embrace, and flies to America. Rai feels that "Langston Hughes's country that never existed but needed to exist—with that, like everyone else, I was thoroughly in love" (419), although Ormus's "double vision" reveals to him America's less nice face, which Rai is also able to see. America's dangerously seducing femininity keeps Rhinehart addicted to its "valley of the Dollybirds" (58), which is the narrator's means of eroticizing the projection of America in Rushdie's novel *Fury*. Indeed, although Malik Solanka, the protagonist of *Fury*, is also seduced by America, Rhinehart, his friend, is literally killed by his addiction to the charm of this country, which is essentially erotic. However, eroticism blends here with an awareness of the beloved country's corrupting and destructive Thanatos force: "To be seduced by what one loathed was a hard destiny" (200), reflects Solanka standing by the freshly dug grave of his friend.

Since his transcultural imagination steps across frontiers to project places of the mind, Florence adds to the erotically charged imaginary maps charted by Rushdie in *The Enchantress of Florence*. Mogor dell'Amore's enamoured description of the Italian city in its Renaissance heyday as an absolutely irresistible seductress plunges the reader into an eroticized topography:

> "Imagine a pair of woman's lips," Mogor whispered, "puckering for a kiss. That is the city of Florence, narrow at the edges, swelling at the centre, with the Arno flowing through between, parting the two lips, the upper and the lower. The city is an enchantress. When it kisses you, you are lost, whether you be a commoner or a king." (176)

Rushdie blends Eros with Thanatos according to an Orphic model. The erotically inviting female characters and the eroticized places of his fiction are ambivalent: they may be both innocent and corrupt, evil witches in a very disturbing way, like Qara Köz / Lady Black Eyes, the Enchantress in Rushdie's novel set in Florence and in India, and projecting an America which was at that time only a dream.

Rushdie designedly set *The Enchantress of Florence* not only at the confluence of two worlds and a dream, but also in the sixteenth-century Renaissance. Rushdie's twenty-first-century imagery relates to the Renaissance imagery and projects America. In this novel, maybe more than in other Rushdie novels, or in a different way, imagination projects and creates worlds and fills them with dreams. Thus, Akbar, the last Mughal emperor, himself an Enchanter, imagines a queen of unsurpassed beauty, whom he calls Jodha. Being created through "a pure act of will" (59), Jodha assumes a corporeal existence which seems to be more "real" than "reality" itself. The projection of Jodha, Akbar's longing for her while he is away, his coming back to her and their love-making scenes are charged with an eroticism which steps across more than one line. Jodha's fictitiousness steals the histories of the emperor's fellow wives, who envy her on that account. Jodha is also a sorceress, "the sorceress of herself" (62), and sometimes she performs her acts of "ungiculation" to inscribe the magic of her "reality" onto Akbar's body and thus "enhance the act of love." "No living woman" can perform "ungiculation" as well as Jodha can until Akbar confesses that "in the loneliness of his army tent, he would close his eyes and imitate her movements, would imagine his nails moving on his body to be hers, and be aroused" (64–65). By imagining Jodha's body, engaging it in erotic games of inscriptions on his own body performed by Jodha's and his own nails claiming to be hers, Akbar, himself a projection, mirrors the writing of the novel and its eroticized space.

The Enchantress of Florence teems with magic and magicians, sorcerers, enchanters and artists, both male and female. Akbar, Quara Köz/Lady Black Eyes, who eventually usurps Jodha and erases her, the other enchantresses in the novel, Mogor dell'Amore, who tells the story, these and others imbue the space with their eroticized artifacts and tales. Dashwanth and his community of painters at Akbar's court literally invent Mughal Hindustan and paint the emperor's soul (148). It is art that projects the world, and thus projected, the world comes into being. So enmeshed in his art is Dashwanth that he literally vanishes into the world of his last painting, which he titles "*Qara-Köz-Nama*, the Adventures of Lady Black Eyes." After he puts all his art passion in this final picture, urging his creation to breathe and transferring his own way of looking at her onto the face of one of the figures in the painting, Dashwanth vanishes beyond and into it,

never to be seen again. Almost all the pictures of *Qara-Köz-Nama* disappear with him. However, Daswanth's "trick" of vanishing into the world of his own creation is discovered. Above everything, Dashwanth's immersion in his own painting is an act of love: "instead of bringing a fantasy woman to life, Dashwanth had turned himself into an imaginary being, driven (as the emperor had been driven) by the overwhelming force of love" (159). Akbar, the emperor who has created Jodha in his own imagination, understands, approves and orders that Dashwanth be left to dwell in the world he projected out of love: "If the borderline between the worlds could be crossed in one direction, Akbar understood, it could also be crossed in the other. A dreamer could become his dream" (159). Through the sublimation of sexuality into the eroticized space of the novel, the whole world is aestheticized as an echo of the Renaissance and its celebration of the body. Florence itself is the personification of a seducing woman, and the forms of seduction and gratification in the novel multiply as the narrative progresses.

Through eroticizing the body and infusing the whole universe of fiction with a culture-building Eros, Rushdie, who sees himself as "a translated man"[4] caught in a rather uncertain space between several languages and cultures, across borders, like Nabokov, Kundera, Derrida, Borges (to give only a few examples), has engaged in a literary project based on (self-) sublimation through Eros and the achievement of a new aesthetic order. Rushdie has absorbed both Eastern and Western cultures, and those cultures have been largely shaped by religions. The scandal around *The Satanic Verses* has made it very clear that he is a secular thinker and writer interested in religion, myth and superstition as story. To him nothing is, though anything may become, sacred. Through eroticism, Rushdie's stories acquire physicality, a dimension which is further refined by aesthetic subtleties.

Conclusion

Aesthetic modernity, a reaction to bourgeois modernity, has been shaped by the Orphic and Narcissistic model of harmony and fusion, which strikes a balance between the objective and the subjective world, between the individual and nature. Through song, Orpheus defeats death, the great enemy. Reinforcing the logic of gratification, the liberating function of the aesthetic and its playful nature, Narcissus typifies the erotic surrender

[4] When he probes into his British Indian identity and the issue of the English language, Rushdie argues that "having been borne across the world, we are translated men" (*Imaginary Homelands* 17). For a detailed discussion of Rushdie and his characters as "translated men," see Dana Bădulescu, "Rushdie the 'Translated Man'" at http://www.sferapoliticii.ro/sfera/166/art09-Badulescu.php.

to beauty. These two archetypes underlie a principle which informed literature and the arts in the last two centuries from Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* through the Pre-Raphaelites' eroticism, Baudelaire's projection of the sensual refined dandy and the *fin de siècle* aestheticized homoeroticism of Joris-Karl Huysmans and Oscar Wilde.

Rushdie's novels aim at aesthetic synthesis by sublimating sexuality into Eros and thus create an order of aesthetic balance as a solution to the crisis of the contemporary individual and society, whose dehumanizing effects have grown more and more rampant since Schiller spoke about "the aesthetic state of mind" and "the aesthetic education of man" in 1795. Rushdie's sublimations are essentially erotic. For most of his characters, love is erotic longing and projection. His eroticized geography translates a sense of cosmic union. His characters' sublimated sexuality is dangerously transgressive. *Shalimar the Clown* insists on consuming love and on the connection between Eros and sacrifice. *The Moor's Last Sigh*, *The Ground beneath Her Feet* and *The Enchantress of Florence* aestheticize Eros through ekphrasis and palimpsestic textuality, orphic song, fusion of the lovers' bodies and souls through music, or arty sorcery.

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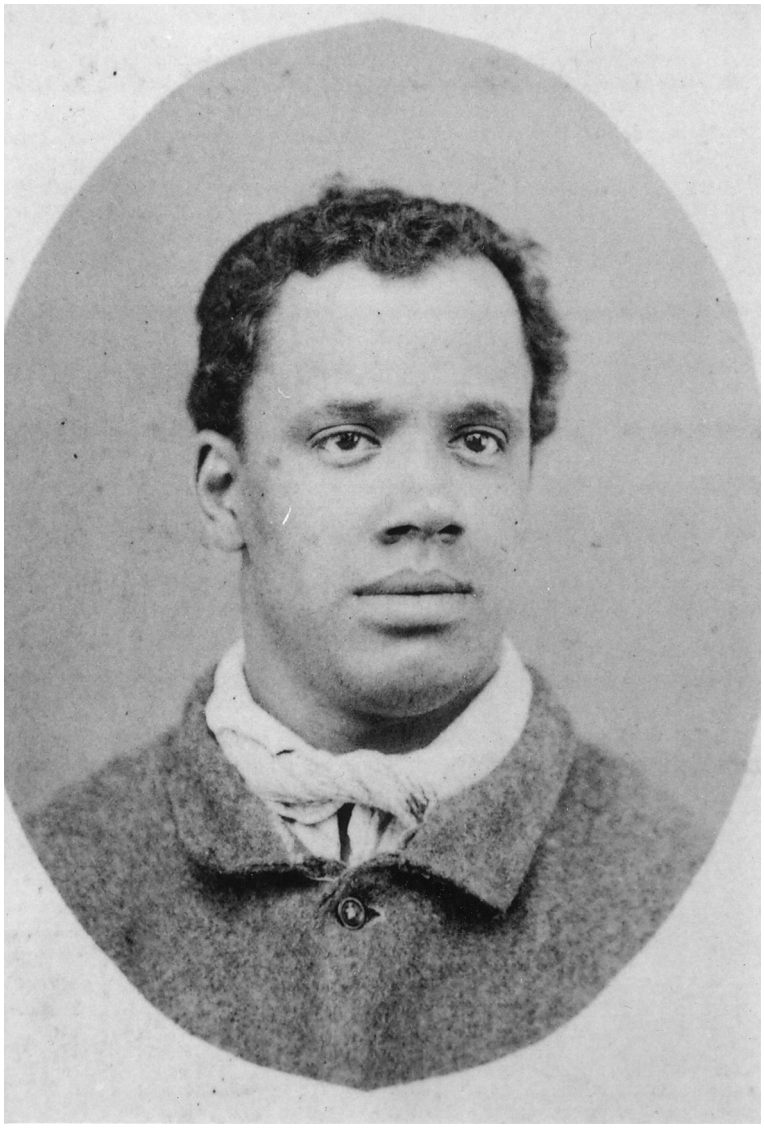
MARGINALIA/MARGINALITIES



Ira Daniel Aldridge

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The Lost Life of Ira Daniel Aldridge (Part 2)[1]

ABSTRACT

The sons of famous men sometimes fail to succeed in life, particularly if they suffer parental neglect in their childhood and youth. Ira Daniel Aldridge is a case in point—a promising lad who in his formative years lacked sustained contact with his father, a celebrated touring black actor whose peripatetic career in the British Isles and later on the European continent kept him away from home for long periods. When the boy rebelled as a teenager, his father sent him abroad, forcing him to make his own way in the world. Ira Daniel settled in Australia, married, and had children, but he found it difficult to support a family. Eventually he turned to crime and wound up spending many years in prison. The son of an absent father, he too became an absent father to his own sons, who also suffered as a consequence.

Ira Daniel's story is not just a case study of a failed father-son relationship. It also presents us with an example of the hardships faced by migrants who move from one society to another in which they must struggle to fit in and survive. This is especially difficult for migrants who look different from most of those in the community they are entering, so this is a tale about strained race relations too. And it takes place in a penal colony where punishments were severe, even for those who committed petty offences. Ira Daniel tried at first to make an honest living, but finally, in desperation, he broke the law and ended up incarcerated in brutal conditions. He was a victim of his environment but also of his own inability to cope with the pressures of settling in a foreign land. Displacement drove him to fail.

ABSTRACT

[1] Part 1 appeared in the previous volume of *Text Matters*. The abstract covers both parts.

Warrnambool

Within two months Ira Daniel and Ellen had moved and were living in Warrnambool, a port (population ca. 3,000) 170 miles west of Melbourne. Though small, Warrnambool was not a dull town. There were frequent lectures, readings, exhibitions, concerts, dances, banquets, and other social and sporting events that residents could enjoy. They had a Bowling Club, a Musical Union Committee, a Volunteer Ball Committee, a Ladies Benevolent Society, a Dramatic Club, and a Committee on Popular Entertainments, all of which provided opportunities for public participation. Ira Daniel was quick to join some of these groups, particularly those devoted to staging literary and dramatic performances. Despite his disastrous debut in Melbourne, he still hankered to prove himself on stage.[2]

His first chance to do so appears to have occurred on 29 March 1869—Easter Monday—when a group of amateur performers from Warrnambool, accompanied by members of the town's band, put on a concert, interspersed with readings from an assortment of literary works, for the benefit of the Common School at Mepunga, a neighbouring community. The *Warrnambool Examiner* reported that "In the first part Mr. Ira Aldridge gave as a recitation, 'Othello's Apology,' with considerable dramatic effect, and in the second part he recited 'The Well of St. Keyne' in a very creditable manner" (2 Apr. 1869: 2). The first selection would have been an imitation of his father's rendering of Othello's last words, but the second, a mildly amusing ballad by Robert Southey, would have had to have been delivered in a very different style. That both were well-received suggests that Ira Daniel managed to display some versatility as a performer.

Encouraged by the favourable response from an audience of two hundred townspeople, he began to get bigger ideas. Five weeks later he was ready to attempt something more ambitious. On May 7th the *Warrnambool Examiner* announced that

> This (Friday) evening, a dramatic performance will be given in the Royal Exchange Hall, by Mr. Ira Aldridge, assisted by members of the Club. We

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[2] I wish to thank Helen Doxford Harris, co-author of *Cops and Robbers: A Guide to Researching 19th Century Police and Criminal Records in Victoria, Australia* (Nunawading: Harriland Press, 1990), for carrying out preliminary research on Ira Daniel Aldridge in Victorian archives and for guiding my own research in Public Record Offices in Victoria and New South Wales. I also want to express my appreciation to Elizabeth O'Callaghan of the Warrnambool and District Historical Society for sending me a list of helpful references to relevant articles in the *Warrnambool Examiner*. And I remain extremely grateful to the Humanities Research Centre at the Australian National University in Canberra for awarding me a four-month fellowship that gave me the opportunity to conduct my research in ideal conditions.

> have seen Mr. John [*sic*] Lambert's testimonial respecting Mr. Aldridge, who is spoken of by the veteran actor in high terms. He is a son of the late Chevalier Ira Aldridge, the African Roscius. The programme embraces selections from Shakspeare [*sic*], and other tragic authors, and includes songs, recitations, &c., by local talent. The entertainment will conclude with a series of Nigger Melodies, in character, by members of the Warrnambool Dramatic Club.[3]

An accompanying advertisement stated that the entertainment, "Consisting of Songs, Glees, Recitations, &c." would include Ira Daniel's recitation of "Othello's Apology" and Erasmus Darwin's melancholy "Death of Eliza at the Battle of Minden," plus, assisted by members of the Dramatic Club, selections from the fifth act of *Hamlet*. All this could be enjoyed in a front seat for one shilling sixpence and in a back seat for one shilling. A subsequent review of the show in the same paper recorded that "There was a fair attendance, and . . . [Mr. Aldridge] sustained the interest of the audience throughout, and was loudly applauded" (11 May 1869: 2). Here was another success and one that had earned the aspiring actor a little money.

A few days afterward Ira Daniel left for Belfast (now Port Fairy), a town eleven miles away that was about the same size as Warrnambool. There he hoped to give a series of entertainments, starting with a repeat of the show he had just mounted with the assistance of friends and fellow members of the Warrnambool Dramatic Club. For this purpose he rented the Odd Fellows' Hall in Belfast with an opening performance set for May 17th. The price for admission was now two shillings for a front seat but still one shilling for a seat in the back, and children could be admitted for half-price. Announcements placed in the *Belfast Gazette* and the *Banner of Belfast* emphasized the success of this entertainment when staged in Warrnambool.

The reaction of the "pretty fair audience" that assembled to see the show in Belfast was not what Ira Daniel had anticipated or wished. The *Belfast Gazette* wrote that

> Mr. Aldridge was assisted in his entertainment by the Volunteer Band and Mr. James Dorney, of Warrnambool. With the exception of the performance by the band, the entertainment was a complete "sell." The songs of Dorney were execrable, both in their selection and in their execution; but the audience maintained a good humour throughout the infliction, amusing themselves with rallying the singer, and with ironical applause.

[3] The error in Lambert's first name suggests that the testimonial was not written by him. Perhaps Ira Daniel had composed it himself.

> The wretched burlesque of the grave digging scene of Hamlet, however, was too much for many persons in the audience. Some left the building, others went to the doorkeeper and demanded their money back, others, seeing they were sold, went in for fun, baiting the unhappy performers. Mr. Aldridge left Belfast the same night. (*Belfast Gazette and Portland and Warrnambool Advertiser* 20 May 1869: 2)

After this debacle Ira Daniel decided to give up show business and concentrate on finding other means of earning an income.

Early in June he opened a day and evening school for boys that offered instruction in "English in all its branches, Arithmetic, Euclid, Algebra, also French, German, Latin, and Pianoforte" (*Warrnambool Examiner* 1 June 1869: 3). In announcing the opening of the school Ira Daniel claimed that he was "an 'Associate of Arts' in connexion with Oxford University, and has during the past four years been engaged in private tuition" (28 May 1869: 2). The first claim was false and the second exaggerated, for he had had less than two years experience tutoring in Lilydale, Melbourne and possibly Warrnambool. There is no evidence that he had worked as a tutor in London.

The *Warrnambool Examiner* applauded his initiative, saying, "The want of an evening school for boys engaged at work during the day has long been felt in Warrnambool, and the rate charged, 1s 6d per week, is very reasonable" (1 June 1869: 2). Actually, the fee for evening classes was two shillings per week. Day students paid the lower rate.

Ira Daniel ran the school at his own residence, but there were occasional problems. On 23 July 1869 he had a boy summoned before the Warrnambool Police Court "for using insulting language":

> It appears that defendant and some other youths were passing complainant's house, on the night of the 17th, whilst he was engaged teaching in school, and the defendant called out "Sambo," an expression which he had frequently indulged in. Mr. Aldridge stated that he had cautioned him, and as it was very annoying he begged the protection of the court. Defendant was fined 5s, and 5s costs. (*Warrnambool Examiner* 27 July 1869: 2)

Warrnambool does not appear to have been a racially intolerant community at this time. Ira Daniel's mother had been white and his father "the colour of a new half-penny, barring the brightness" (*The Times* [London] 11 Oct. 1825: 2), so he himself was a light-skinned negro, but his curly hair, thick lips, and broad facial features may have made whites conscious of his racial heritage. Nonetheless, the local paper reveals he was not denied participation in community activities. He continued to give recitations and

readings at monthly public events organized by the Committee on Popular Entertainments,[4] he applied without success for a position as Tramway Clerk (17 Sept. 1869: 2) but was later appointed Collector for the Warrnambool Mechanics's Institute (21 Jan. 1870: 2), and he plugged on as a schoolteacher, still running his night school in his home but in November 1869 opening a new day school for boys and girls in a larger building, the Volunteer Orderly Room, where he was assisted by James Martin in Commercial and English subjects and by Mrs. Martin as sewing mistress (23 Nov. 1869: 2). On 12 March 1870 his son Ira Frederick was born, and a few days later Ira Daniel purchased a piano and offered to give instruction in playing it three times a week for a fee of £1 1s per quarter in advance (25 Mar. 1870: 4). It looked as if he was prospering and things were going his way.

However, within six weeks he was in serious financial difficulty. On April 29th and 30th he was sued in court by three individuals and two firms for unpaid bills, unpaid wages and unpaid loans amounting to more than £14 (6 May 1870: 4). He did not have the means to discharge these debts, so police seized his crockery, glass, cutlery and family clothing, auctioning them off on May 5th (3 May 1870: 2). The amount realized at the outset of the sale satisfied all the claims for which verdicts had been obtained, so some of the items—mainly women's and children's clothing—were returned to Mrs. Aldridge (6 May 1870: 2).

But this was only the beginning of Ira Daniel's financial woes. On May 10th three more people—one a teacher at his school—came forward with claims on him amounting to more than £10 (13 May 1870: 3). Two others later joined the suit with additional claims of more than £8 (8 July 1870: 4). By the time the first of these new charges reached the court, Ira Daniel had absconded, and police who had been alerted in Warrnambool, Melbourne and Ballarat could not find him in order to serve a summons on him (13 May 1870).

Prison

Where Ira Daniel went and what he did to support his young family after leaving Warrnambool is unknown, but it looks as if he headed toward the gold mining region of the country. The next mention of him in print appeared almost a year later in the *Victoria Police Gazette*. He had been picked up by the Avoca police and remanded to Castlemaine, seventy-eight miles northwest of Melbourne, for having committed a crime under a pseudonym:

[4] See the accounts of these entertainments in the *Warrnambool Examiner*, 18 June 1869: 2; 13 Aug. 1869: 2–3; 22 Oct. 1869: 2; 5 Nov. 1869: 2; 12 Nov. 1869: 3; 19 Nov. 1869: 2.

> Charles Corfield, *alias* Ira Aldridge, is charged, on warrant, with uttering a valueless cheque for £1, to John L. Sangster, Castlemaine, on the 22nd ultimo. He is a half-caste of african descent, a pianoforte tuner, aged about 25 years, about 5 feet high, medium build, very dark copper-colored complexion, black curly hair, clean-shaved; wore dark coat, dirty white waistcoat, and wideawake hat. He has a fresh scar on forefinger of one hand.—1st April 1871.[5]

He apparently was now following in the footsteps of his father-in-law.

Two weeks later he was charged with having obtained board and lodging as well as 7s 6d from another individual by uttering a valueless cheque under the name of William Hill (*Victoria Police Gazette* 18 Apr. 1871: 96). When these cases reached court, he pleaded guilty and "said that he had a wife and family dependent on him, and but that he was pressed he would not have done what he did. The Bench sentenced him to gaol for three months" (*Castlemaine Representative* 18 Apr. 1871: 2). The sentence included hard labour.

While Ira Daniel served his time, Ellen and Ira Frederick probably moved back to Melbourne where her mother and some of her siblings lived. Her father, Francis Huxley, and her younger brother John, who had been convicted of burglary and stealing, were both incarcerated outside Melbourne at Pentridge Prison, which had small single cells measuring 9'6"x6'4" (Kerr 153) but better facilities and amenities than the country jails. At Castlemaine and other prisons some distance from Melbourne, "the single cells, unlike the cells at the Pentridge Panopticon, were unsewered, nor did they have running water or artificial light" (Lynn and Armstrong 76). A thief who had served time at several prisons in Victoria was quoted as saying, "Melbourne [Gaol] is a Hotel, Pentridge is a boarding-house, but Castlemaine is Hell" (Lynn and Armstrong 84).

Upon completing his sentence in such a place, Ira Daniel may never have wanted to spend another day in any sort of prison, but nine months after being released, he was back at his old tricks again, passing bogus cheques for small amounts to shopkeepers, landlords and other gullible strangers in Melbourne. He was arrested at the end of April 1872 and prosecuted at the Melbourne Criminal Court on May 15th. A record of the proceedings appeared in a *Supplement to the Argus* the following day:

> Ira Aldridge, a young man who was at one time advertised as a theatrical star, was charged with forgery and uttering. On the 17th April the

[5] *Victoria Police Gazette* 4 Apr. 1871: 85, and reprinted in the *Warrnambool Examiner* 14 Apr. 1871: 2. According to the *Warrnambool District Historical Society Newsletter* Mar. 2005: 4, a wideawake hat was a soft felt hat with a broad brim and a low crown.

> prisoner went to the shop of Mr. Joseph Benjamin, in Elizabeth-street, and purchased a pair of earrings for 6s. He paid for them by a cheque for £1 17s., purporting to be drawn on the Commercial Bank by Thomas Howard, the difference between the price of the goods and the amount of the cheque being handed to the prisoner. No such person as Thomas Howard had an account in the bank. The cheque was proved by one Charles Partridge to be in the prisoner's writing.
>
> The prisoner was found "Guilty."
>
> He was then arraigned on another charge of forging the name of George Coppin to a cheque. On the 26th April prisoner went into the Greyhound publichouse at Richmond and presented a cheque for £1 3s. 6d. of Mr. George Coppin's. The landlord cashed the cheque, but on presentation it turned out to be a forgery.
>
> Verdict—"Guilty."
>
> The same prisoner was arraigned on another charge. On the 18th April prisoner went to the Niagara Hotel and asked the landlord to cash a cheque for £1 4s. 6d. on the National Bank, Bourke-street, and purporting to be drawn by George Halliday. The landlord had no change, but a bystander named Joseph Gulliver cashed the cheque. It turned out that no person of the name of George Halliday had an account at the bank.
>
> Verdict—"Guilty."
>
> There were two other charges against the prisoner but they were not proceeded with.
>
> Prisoner was remanded for sentence. (16 May 1872: 2)[6]

Actually, the official record of the trial shows that there were seventeen additional complaints registered against Aldridge for similar offences,[7] and there might have been many more if greater sums had been involved, but "in each case the cheque was drawn for a small amount, the largest being £2 7s" (*Argus* 7 May 1872: 7). By now Ira Daniel was a serial fraudster specializing in financial transactions so petty that he may have thought no one would bother to pursue him, but since he was known in court to have been a repeat offender with a record of imprisonment at Castlemaine, the penalty he received was three years at hard labour, to be served this time at Pentridge, where two of his in-laws occupied cells.

On July 27th that year Ellen gave birth to a second son, James Ira, at the Lying-In Hospital in Melbourne, so she had been in her last trimester of pregnancy when her husband was arrested, tried and sentenced. What

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[6] George Coppin, a well-known British theatre manager in Melbourne, had in his younger year performed with Ira Daniel's father in Newcastle and Wolverhampton in 1846. For information on his career in Australia, see Bagot.

[7] Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 23/P/O, Unit 15, Melbourne Criminal Sittings, 15 May 1872: 21.

could the poor woman do in such circumstances? One assumes that she sought refuge with her relatives, but all we know for sure is that when James Ira died a year later on the 7th of May after two days of convulsions, she was living at Nott Street in Sandridge, Melbourne's seaport. During the next two years she may have lived with another man or turned to prostitution, for on 24 July 1875, a little over a month before her husband was discharged from prison on August 30th, she gave birth to another boy, John Edward, who could not have been Ira Daniel's son.

Ira Daniel seems to have taken this surprise in stride, for when the birth was registered a week later, he signed on as the father, describing himself as a teacher of languages living with his wife and five-and-a-half year old son at 91 Cambridge Street in Collingwood, a northern suburb of Melbourne. However, in an application for assistance from the Victorian Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society, he described his situation as follows:

> Destitution and that alone was the cause of my fall. I had tried hard to obtain a living for my family but failed. My wife was in ill health at the time as well. I do not want pecuniary assistance but employment is the thing I want. I have one child of my own and about six weeks since my wife's sister died leaving an infant to our care. I have some idea of starting hawking tobacco, round the shipping and suburbs. But I ask the Society to obtain me employment, on a station as book-keeper, store-keeper, or any employment that I am capable of doing.[8]

The Victorian Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society had been formed in 1872 at a meeting called by the Society for the Promotion of Morality. Its purpose was to help discharged prisoners make the transition to normal society so that they would have a chance to lead virtuous, honest and productive lives. However, at first they helped only "deserving cases" (Lynn and Armstrong 96). Members of this Society may have been responding to a report made a year earlier by the Inspector-General of Penal Establishments who had pointed out that

> No system can be considered complete which does not make provision for saving the discharged prisoner, on his first restoration to liberty, from the promptings of his own evil heart, and from his old associates in crime. Two causes combine to throw him back upon his old habits—employers often object to give him work with the knowledge that he is a discharged prisoner—*employes* [*sic*] refuse to work with him for the same reason. (*Age* 18 May 1872: 7)

[8] State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, MS 10663, Bag 27, Application Register No. 4, p. 34.

The Executive Committee of the Society considered Ira Daniel's application on the day he was discharged, and noting that his conduct in prison had been good and that he "now appeared sincerely desirous to . . . strive to regain his character . . . [and] to obtain some kind of employment through which he could support [his family]," they agreed to help him find suitable work.[9] In the meantime he began hawking tobacco, using the sum he had earned in prison (£5 6s. 2d.) plus a loan from the Society to start his business. Entries in the reports of George Wilmot, agent and collector for the Society, reveal that for a time Ira Daniel did make some progress:

> September 10, 1875—Aldridge has called several times through the week. He says he is doing a little and would do much better if he had a larger stock of goods. He wishes for the loan of £2.
>
> September 13—Alldridge [*sic*] called today, to say that he had been out to see Mr. Bridges, overseer of the Shoemakers at Pentridge, who advised him to get a sewing-machine, and he would endeavour to obtain him plenty of work in making uppers. Alldridge finds he can get a machine for £9.9.0 on time payment but wants a guarantee, this he asks the Society to be. To have a loan of 20/- towards increasing stock to be expended by agent.
>
> September 14—Aldridge was given tobacco to the value of £1.
>
> September 27—Called today to say he was making a living.
>
> October 11—Ira Aldridge is steadily pursuing his employment—hawking tobacco—he makes a living.
>
> November 8—Ira Aldridge is still hawking tobacco and is making a living.
>
> January 10, 1876—Ira Aldridge is still doing pretty well, he would have repaid the loan, but his wife has been sick. He promises to call this week.
>
> February 14—Ira Aldridge is still persevering in the right direction.[10]

Ironically, this last report was written a week after Ira Daniel had started forging and uttering worthless cheques again, first in Melbourne and then much farther afield in Horsham and Echuca, where under another pseudonym he had represented himself as a travelling salesman for a music company in Melbourne (*Victoria Police Gazette* 29 Feb. 1876: 61). In most cases the amounts fraudulently obtained continued to be small, not exceeding £3, but in one instance he obtained from an outfitter in Melbourne the sum of £18 17s. 6d. by asking him to cash six of these cheques. After

[9] State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, MS 10663, Box 103, Minute Book No. 2.

[10] State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, MS 10663, Bag 27 and Box 51, Agent and Collector's Report.

this, the police were looking for him, but he had already fled to Sydney, where it was said "he continued his dishonest career" until he was arrested by Sydney detectives in November 1877 and remanded to Melbourne where he faced trial for two of his old crimes. The press reported that "he pleaded guilty, and asked the bench to deal with the cases. In order to give him an opportunity of reforming, his application was granted, and the lenient sentence of twelve months' imprisonment for the two offences was inflicted upon him" (*Age* 21 Nov. 1877: 3). The reporter failed to mention that this lenient sentence required that he spend the year at hard labour in Melbourne Gaol.

In April or May 1878, halfway through his new period of incarceration, Ellen had another baby, a boy she named Arthur Henry without registering his birth. In this case too it is not certain that Ira Daniel was the father, for he presumably would have been continuing his criminal career in New South Wales at the time the child was conceived. Ultimately it didn't matter, for Arthur Henry died four months later, so Ira Daniel never had any contact with him. On the death certificate Ellen recorded her husband as the father, listing his occupation now as bootmaker, a trade he may have learned during one of his spells in prison.

Upon his release from prison in mid-October 1878, Ira Daniel made another appeal to the Victorian Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society for assistance, but this time, after examining his record of recidivism, the General Committee declined his application.[11] The following month he started passing bad cheques again.

It would appear that Ira Daniel never learned his lesson. He kept on forging and uttering deceptive cheques even though he must have known that the police would eventually catch him and send him back to prison. Perhaps it was simply the easiest of crimes to commit. A historian of criminal activity during this period states that

> A shortage of coin and bank notes in country districts, and a consequent reliance on orders, greatly widened the scope for forgery. . . . New South Wales' convict character . . . made it unsafe to carry or keep cash. . . . it was distance which principally led to the widespread use of orders. The ease with which such orders could be drawn or altered was believed to be a major incentive to forgeries. (Sturma 112)[12]

The same historian adds that

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[11] State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, MS 10663, Box 30, Application Register.

[12] Forgery and uttering were common in Victoria as well. Between 1868 and 1876 the *Victoria Police Gazette* recorded an average of nearly 110 cases per year.

> it was assumed that most offenders were either intoxicated when they perpetrated crimes, or that they committed offences in order to satisfy their appetite for liquor. . . . Burglaries were inspired by spirits, while forgeries were committed by "habitual drunkards of the more educated class." (Sturma 150)

Ira Daniel certainly would have been classified among "the more educated class," but given the long years he spent in prison, it appears unlikely that he would have had an opportunity to develop the habit of excessive drinking.

He may have simply given up all hope of finding a decent job. As an ex-prisoner he certainly couldn't go back to school teaching or to acting on stage, and he never had sufficient means to set himself up in business, so what options of productive employment did he have? John Buckley Castieau, the Governor of Melbourne Gaol in the 1870s, recorded in his diary that

> I am convinced both men & women frequently leave the Gaol impressed with the folly of leading dissolute lives. They can-not however battle with the world without assistance. Reputable people turn the cold shoulder upon them & their applications for employment & at last in desperation they seek the kind word & shelter where it is to be got, among their old companions or those they have made in Gaol. Return to prison is then certain & merely a time of days or weeks. Their having been in Gaol before & the company they are keeping is sufficient to make them fair game for the Police. (194)

Ira Daniel seems to have been a case in point. By the middle of December 1878, barely two months after being released from Melbourne Gaol, he was again apprehended, charged and convicted in two police courts on several counts of obtaining money by false pretences, and sentenced to another year at hard labour, most of which he spent in Geelong Gaol, forty miles southwest of Melbourne (*Victoria Police Gazette* 11 and 18 Dec. 1878: 345, 355).

Upon release the following November he almost immediately resumed his old practices under various pseudonyms, but now he did so some distance from Melbourne—in Ballarat, Hay, Narrandera, and fashionable sections of Sydney (*Victoria Police Gazette* 4 Feb. and 3 Mar. 1880: 29, 61; *New South Wales Police Gazette* 25 Feb. 1880: 72). One of the warrants for his arrest stated that "He frequents public-houses," so perhaps it is true that he, like other educated forgers, had developed a strong appetite for liquor (*Victoria Police Gazette* 4 Feb. 1880: 29). It took until August for police to find him, and after being tried under the assumed name of

George Crawford in a Wagga Wagga court, he wound up in Berrima Gaol, where he was described as follows:

> 1880: 193. George Crawford
> Condition: Free
> Ship: Great Britain
> Year of arrival: 1867
> Where born: England
> Religion: Church of England
> Trade: Cook
> Age: 28
> Height: 5'5"
> Make: Stout
> Complexion: Black
> Hair: Black, Curly
> Eyes: Black
> Education: Read & Write
> Remarks: Thick lips, Thick short nose[13]

A few of these details (the name of the ship he arrived on and his age) were incorrect, and his trade was new, but the rest of the description conformed to what had been said about him in previous prison registers.

Berrima Gaol, constructed in 1839 with 92 cells, was described in a pamphlet a century later as "a blot on the history of British Justice in this country, [being] as useless as it was despairing, and it is doubtful if any moral benefit accrued to any who spent a period of exile within its walls" (*Berrima Gaol* 1). All the worst offenders were sent to Berrima, and they were treated harshly. After 1860, prisoners serving five years or more had to spend their first nine months in silence and solitary confinement in a small cell (6'x4') for twenty-three hours each day, only one hour being allowed for exercise in a narrow fan-shaped yard (Jervis 34 and McColgan). "What with the continual loneliness and silence, they succumbed to a condition of melancholy" (*Berrima Gaol* 4).

It is in this state that we must leave Ira Daniel, for no further records have been found that tell the rest of his story. He was sentenced to five years at hard labour on the roads at Berrima, but we don't know what happened to him afterwards. Perhaps he was arrested yet again and detained elsewhere under other pseudonyms. Or perhaps he died an early, unrecorded death. The only thing that seems certain is that after his stint at Berrima, and possibly even earlier, he never returned to Ellen

[13] State Records New South Wales, Wagga Wagga Description Book (1880), ref. CGS 2570, 6/5513.

and her children, for we do have further fragments of information about them.

Family

Ellen had been having her own problems with the law while her husband was in and out of prison. She had been arrested and locked up for a week in November 1879, for a month in January 1880, and for forty-eight hours in April 1880. These sentences were for minor offences, probably drunkenness or some other form of disorderly behaviour,[14] but in February 1881 she was sent to Melbourne Gaol for twelve months at hard labour for keeping a house "frequented by thieves and women of ill-fame" (*Age*, 11 Feb. 1881: 3). She may have been imprisoned earlier under the name of Ellen Jackson or another pseudonym for such crimes as stealing, vagrancy, indecency, prostitution, and using threatening, insulting or obscene language.[15] By April 1894, when she was given another twelve-month sentence for being "idle and disorderly," she had a record of nineteen previous convictions (*Victoria Police Gazette* 23 Feb. 1895: 70a). Clearly she had gone steadily downhill after the break up of her home life.

Her children would have been quite young—Ira Frederick almost eleven, John Edward only five—when she went off to Melbourne Gaol for a year. Someone must have stepped in to care for them in the interim, but it appears likely that their lives were considerably disrupted by the loss of both parents. In June 1891, when John Edward was fifteen and apprehended along with two other youths for playing pitch and toss at a late hour in Melbourne (*Age* 30 June 1891: 5; *Argus* 30 June 1891: 9), the police reported him as a neglected child whose "parents are reputed to be very disorderly and dishonest, and also the whole family bears a very bad character."[16] He was sent to a reformatory for two years, but after serving a portion of his sentence by working on a farm in Wahring, he absconded in November 1892 and went to live with his mother in Carlton. However, he too soon turned to petty crime and subsequently was booked for offences major and minor—larceny, vagrancy, getting into a railway carriage while in motion.[17] By 1899, when he was arrested and imprisoned for six

[14] The offences are not mentioned in her prison record held at the Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 516, Unit 8, No. 4709: 211.

[15] In a court deposition now held at the Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 30/P, Unit 935, File 341/1893: [24], Ellen stated that "I have been called Ellen Jackson."

[16] Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 4527, No. 18083: 108, available on fiche no. 100. Ellen's father Francis had a long prison record, and her brothers John and Edward had been in and out of jail several times by the 1890s.

[17] Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 515, Unit 51, No. 27970: 213.

months as a "suspected person," he had a record of six previous convictions (*Victoria Police Gazette* 4 Apr. 1900: 128b).

Back in April 1893, when John Edward was still living with his mother, Ellen brought a charge of assault with attempt to rape against John Wooten, a young man who along with three companions had entered her house in the middle of the night demanding beer. The *Argus* reported that

> The case for the prosecution was that Ellen Aldridge, a married woman, living apart from her husband in High-street, Carlton, was aroused about 1 o'clock on the morning of the 9th ult. by a disturbance in the kitchen. She went down, and found four young men assaulting her son. She interfered, and her son ran off for a policeman. The accused then knocked her down and attempted to assault her, but she screamed for assistance, and the men decamped. The accused was afterwards arrested and identified by Mrs. Aldridge, but her son was not able to do so. The defence was that Mrs. Aldridge was mistaken, and that the accused was not one of the men who were in the house. The jury acquitted the accused, and he was discharged. (19 May 1893: 7)

Wooten may have escaped punishment because the jury did not find the testimony of a woman with a long criminal record credible. A month later he was tried for perjury with testimony given by several police constables who supported Ellen's version of events, but Wooten was again acquitted.[18]

One interesting fact that emerged at these trials is that on the night of the alleged assault "a child three years of age was the only other person in the house."[19] There was no indication of whose child this was. Ellen, at age forty-seven, was probably too old to be its mother; John Edward, now eighteen, may have been too young to be its father; and Ira Daniel, having disappeared for thirteen or more years, almost certainly had nothing to do with it.

This leaves Ira Frederick, age twenty-three, as the likeliest suspect. Unfortunately, we know nothing about his youth and young adulthood except that he somehow managed to stay out of trouble while his father, mother and brother were repeatedly breaking the law. He never was sent to a reformatory or to prison, so his name does not turn up in the *Victoria Police Gazette* or other criminal records. The only surviving documents through which we can trace him during this period pertain to his death, which took place the following year, on 20 May 1894. There were several reports of this "strange death" in the press:

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[18] The depositions for both cases can be found at the Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 30/P, Unit 932, File 287/1893, and Unit 935, File 341/1893.

[19] Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 30/P, Unit 932, File 287/1893: 3.

> About 1 o'clock yesterday morning Constable E. Hedger, of North Melbourne, was informed by a man named William Dunlop that the body of a respectably-dressed young man was lying in Courtney-place, off Courtney-street. The constable went to the spot, and found that though the body was covered with blood there was still some life in it. He therefore removed it to the Melbourne Hospital. On admission there, however, life was pronounced to be extinct. Returning to North Melbourne Constable Hedger learned that the deceased was one Frederick Aldridge, a married man with a wife and one child, who lived in Mary-street, North Melbourne. Mrs. Aldridge states that her husband was seized with an attack of severe illness on Friday, during which he vomited blood plenteously. On Saturday night he was much better, though at 8 o'clock, when she went out, he was in bed, and intended to remain there. During her absence he had apparently been seized with the illness again, for the bed was covered with blood, and the doorstep and verandah were stained with it. From there to the spot where Aldridge was found there was an almost continuous track of blood, and it is surmised that when his illness returned, being alone and unable to send for medical assistance, he had got out of bed and dressed himself hurriedly so that he might go himself to the doctor's residence. Exhaustion, consequent upon his loss of blood, overcame him in Courtney-place, and he fell and died on the paving-stones within a hundred yards of his own door. (*Argus* 21 May 1894: 6)

His death certificate identified the cause of death as ulceration of the right bronchus and pulmonary hemorrhage, but given the circumstances of the case, the city coroner did not consider an inquest necessary (*Argus* 22 May 1894: 3). It is odd that the death certificate did not name his wife, saying only "Married Particulars not known." The names of his parents were also not known.

Ira Frederick was buried in the Church of England section of the Melbourne General Cemetery in the family plot (GG No. 39) of James and Rachel Fulljames. This fact suggests that Ira Frederick's wife may have been one of the Fulljames's daughters, possibly Laura, since their other daughters, Emma and Margaret, had married in 1892. However, Laura, born in 1876, would have been only eighteen years old in 1894. Would she have borne a child four years earlier who was being raised by her mother-in-law? The absence of birth and marriage records makes it impossible to answer such questions with any degree of assurance. It is known that Laura in 1913 married James Burr, and she may have married someone else before or after this date, for when she erected a monument on her parents' grave after 1903, she gave her name as Laura Hill-Trevor, but there is no official record of her marriage to anyone with this name. Rachel Fulljames, in a previous marriage to William Pemberton, had had three other

daughters—Esther Jane, Elizabeth, and Mary Ann—one of whom could perhaps have been Ira Frederick's wife. An Esther Jane Pemberton married in 1888, and an Elizabeth Margaret Pemberton married in 1889. If these are Rachel's daughters, this leaves Mary Ann as the only likely bride for Ira Frederick from this branch of the family, but there is no record of a Mary Ann Pemberton ever marrying.

In any case, the child born to Ira Frederick's wife, whoever she was, and whether or not she left her child to be cared for by his mother in 1893, may be the last possible genetic link to Ira Frederick's grandfather, Ira Aldridge, the African Roscius. It would be interesting to know if this descendant had any descendants, for if so, there is a possibility that the bloodline of Ira Aldridge may be carried in the veins of some Australians living today. Ira Aldridge's Swedish wife had four children by him but they all died childless.

Ira Daniel, the illegitimate son who could not get along with his stepmother and was sent away to Australia half a year before his father died, had an unlucky life. His best years may have been those he spent at boarding school, where he had a secure base among friends and teachers who cared for him. His "Mamma" was also a reliable source of love and comfort when she stopped travelling with her husband and took up permanent residence in London. His father, though, was seldom home during his youth and adolescence, and Ira Daniel may have lost some respect for him upon discovering that he was a serial womanizer. Perhaps this knowledge also alienated him from his young stepmother whom he appears to have treated with scorn and hostility.

Australia was meant to reform him, to help him mature and learn to rely on his own resources. His father had left the United States at age seventeen and had struggled to make a career for himself on stage in England. How wonderful it would have been if Ira Daniel had been able to report to him his own success playing Mungo in Melbourne. But he did not have the theatrical talent of his father, so he started teaching to make a living. In this profession he also failed, and when he could find no other honest work by which to support his family, he turned to crime.

The Australian penal system, based on a notion of "reform through suffering" (Finnane 42–43), only made his life worse. Long spells of solitary confinement, enforced silence, and hard labour killed his spirit, and his prison record deprived him of opportunities for gainful employment afterwards. Following his three years at Pentridge he made a half-hearted effort to earn money independently by hawking tobacco, but he found it far easier to pass forged cheques. Between 1871 and 1885 he spent more than ten years in penitentiaries and another two or three years travelling and hiding from police. His wife turned to other men, and his sons hardly

ever saw him. He wasn't just an absent father; he was an unknown father, someone who had no presence, no place, in their lives. One of his sons turned bad, and the other died young. His wife gradually became an habitual criminal.

It's a sorry story, and one wonders if the inheritance his father left him would have enabled him to make a fresh start. However, Ira Daniel turned twenty-five just as he was entering Pentridge, and he may not have wanted Mr. King, Mr. Bone or his stepmother to know where he was or what had happened to him. Also, it is possible that he knew nothing about his father's will. Perhaps neither the executor nor any of his father's friends had been able to reach him in Lilydale, Melbourne or Warrnambool to inform him of the terms in his father's last testament. Lost, Ira Daniel may have been left to his own fate in a foreign land. This was a legacy of abandonment that, like a bad cheque, he passed on to his wife and sons, cheating them of a decent family life.

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Reviews and Interviews

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Margin Speaks: Indian Dalit Literature. A Review of *Writing as Resistance: Literature of Emancipation*, ed. Jaydeep Sarangi (New Delhi: Gnosis, 2011)

Writing as Resistance: Literature of Emancipation is a powerful amplifier to the increasingly audible buzz of writings by Dalits—the worst victims of mindless age-old caste-discrimination—and their sympathizers. It highlights the priceless contribution of the stream of Dalit literature to Marginal, Subaltern and Post-colonial literature. Though its boundaries are not totally rigid, the concept "Dalit" (also known as "Atishudras," or the outcastes, or "avarnas") has been applied to those communities who are considered too polluting to be accepted within the Indian four-fold caste system because of their hereditary occupations of animal slaughtering, carcass burning, garbage collection, etc, which were considered ritually impure by the exploitative version of the Brahminical scriptures. However, there are some writings that prefer to include every category of the oppressed under any system of stratification (not solely caste) under the term "Dalit."

Bending low under the crushing arrogance of the higher strata of Caste for thousands of years, and with all avenues of a life of dignity closed to them, these communities have repeatedly wondered about the rationale of their condition, cried out for sympathy and revolted for human dignity. A powerful expression of such activism is Dalit Literature, which "received its first impetus with the advent of leaders like Mahatma Phule and Ambedkar in Maharashtra, who emphasized the seminal concerns of Dalits through their theoretical writings" (Preface by the editor vii). One also gets a clarification of the various shades of the concept of "Dalit writers," with the majority considering them as those outcaste people who have directly faced caste-based atrocities. Yet again there are authors who have also accepted as Dalit writers those who merely sympathize with and write in revolt of atrocities against Dalits. Analyses of writings of both categories have been upheld by the volume, making it rich in content. The Editor's note at the beginning gives a clear trajectory of the objectives of the book.

Writing as Resistance is a commendable effort to present a meaningful collage of the various regional currents of Dalit Literature spontaneously emerging in revolt of localized expressions of the pan-Indian caste-based atrocities on the "outcastes." Thus prose, poems, short stories, novels, multimedia documentaries and auto-narratives, both translated into and written in English, all have been brought under lenses of varied analyses. There are articles which take up individual Dalit writers of various regions and take up their work/s and characters for in-depth analyses in an effort to give a feel of simmering Dalit vibrancy amidst life stripped of dignity and revolt; there are articles which have tried to capture the wide spectrum of literature on the theme emerging from a particular region of India and even compared it with similar marginal literature of other countries; ambitious articles have tried to tie disparate regional Dalit literature into a pan-Indian bouquet in search of common patterns; further are interviews with Dalit writers to throw light upon how sufferings have crystallized into literature and how it is evolving. These articles have variously tried to make sense of the vibrant phenomenon of Dalit Literature through sophisticated lenses of feminism, environmental consciousness, subaltern perspective, intra-stratum dynamics, post-colonialism and marginalization.

Six articles invite us to in-depth analyses of works of individual Dalit writers. S. Robert Gnanamony skilfully elucidates Dalit life as portrayed through the poems of Dalit Tamil writer N. D. Rajkumar, which "depicts the misery, discrimination, exploitation and downgrading of the Dalits and other downtrodden people in our country" (13). Though it "may sound very crude and harsh to our ears" (14), he claims it is a "blunt call for mobilizing the Dalit community to resist the elite domination and organized exploitation" (14). He proceeds to unearth the anxiety of a Dalit psyche, the Dalit community's bondage with Mother Nature, "angry outbursts" against uprooting them without compensation, the paradoxes of caste discrimination in religious space, as well as modernized government bureaucracies. T. Gangadharan and Premila Bhaskar work on the first female Tamil Dalit autobiographer Bama Faustina's novel *Vanmam*. The articles explore the theme of intra-Dalit feud that is a towering challenge to Dalit uplift—the politics and violence of gradations within the Dalits, the resilience of caste discrimination and resistance to the modernizing influences of conversion to Christianity and education, the contribution of Dalit women to the fight and the hope of ultimate emancipation through modernization. The articles of D. Ashish Gupta and Rajeev Kumar Sharma go into the deconstruction of a particular Dalit character Bakha of novelist Mulk Raj Anand's fiction *The Untouchable*. Gupta shows how through the novel Anand "chiefly dealt with the ghastly evil of Untouchability afflicting the Hindu society of the pre-partition era, in the larger backdrop of the caste

configurations within the Hindu society that have successfully stifled the healthy growth of a considerable section of Indian community for centuries" (181). Commenting further, he says, "Latrines, dirt, squalor, beggars, poverty, disease and prostitution—are beautifully described in his works. He sees both the seamy and ugly sides of life minutely and portrays them realistically" (181). A few of the aspects Anand shows through Bakha, the protagonist, are: higher caste hatred in spite of diligent service, groping for meaning by the victim, sympathetic treatment of other communities such as Muslims and Christians towards Dalits, Hindu reforming efforts, and Bakha's transformation from "a helpless sacrificial animal" into "a thinking articulate individual" (182). He is animated to "think, act, doubt, love and resent," which gives him "honour and dignity" (182). A fascinating article is Khushi Pattanayak's analysis of R.P. Amudhan's *Shit (Pee)*—a video documentation of the horrid condition of the hereditary manual night-soil cleaners of India. It is a shocking exposure of the continued existence and humiliation of such professionals in spite of manual night-soil cleaning employment becoming a punishable offence under the Indian Penal Code.

Next come articles trying to capture the whole spectrum of Dalit literature and its evolution at the regional level. M. B. Gaijan explores the Gujrati Dalit literature from various perspectives. First is his attempt to give a feel of the Gujrati Dalit Literature through representative novels of Daxa Damodara, Dinu Bhadresariya and Kantilal Parmar. Damodara's multifaceted *Sosh* portrays the "human excellence of Dalits" (46), the complex pressures of multiple stratified Indian society. Bhadresariya's *Kideeae Khonkharo Khandho* exposes rural Dalit exploitation and the hypocrisy of social reformers, communal conflict and elite politics. Parmar's *Gobi Timbo* among other themes upholds education and modernization as a panacea to Dalit sufferings. Harish Mangalam's *Aganzal* gives agency to Dalits as the revolting group in modernized settings, and Damodar's *Savitri* is a biographical novel of Savitrimayi Phule, documenting her significant contribution to supporting Jyotirao Phule in his activism for Dalit emancipation. It highlights the importance of education for women's personal and Dalit community's emancipation. Bajrang Korde's article briskly documents the flourishing of Marathi Dalit literature and places it in the context of pan-Indian Dalit struggles. Two articles by G.A. Ghanashyam and Vandana Bhatt, respectively, attempt to document the development, diversity of and influences on Indian Dalit literature as a whole, bringing them under one umbrella and identifying common trends of militancy, activism and the search for identity.

Three interviews of Dalit writers contribute a lot to the phenomenon. Jaydeep Sarangi interviews Bengali Dalit writer (and the editor of *Dalit Mirror*) Manohar Mouli Biswas and gives valuable insight into the making

of a Dalit writer, the formation of Bengali Dalit literature and its English representation. Nilanshu Kumar Agarwal interviews self-made Dalit writer from Uttar Pradesh, Jai Prakash Kardam, who rose from being an unskilled construction labourer to the Second Secretary in the High Commission of India in Mauritius. He talks about how Dalit Literature is gaining increasing space in academia, how Dalit activism is expressing itself powerfully through various cultural media, and the road ahead to Dalit emancipation through literature and translation efforts. Finally, the interview of promising Bengali Dalit writer Kalyani Thakur by poet-academic Jaydeep Sarangi and sociologist Angana Dutta explores the making of the writer, translations, Dalit literary organizations, propagation of Dalit writings, Dalit literary engagement as activism, and the failure of exclusive application of Gandhism and Marxism to solving Dalit problems.

Special mention must be made of the scholarly article by Debasree Basu, "In Search of a Dalit Female Consciousness: through the Religio-Folk Idiom of Meerabai and the National Womanhood of Sita." Emancipating these figures from the traditional perspectives of religion and womanhood, she portrays them as subaltern figures who have challenged the elites of religious and gender stratifications. "The gender fluidity present in their myths and legends can be worked not to re-establish the vulnerability of subaltern women but the vulnerability of patriarchy that generates it" (149). Rajeshwar Mittapalli's article explores Dalit social history through a study of postcolonial Indian fiction in English from the perspective of subaltern subjectivity and resistance.

This volume unifies and powerfully amplifies literary voices in revolt of the caste-based violation of human rights and thereby contributes to claiming their well-deserved space in the arena of English Literature.

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A Garden of Orismological Delights: A Review of the Fifth Edition of J.A. Cuddon's *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, revised by M.A.R. Habib (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013)

The publication of the fifth edition of Cuddon's *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* by Wiley-Blackwell is a much awaited event, considering the popularity the dictionary has enjoyed. Apart from M.A.R. Habib, the editor who revised the edition, there are four associate editors: Matthew Birchwood, Vedrana Velickovic, Martin Dines and Shanyn Fiske, all of them academics associated with English or American universities. The release of the dictionary must have been a challenge. The fourth edition was published in 1998, which makes this one the first Cuddon dictionary in the twenty-first century.

The reader's attention is attracted to etymological explanations (though they are not always present), and a variety of subjects; some defined in a handy, succinct way, others described in miniature essays which often span a broad time context. Apart from respectable-looking derivations from Greek and Latin, there are words of French, German, Spanish, Russian, Turkish, Japanese, Sanskrit or Old Norse origin, to mention the instances that immediately catch the eye.

However, the authors and editors of such gigantic projects always experience both blindness and insight. Cuddon was clearly aware of that, as specified in the preface to the third edition. Did his queries affect the current version? This is what he said: "I am familiar with Classical, European, Slavonic and Near Eastern literatures and have some knowledge of the literatures of North America and of Commonwealth nations. But my knowledge of Oriental literatures and those of Spanish America and South America is limited." While the statement points to the immense erudition

of the late author, my locatedness makes me frown on the juxtaposition of European and Slavonic, as if Slavonic literatures were not a part of Europe. I do not assume Cuddon only meant the Asian territory of Russia. Geographical nuances aside, Slavonic literatures are present in the fifth edition in a very selective way. Probably the involvement of the editor whose roots are in former Yugoslavia accounts for some references to the literature of that part of Europe. There are, of course, references to Russian literature. As for Poland, Henryk Sienkiewicz is mentioned in the entry on historical novel (though his novels can hardly be called an "imperialist" project, 333). Jerzy Grotowski appears in an entry on Theatre Laboratory, but the widely acclaimed Stanisław Lem goes unnoticed in the science fiction entry, and so does Jan Kochanowski in the entry on lament, even though his *Laments* (translated into English by Barańczak and Heaney) remain unique in Renaissance literature. South America continues to be a *terra incognita*, though *gaucho* literature has been given a separate entry, while South American writers are mentioned in the discussion of magic realism. Postimperial peripheries, i.e. New Zealand and Australia with the specificity of their fertile indigenous cultures and terms derived from them are not really acknowledged; the same would go for most of Africa. Discussing new additions, M. A. R. Habib mentions terms from "Chinese, Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Indian" (vii). It is interesting to see that far from being insular, the field that the dictionary mines has been expanding throughout successive editions and will, hopefully, do so in the future.

It is certainly interesting to see the new developments, that is, the entries related to the material advertised on the blurb, namely "gender studies and queer theory, postcolonial theory, poststructuralism, postmodernism, narrative theory, and cultural studies." Surprisingly, the term "gender" is not given a separate entry to explain how it has been operating, as compared to another key term in the feminist discourse, i.e. "sexual difference." While there are interesting entries on particular terms such as "abjection" and "chora," both relating to Kristeva's description of the semiotic, her *oeuvre*, like that of Irigaray and Cixous, is not given too much attention in the entry on feminist criticism. The entry refers to them as "French" feminists, thus erasing the origin of the three French-speaking theorists. The fact that Kristeva came from Bulgaria, Irigaray is from Belgium, while Cixous was born in a Jewish family in Algeria is not irrelevant. Perhaps more precision connected with the origin of people would not be altogether out of place. Also, while labelling them all as followers of poststructuralism, the author of the entry loses sight of the fact that they were all heavily influenced by psychoanalysis. However, if you carefully follow the cross-referencing system, Kristeva will be found in an entry on poststructuralism where her connection with psychoanalysis is stated. A rather unfortunate thing is the statement that they

are all preoccupied with "the theory and the role of gender in writing" (274), for gender and sex are clearly a distinction from the English-speaking world, as French has only one term where English has two. The author of the entry has focussed on the earlier stages of feminist criticism mostly, thus reducing the vigorous new developments in the field to the barest minimum. The very explanation of what feminist criticism is sounds peculiar at moments when we read that it offers the critique of "representations of men in literature" (273), whereas a possible target of criticism is clearly the representation of women in the literary works by men. Whether this was just a cavalier mistake or an off-hand dismissal is hard to see. The very word "representation" should have been defined as crucial for postcolonial and feminist studies. Yet, the impression is that feminism was not among the editors' favourite subjects. Even in a rather classic and not updated entry on utopia, Margaret Atwood appears briefly with her dystopia *Oryx and Crak* (*sic!*), despite the fact that feminist dystopia is clearly an interesting variant, and Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* is certainly a case in point.

Much more attention has been given to queer, lesbian and transgender studies. You will find Judith Butler in a useful entry on performativity. The excellent cross-referencing system, which Cuddon referred to as "plumbing" or "wiring," will lead you to many discoveries. If authors and editors "ventilate" their views, as Cuddon had it in his preface to the third edition, the sentence that filtered into an entry on historical novel can be seen as an example. "Mary Renault's novels set in Ancient Greece . . . demonstrate that homosexual relationships have in the past been considered honourable; her novels implicitly ask that present-day homosexuals be offered respect" (334). While most of the sentence does not necessarily further our knowledge of the historical novel, it certainly indulges in didacticism motivated by political correctness. The impression arises that the editors were much more careful dealing with gay studies than with feminism as the previous paragraph proves.

Postcolonialism and Orientalism are described in an exhaustive and detailed way in two entries, and there are other terms relating to them such as *Négritude* or *créolisation*. However, the author of the entry on multiculturalism turns a blind eye to the fact that this has been the official policy of Canada, a classic example of a state where multiculturalism became much more than a literary term, and despite the controversies surrounding it, its implementation has resulted in a rich history of positive and negative responses. A section on deconstruction merits attention; dissemination, trace and grammatology are defined in separate entries. A great deal of effort went into narratology and even into cyberculture. The reader can take issue with some approaches and agree with others, but the overall impression is that the dictionary offers a garden to delight in.

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Reading Literature—Matters Still: A Review of *Czytanie Literatury* [*Reading Literature*], a journal of the Institute of Polish Studies, University of Łódź

Among the many Polish periodicals devoted to contemporary literature one can understandably observe an implicit urge to fashion critical endeavour in accordance with the latest trends in world philology. Still working to compensate for the period of blindness to the developments in the humanities that took place in the latter part of the twentieth century, Polish journals press for standards that comply with the internationally acknowledged levels of criticism. *Czytanie Literatury* [*Reading Literature*], a new academic journal affiliated with the Institute of Polish Studies, University of Łódź, seeks to rise to the challenge.

The first issue (1/2012), published at the beginning of this year, is devoted to reading a number of individual poems by Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz and Czesław Miłosz. However, *Czytanie Literatury* breaks far beyond the boundaries of monograph discussions in that there are sections on the general tradition of criticism and the history of Polish philology in Łódź, and added to those are (always hearteningly welcome) papers on the reception of Polish literature abroad and a survey devoted to the question of the meaning of literature today, which is answered by renowned Polish scholars. Clearly, the first issue surprizes with its staggering diversity, ranging from meticulous close readings to the more popular, though no less intriguing, discussion of the purpose of literature in today's world.

However, the particular strength of *Czytanie Literatury* lies in the translation section as seen in the first issue. Immediately after the series of essays dealing with Iwaszkiewicz, Miłosz and a broader spectrum of literary tradition, there is a translation of the illustrious Stanford critic Marjorie Perloff's essay on T.S. Eliot, which comes from her crucial 2002 book *21st Century Modernism*. In the essay, Perloff argues that in his pre-*Waste Land* poems, Eliot created a highly complex constructivist poetics that would later be re-deployed in a more radical manner in the late-twentieth-century

lyrics of American poets such as Lyn Hejinian, Frank O'Hara and Charles Bornstein. However, placing Perloff's essay in the context of Polish poetry as it is investigated in *Czytanie Literatury* makes as powerful a critical statement here as it did over a decade ago in the US. Perloff advises that contemporary critics re-approach the artful complexities inherent in modernist writing, for it is those complexities that continue to flourish in late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century poetics. Seeing Perloff's argument in the light of Polish literature, it becomes clear that a similar return to the writing of individual masters of the early- (to mid-) twentieth century holds a fruitful key to re-reading our contemporary scene of letters. Thus the illuminatingly detailed readings that comprise the first issue of *Czytanie Literatury* seem to endeavour not only to resuscitate traditionally recognized authors (which hardly needs to be done) but also to let those "strong precursors" provide up-to-date discussions of literature with a new lease of life.

The fact that it is Iwaszkiewicz and Miłosz who come to open the inaugural issue of the journal derives from the editors' deliberate wish to emphasize close readings of individual texts, a tradition that holds strong in the Institute of Polish Studies at the University of Łódź, with an eye to revaluating the existent views on those works. Through conscious application of theoretical principles and philological insight in its most lucid form, the analyses presented in the volume engage not only in the critical debates centred on individual writers but also in the wider development and significance of literary studies in the present-day world. In full awareness of the fact that literature does not exist outside the worldly spectrum as non-referential text-in-itself, the authors read the eminent works against their historical and cultural context, showing that, the temporal gap notwithstanding, literature retains a virtually inexhaustible staying power. Iwaszkiewicz, Miłosz and a number of other writers emerge as vivid, lively figures whose literary output constitutes a vital part of the panorama of our world. Above all, it is hoped this tradition will be kept up in the forthcoming issues of *Czytanie Literatury*. The contributors to the journal repeatedly demonstrate that reading matters more than ever inasmuch as within the textual world the finest space for understanding the variety that our civilization has compelled is opened.

"On the radio the pictures are better"

Dan Rebellato Interviewed by Michał Lachman[1]

Michał Lachman: There is a tendency to think about British post-war drama exclusively in terms of realism. Did you want to redefine this tradition in *Cavalry*?

Dan Rebellato: Yes. The basic idea for the play was a story of someone interviewing four men who at some point turn out to be the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. And I thought it would be interesting to do it in a magic realism genre where you have the biblical story but at the same time you try to treat it very realistically. So the language in *Cavalry* is hyper-realistic; for example, consider the way she speaks in the first half of the recording; she is stumbling over words, she is finishing sentences half way and starting another thought. All that is scripted and the actress, Francis Gray, played it wonderfully well. So the formal point of departure was a juxtaposition of realism of a journalist and ins-and-outs of that profession with the extremity of an apocalyptic story.

ML: When listening to your play, it came to me that you can hardly find plays in the history of contemporary British drama that refer to the future or the end of the world. The theme rather features in science-fiction or dystopian literature but not necessarily in modern drama. More often it can be found in medieval drama, like morality plays. Was medieval drama an important context in composing the play?

DR: There are some examples, actually; Caryl Churchill has written some dystopian plays like *Far Away*; Simon Stephens, David Eldridge, and Robert Holman co-wrote an end-of-the-world play called *A Thousand Stars Explode in the Sky*. There are others. I think they are responding to climate change, globalization and more, and I am interested in the way they do so through apocalyptic imagery. In my case, though, the play is deeply anchored in the present. I wonder at what point you guessed that the four jockeys are the Four

[1] The following interview was conducted as a part of the 2012 edition of Back 2 Festival "BETWEEN.POMIĘDZY" (Sopot) after the audience listened to one of Dan Rebellato's radio plays, *Cavalry* (2008).

Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Some people guess it very early on and some do not until one of the characters admits that. In that way, the play is completely in the present and it also should seem quite banal; the first five minutes listeners keep asking themselves what kind of an incompetent journalist it is, making a real mess interviewing some jockeys, which, for starters, sounds like the worst idea possible for a play. That is also the reason why we have the initial poor quality of the recording; I wanted people to go and check if the radio is broken.

In addition, I am not at all religious and had no commitment to tell a real tale of the end of the world. So in a way it is an alternative take on the present rather than a projection of the future.

ML: Right, and, unlike listeners who sooner or later guess the identity of the characters, the journalist is the last to believe that the four horsemen are the Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Was it your intention to depict modern man as an individual who is unable to comprehend or tolerate irrationality, metaphysics or the supernatural?

DR: The journalist is very much me, in the sense that she denies the possibility of the horsemen being the Horsemen of the Apocalypse. If I were in that bizarre situation I would also be quite reluctant to believe someone saying that they are the Four Horsemen. The play is therefore a mechanism to test the limits of our rationality.

What is more, I was interested in the whole context of the fundamentalist Christian millenarianism and the apocalyptic view in some of the extreme American Christian groups for which all the conditions for the Last Judgement are in place and the Rapture is coming soon and we will be left in chaos. So the play is recognition of the imperfection in the world and a totally fictional attempt to find a solution for it.

ML: So is the play a critique of beliefs such as millenarianism?

DR: Not really, at least not expressly. The play obviously does write on the iconography and associations of the Four Horsemen, although I did not strictly follow the Book of Revelation in the respect of presenting those characters. The reason why they are scary is that they are four relatively young and very cocky men in a male environment with a single woman. There is a mixture of physical threat, occasional sexual threat or simply the way they behave; they are uncooperative, rarely answer the questions, constantly teasing and ridiculing her.

ML: What I also found interesting in the play was the process of recruitment of these horsemen—they are selected from the ancient armies of Genghis Khan or Alexander the Great. You seem to suggest that the apocalypse, like the Four Horsemen

of the Apocalypse, is completely man-made. How did that idea come around?

DR: The actual reason for that idea is quite trivial. I had problems to get the play commissioned and when we first put forward the proposal for the play, it got rejected on the basis that there was not enough story. Apparently, the apocalypse was not enough a story for the BBC afternoon play.

Actually, writing plays for the BBC works in that way that you say you are going to do certain things and then you do not have to do them. So I promised to insert an epic story of each horseman. And although I did not do that I sort of thought it might be interesting to slightly colour characters as individuals with their doubts and fears because that makes them more appealing.

ML: That is right and at the same time you seem to suggest that the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse used to be humans shaped by a destructive mechanism we ourselves produced. They are not of God's but of humanity's making, and each marvellous and great civilization has been founded upon destructive powers. Still it is good to know it was just a trick to fool the BBC.

It is also interesting to see how you depict the journalist herself and what role she is given in the apocalyptic vision. The journalist records a programme about jockeys. So in *Cavalry* we have a radio recording within a radio recording with all the technicalities, her incompetence and final sticking to the microphone with a view to recording the story among the chaos of the apocalypse. (It must have been very reassuring for BBC journalists: the idea that they are presented as lasting until the very end, as they are the last resort to which people would turn.)

DR: There is a sort of a classic BBC radio drama and it is very similar to a nineteenth-century novel in that microphone is the omniscient, non-existent figure and you just hear voices in a similar way as a narrator's voice in, say, George Eliot's novel. So I was interested in disrupting that convention of the microphone as a point of view that gives you a different sense of involvement in a story.

Before *Cavalry*, I did an adaptation of Nikolai Gogol's *Dead Souls*. We did a different sort of experiment there. What I found boring about radio drama is that you often have a narrator who speaks into a microphone. It is called "close mike" and it means that you have a narrator figure who introduces the story and conveys the idea of "a voice in your head." Then you have regular scenes with actors further from the microphone. I have always thought it boring and cheap and obvious. *Dead Souls* is interesting in that it was written in 1842 when the idea of the omniscient narrator had not really settled down

yet. And the narrator of the novel is quite odd because sometimes he narrates way too much, telling you what the horses are thinking or what the furniture is thinking; and sometimes way too little as when a woman pulls a certain face and the narrator says he has no idea of what that might mean (although as a narrator he is also the creator of the entirety of the story!). My favourite point of *Dead Souls* is where the narrator is narrating quietly so as not to wake up the people he is narrating about.

Doing the adaptation we had the narrator at the "close mike" but the joke was that everybody could hear him. So when he is making very unflattering descriptions about people, they get offended. By means of that we tried to explore the mechanics of the radio drama conventions.

ML: Indeed, *Cavalry*, I think, is very "spatial" in the sense of us hearing the voices within various distances from the microphone. In a way you really feel the space. At one point you have the journalist very close to the microphone and when the horsemen appear for the first time, we hear them at some distance. The play is therefore very three-dimensional.

Can you tell us how plays get commissioned?

DR: There are various slots at BBC afternoon play shows; there is an afternoon play slot, a Saturday play slot, a classic serial, a woman's hour drama. They have commissioning rounds at various times of the year. The round for the afternoon play takes place twice a year.

ML: What about the production?

DR: You also have to have your own producer. Mine is Polly Thomas and I have done about ten radio plays with her. First, I send her a couple of pages of ideas for a play and then we have a conversation or a series of conversations. Polly always directs the plays and we are a very good team; we have the same taste, I think, the same ideas about radio and narrative. I am there at the recording and when I feel some things are missed or there is an opportunity we could go for I have a chance to make it then.

The great thing about drama in Britain is that it is done very quickly. *Cavalry* was recorded in a day and a half so that is half an hour of making broadcast material in a day. In addition, you can get very good actors because it is enough to make some phone calls and make an arrangement for the following week or so. So, for example, I have worked with Michael Palin who played the narrator in *Dead Souls*. I could write stage plays my whole life and could never get Palin to be my actor.

ML: Has it ever happened that you had to make any changes in the script?

DR: Yeah, sure. When you have a day and a half to record, everything in the script must be like it is going to be recorded. The process is: I produce a first draft and send it to the producer. She gives me notes and suggestions for rewritings. There is no possibility of extending the play, so if the play is too long, I need to cut because otherwise it will be cut in the edit.

At the beginning of the first day of recording, you always do the read-through to judge whether the running time is OK. Usually I have a good judging of the right length of the script. But, surprisingly, *Cavalry* was six minutes under, too short, and that was really tricky. On that Monday evening I went back to my hotel room and wrote those six minutes; that is the bit where one of the horsemen takes the journalist to see the horses. It is quite funny because I wrote it very quickly and people often tell me that it is their favourite bit.

Audience 1: Could you describe the writing process when writing for radio compared to writing for stage, and whether the visualizing work is the same or different in those two respects? And if it is different, in what way?

DR: There are two interesting and contradictory stories about radio drama; both are also probably untrue. The first refers to the first radio drama ever broadcast which was in 1924. The BBC had thought about making radio drama but radio as a medium has the disadvantage of no images. So the first radio play broadcast on the BBC was set down a coalmine during a blackout because they wanted to motivate there being nothing to look at. So the story conveys the idea of radio drama being confusingly blind.

The second story is set in 1950s. Loads of people bought televisions in Britain, partly for the Coronation. There was a woman who decided to give up her television on the basis that in her view "on the radio the pictures are better." That story captures the completely opposite view; that the radio is intensely visual.

In my opinion, the writing process of a radio drama must be located somewhere in between those two contradictory ideas. The interesting effect you can get in radio is when you have someone saying why they are doing this or that so you have to engage your visual imagination. Most of the time, you have a fuzzy sense of what people in a radio play are like.

The toughest thing in a radio play is a conversation of, say, six people because you somehow have to differentiate between them so that the listener knows who is talking. And when one character is quiet for a long while it is confusing for the listener to know who they are. So you have to pay a lot of attention to this somewhat indeterminate mental visual picture. But it is not about being fantastically

descriptive so that the listeners can create incredibly three dimensional high-definition images.

Audience 2: What are you currently working on?

DR: In terms of radio plays, I am doing a trilogy of plays, broadcast in the same slot. The idea is a story of Britain's relationship with the Middle East and, more specifically, of a British woman getting kidnapped by one of the factions in a country like Syria during an Arab Spring.

The first play is first-world, focused on the woman's husband being woken up at night by someone saying that they have lost contact with his wife. Trying to find out who those kidnappers are, he discovers his wife's secret life.

The second play is second-world and focused on UN hostage negotiators roleplaying with each other quite incompetently, and trying to prepare possible scenarios when they get her back from the kidnappers.

The final part will be the woman and her kidnapper in the form of a duologue. The three plays will be real-time, which seems to be quite a challenge to do. Also, I want to convey the idea of a claustrophobic and small space in the trilogy, intense in focus like *Cavalry* with the difference that *Cavalry* starts tiny and finally gets really massive; the trilogy in turn would keep claustrophobic and small.

Audience 1: Did you get any response from listeners with reference to *Cavalry*?

DR: The play went down quite well. It was nominated for the Sony Award for the best radio play. It did not win but was in the top five.

There used to be a BBC radio drama message board where people could post their comments on the BBC website zone about the plays they watched or listened to. *Cavalry* got generally positive posts. There was, however, one person who did not like it but, still, said it was nice to hear a radio play where nobody is baking a cake. (BBC radio plays are often cosily domestic and it would not be untypical for the central action to revolve around a stressed housewife making a cake.)

Audience 3: Is there any research about who listens to BBC radio plays? What is the audience?

DR: I do not really know that level of detail but I do know that the afternoon plays, like *Cavalry*, usually get an average audience of one million people, which is massive, of course. The most popular BBC radio play, *The Archers*, gets an audience of about two or three million. The afternoon play slot begins right after that radio series with about two million people and in the course of it the audience is reported to fall by half.

ML: Is it not discouraging?

DR: Not really; it is rather motivating. I am aware I am writing for someone who can easily hit the off button. My experience is that the afternoon radio slot starts at 2.15 when people have just had a bit of lunch and they're cleaning up in the kitchen with the radio on. But once they finish the cleaning-up, they go. My aim is to write a play that would stop people from leaving and instead make them carry on listening.

The nice thing about writing radio plays is to get an email from people saying that they sat in their car outside their house because they wanted to hear the end of the play before they went in. So I had a strong sense of the necessity to intrigue the listeners and keep them listening. That is why story is so important for a radio play. It very well organizes the experience and you can insert lots of things in the story.

I also consciously wrote *Cavalry* for another listening and inserted several jokes that work best on the second listening; for example, Pestilence has got a rash he cannot get rid of or Famine enters saying he is starving. These jokes are there for people who might want to hear the play again.

ML: I downloaded the play from the Internet. Was it an intentional leak from the BBC website or was that stealing on my part?

DR: No. I have got all my plays available on my website. You have not done anything wrong; I might have, although the BBC board have not asked me to remove them. The BBC is tied up in a bureaucratic web that makes it difficult for them to make the plays available for people. And it has the extraordinary resource of thousands of thousands of plays that people might like to listen to.

ML: Sharing intellectual capital is not the end of the world, right? Thank you very much.

Transcript: Bartosz Lutostański
between.pomiędzy, 13th May, 2012

"This is for you": Emotions, Language and Postcolonialism

Rukmini Bhaya Nair Speaks with
Dorota Filipczak

Dorota Filipczak: Professor Nair, you have arrived in Poland as a linguist, but you are also a postcolonial critic and a poet, which is always the most intimate identity. I would like to ask you about the way these different roles inform each other. As a linguist you are a self-conscious user of languages. How does it affect your poetry and your criticism?

Rukmini Bhaya Nair: I think you have problematized the question of the "self" of the writer in such an unavoidable way that I must now confront it head-on—and the dangers of self-inflicted injury in such a situation are apparent! I must begin by confessing that I find the notion of a single, primary identity or role quite difficult to accept. You have spoken about my being here at a conference on linguistic pragmatics, and this is a disciplinary area that studies the multiform, multivalent uses of language. Taking my cue from this, I want to suggest that it is the nature of language use, which always has to adapt itself to current circumstances, to change subtly from moment to moment. Use is an itinerant, a beggar, knocking at the door of language. It does not have a "room of one's own," so to speak. This affects our conceptions of the self as well. I think that the hierarchy of the self, predicated on the uses of language, is, in essence, rickety. Even if one intentionally constructs oneself, let's say, first as an academic, then a mother, and then a poet, language simply does not allow one to freeze these identities. So poetry too, like any other use of language, becomes a persistent questioning of identity. And I think this is most marked in the case of women! I do not know about Poland, but being a woman in India often means you have to adjust minute-to-minute to somebody else's notion of who you are. This constant calibration of who you are sensitizes you to what you are not. And writing, whether as a postcolonial critic or linguist or poet, is all about investigating this calibrated ambiguity. Exploring what you are not is exploring what you are. Ambiguity flowers at the heart of language.

DF: Let me ask you a more personal question. Were you born into an Anglo-Indian legacy? What made you choose English as a medium of your poetry? I would like to know what your original language is and how many languages you actually speak, and to what extent they influence the syntax and vocabulary of your poems.

RBN: I often say we do not choose our languages any more than we choose our parents. To answer your question more specifically, my mother came from Goa, and was born into a Catholic family, though she was not a believing Catholic from quite early on, while my father came from Bengal and was Hindu but not a believing one either. So, you could say faith in questioning, and questions of faith, were interlocked in my ancestry! As I've mentioned, my parents had different religions and spoke different languages. My mother's background was Goan and Portuguese, and my father's background was Bengali. It was an unusual marriage. When my parents got married in the 1950s, my mother was excommunicated by the Cardinal in Bombay for marrying a Hindu! Religious conflict and language difference therefore almost seemed fated to later enter my writing: for example, when I wrote a long poem like *The Ayodhya Cantos* which used old myths and legends to tell the political story of the barbaric destruction of a sixteenth-century mosque by Hindu fundamentalists in 1992.

The fact of the matter is you put any language that is available to use when you need to, just as you eat the food that is put on the table when you are a child without asking whether there is better food available elsewhere. In my case, the common language that my parents happened to have, through the historical contingencies of colonialism and postcolonialism, was English. English was the food served up on my parents' rather unusual table. I ate it, I used it—and that was that.

It was only later, in high school and college, that I became aware of the politics of using English as a means of self-expression. Speaking more generally, though, my case is not that unusual. A culture of linguistic hybridity is actually taken for granted in India, given the complexity of the language context. As you know, India houses—if that's the right word—not only one sixth of the world's population but one sixth of the world's languages. It has twenty-two or twenty-three official languages and most of the world's living scripts, still used by millions. So, like other Indians, I grew up in a world of enormous language potential. Under these circumstances, the fact that my parents came from different states made English, which is also undeniably an élite language, a "natural" choice for me as a writer. But, of course, there was something unnatural about this decision as well.

Its postcolonial status makes English a double-edged sword in the hands of an Indian writer. English is a language whose colonial roots are still fresh in the memory, and it can alienate you from large numbers of the citizens of your country, while at the same time making you available to the world as a "representative spokesperson" for India. This continues to be the irony of using English in India.

DF: What kind of English did you speak at home?

RBN: That is what you do not know until you grow up! In India, I used English in my childhood as if it was a native language. I read and dreamt and studied in it without it ever occurring to me that the hybrid tongue I spoke was not "native speaker" English! In my schooldays, I knew few native speakers, indeed none at all except for a few nuns in the convent where I studied. My English was learnt from books and films and television and, most crucially, from other deluded Indian native speakers like myself! It was certainly not "English" English, but it was only when I went to England in my early twenties that the paradox struck me forcefully: my English was not the same as that of the good people of Cambridge. And yet, these people complimented me, saying: you speak such good English! The truth is that you do not confront these questions of language ownership until you go to another country, another culture.

English is so internalized by many in India that you have the confidence to write in it like Rushdie. So what he does—and I do it, too—is to adopt the strategy of creating layers of meaning within a text. Some of these are available to a monolingual English speaker and other meanings to a bilingual or trilingual speaker. Here's an example: in *Shame,* Rushdie calls the three generals in the novel Raddi, Phisaddi and Bekaar, meaning rubbish, laggard and useless, and only sub-continental speakers of Hindi/Urdu know this. For most Western readers, these are just names of generals. So, all the time in India, you are listening to a medley of languages in your head.

DF: How would you comment on Rushdie's language and style?

RBN: Several years ago, I wrote an article which Rushdie, I believe, quite appreciated and it described "history as gossip" in Rushdie's work. The notion here is that not everybody is aware of the nuances of gossip. With gossip as a form of historical story-telling, you have to be aware of the readers of texts as both insiders and outsiders. The more of an insider you are, the more you "get" the story. This is a helpful insight even for linguistic research. You can say: I will look at gossip as a genre, or "sensationalism" as language strategy, and

then you have an entry point into the study of complex texts such as Rushdie's. You make a strength of what could have been a weakness. You could think of a gossip-based grammar of narrative as quite unsophisticated. On the other hand, you could choose to listen to the whispers of all these other tongues within English, and realize that the very being of English today comprises the fact that it is richly sustained by all the other contact-languages.

DF: I'm intrigued by the concept of literature as gossip. This would be one of the phenomena in Canadian literature by women as well, since women are stereotypically connected with gossip. So it is interesting that Rushdie could be read in a gossip mode.

RBN: That is right, the gossip has intimacy. In fact, Robin Dunbar, the evolutionary biologist, has a theory about it. In the early history of our species, he speculates, while the men were out hunting, women gossiped and told stories. This activity constituted a form of moral judgment and the setting of ethical boundaries. It created communities on the basis of "social grooming," like braiding hair. In this sense, gossip can be seen as an interwoven and sustaining activity which creates ethical discourse, so if it is a "woman's thing," it also reflects a high moral standard. This is obviously relevant to the Rushdie case since the battle over the fatwa was widely analyzed as a clash over moral ideologies.

A lot of postcolonial theory, too, consists in asking similar questions: What is the ethical position that a postcolonial theorist must adopt? Do the kinds of theory we produce essentially perform an emancipative role, due to which postcolonial societies seek to free themselves from the self-contempt and lack of self-esteem that a colonial regime inevitably imposes on its conquered peoples? How do we break free of these mental blinkers that continue to obscure our vision? What, ultimately, makes the postcolonial experience postcolonial?

I think of these enquiries as another strand in my own work. For instance, when I wrote *Lying on the Postcolonial Couch: The Idea of Indifference*, I argued that the world élite, schooled in English even when they come from the "Third World" have often fully absorbed the European legacy of modernism and postmodernism in art and literature. They have that privilege, so they know that Derrida's thesis about persistently burgeoning difference and polyphony is rooted in such an understanding. But in postcolonialism, I suggested in my book, the emphasis was not so much on difference but on *in*difference. Distance is created in colonial and postcolonial contexts by rendering oneself indifferent to the polyphony of the other, the "native" tongue(s). Postcolonialism as an emancipative doctrine is really concerned with the

use of linguistic resources and written resources to recover these "lost" differences. The task before postcolonial nation-states is to freely think and sing in our "native" languages again. Against this background, the decision of the Indian government after independence was gained in 1947 to institute "linguistic states" or administrative units based on India's different languages is understandable, as is the confusing notion of having over twenty official languages! When Frederic Jameson spoke, rightly or wrongly, of the typical form of Third World Literatures being the "national allegory" perhaps it was also this imperative he had in mind.

My own archival work on the rise of the colonial system in India from 1757, when the decisive battle of Plassey took place, to 1858, when "the Crown" officially took over from the East India Company, provided me with an important insight here. For, in this historical examination, we find that this formative century was a period of much literary writing by the British in India. Everybody, starting with Warren Hastings to the articled clerk and the foot-soldier, seemed to have been writing poetry at this time. Why? My answer is that they were taking on a performative role, they were actually undertaking a crucial cognitive task through such literary practice. These poetic effusions were fantasy rehearsals for the eventual establishment of empire. In this poetry, the early colonizers routinely compared themselves to Greeks and Romans, for example. This literature produced in the alien heart of empire thus served to convince the future rulers of India of their own moral and civic superiority. Off the top of my head, an example: "This land as at present it stands / Has no church or steeple / Its lands are low-lying lands / And its people are low, lying people." Through witty poetic means of this sort, persuasive justifications were created for the colonizers' right to govern, to disregard the language of the "natives," their religions and their moral positioning. Postcolonial theorists, my work tries to show, attempt to reclaim this literary space, often using English, the erstwhile colonial language. That is why "hybridity" is such an important word in their vocabulary. If you look at the history of colonization, it is remarkable how so much of the contentiousness is in fact linguistic. It is all about the way language is used as a weapon or for defence, as an armour, an emotional and emotive shield against criticism.

DF: We were talking about Rushdie earlier. Let me go back to *Shame* at this point, a work so strongly concerned with exploring forbidden emotions. You seem to connect with Rushdie emotionally and intellectually. How would you describe this relationship?

RBN: Well, in the eighties when I was a graduate student at

Cambridge, there occurred a significant literary moment. In 1978, Said published *Orientalism* and then just two years later came the publication of *Midnight's Children* in 1981. For me and for others of my generation, both of these iconic books created what I can only call an inauguration. This was the birthing of "postcolonial studies" as a powerful new force in the literary field. Before this moment, there was really no entity called "postcolonialism" in my own thinking, but now I had to confront the thought and language of these two major innovators. I had to self-consciously ask myself what it meant to use language as a situated poet and theorist. Also, I have to say that when I considered Said's work in *Lying on the Postcolonial Couch,* his academic views were relatively easy for me to accept, but it was not so easy to accept Rushdie the fabulist as a commentator on Indian writing. He seemed to adopt a patriarchal stance and he came so very strongly to the defence of writing in English. These things bothered me. Still, I knew that "not accepting" Rushdie's views by simply ignoring them, by preserving a mutinous silence, was not an intellectual option. I had to respond to him in writing. So, in my mind, I created a counter-narrative. I argued that if Rushdie fashioned himself as a grand old patriarch, as did others, we could also see him as a writer who was very much a prodigal son. Rushdie himself speaks of "Jocasta's children" as the ones who are judged "disloyal" to their roots, implying that he is one of them. I am currently finishing a book on Rushdie where I try to deal with his putative patriarchy, while admitting that he is clearly a major writer. Disentangling these paradoxes is the work of the critic. Take Kipling, for instance. He is a great writer whose political stance on colonization you may not agree with. With regard to my own work, too, people often say to me in interviews, "well, you are such a difficult writer." And I reply, "but I am not a difficult person!" Or, it could be the other way around. In order to grow as a disciplinary formation, postcolonial theory must seek to identify and discuss all these textual and emotional tensions in the writing of formerly colonized societies like the Indian.

DF: Let me continue to engage with emotions. What is ahead of us, as you say, is the reassessment of emotion, providing it with the importance it should have. Would you say more about that? I am not naively recreating the grid Said exposed: emotion vs. intellect. I am talking about emotion that will disrupt the authority of linguistic structure.

RBN: Now that you mention Said, I recall that he uses the example of Flaubert's picture of the Oriental woman (in *Orientalism)*, and he remarks that she never spoke; she never revealed herself or her personal history. Non-revelation of self and silence are at the core

of Flaubert's image of the Orient as a commentary on emotional life. When the psyche of an Oriental woman is explored it is the ultimateness of her silence that is intriguing. For me, this woman is not only part of Flaubert's fiction; she is an imaginative trope, which could be explored even in the native literatures of India. How is the signifier "woman" constructed and reconstructed in writing? Emotion itself has belonged to the realm of women, as has gossip. But I feel we should negotiate these dichotomies not necessarily in terms of what it means to be a woman or a man, but also in terms of what it means to be human. That is why I constantly go back to the theme of human evolution in my work and ask the—perhaps unanswerable—question of how we came to be what we are. To live in an emotional ambience, to my mind, is finally connected with being human and not just with being a woman. The modern dichotomy between an emotional woman and a rational man who did not need to talk about affect seems to me spurious. It's a literary trap. After all, it was the so-called "rational man" who attributed affect to a woman's nature, so whether it is Emma Bovary or some other wonderfully imagined female character, attribution and attributes play a key role in stereotyping. This has happened, of course, across literatures and cultures. However, preserving this dichotomy between an experiential being and a thinking being could be highly misleading because experiential thought is an attribute of both sexes.

Thus, to describe somebody as a "feminist writer" or a "woman writer" is to deny the fact that what we write as feminists and as women is for *everyone*, just as the lessons of postcolonial theory are not just for the postcolonial world but for the "developed" world as well. Feminism and postcolonialism are emancipatory doctrines. That is what they have in common. So, as a writer, I feel I must try and understand what the universalist notion "everyone" might mean. How does this "everyone" inhere in a singular individual or in a character in a text? If you write in English in India, do you really write for everyone? Won't you face the charge of being "inauthentic" because you simply do not possess the linguistic means to depict the everydayness of your society, its individuality, its local specificity? Conversely, if you write in, say, Bengali, are you available to the world? Yet, when you write "for everybody," the concept of an audience simply dissolves, as Wittgenstein might have said. How do we interpret this conundrum? Shakespeare, we accept, belongs to the wide world, as does Tagore. My point is that intellectual traditions, as they have been constructed by modernity and colonialism, should not divide us. If you are an Indian writer you do not write for Indians only. For example, I've read Dostoyevsky and Gogol and

Tolstoy only in translation, and it never struck me that these authors were just for the Russians! For me, it is quite liberating to realize that our common intellectual heritage comes from everywhere. It may be specific, but it does not have to be limiting. If we read with a sense of the cultural barriers always being up, then most of the intellectual inheritance of the world would not be available to us. In the age of the Internet to keep these barriers up will be even less possible and, indeed, not desirable.

DF: Let me stay for a moment with your comment on intellect and emotion because I would hate to lose that. It strikes me as something that came up in the feminist philosophy of religion.

RBN: Absolutely.

DF: Pamela Sue Anderson, a feminist philosopher and contributor to *TM1* came up with a concept of "rational passion" collapsing the opposition between the privileged element of reason and a negatively constructed element of desire excluded from philosophical discourse. Could it be said that people from the former peripheries of empire are the ones who also collapse the binary oppositions Said specified?

RBN: I think that is a very pertinent observation. The act of bringing emotion back into discourse significantly takes place as a philosophical strategy in literature as well. Again, to recall Flaubert's silent woman or the figure of the subaltern in Gayatri Spivak's famous essay on the postcolonial dilemma "Can the Subaltern Speak?" we could ask: Is it possible to recoup the speech of the subaltern, who has been silenced for various historical reasons, via fiction, via poetry? In fiction, after all, you can get emotionally close to the characters in a way you simply cannot in real life. In a text, emotional barriers are removed by sleight of hand and the text permits nuanced intimacy.

The point made by me in *Narrative Gravity* was: Why did these "useless" literary forms—fiction, poetry, drama—survive across time in all cultures? What was their evolutionary purpose? When you listen to an interesting story or watch a gripping film, I noted that your pulse rate goes up, your eyes are transfixed, your facial and body language alters frequently, you cry and laugh although you know very well that the projected experience is not "real." Yet you produce these visceral reactions. The question in *Narrative Gravity* was: Why do we do this? My answer was that it is really an epistemic means of learning, of experience acquired at a low cost. You do not actually have to climb a mountain or fall in love to understand these things; the textual experience gives you a huge intellectual and experiential reservoir. In my view, this emotional reservoir is

why these fictional or poetic forms are so privileged across cultures. These emotional feats are also intellectual feats because you have to think to "get" the very complex causal chain of a narrative, you have to empathize with "other minds" and deeply understand the true importance of pretence and metaphor.

As for poetry, as I mention in my book *Poetry in a Time of Terror*, on September 11th 2001, the radio channels in the United States were flooded with poetry. Again, why? Surely it was because it was people's immediate emotional means to articulate something inexplicable. And to me this articulation of the inexplicable is also one of the great intellectual feats that humankind undertakes. You need emotion to resolve a crisis, because crisis is always emotional. Further, there does not exist a human culture without stories or poetry, because these are primary means for hypothesis formation and inference-making. All intellectual feats are thus emotionally imbued. The two elements cannot be separated because without passion you cannot embark on an intellectual endeavour. In the case of specific intellectual histories such as the South Asian or Indian, the argument is also similar: you have to struggle emotionally to create a robust intellectual vocabulary for "the subaltern."

DF: This explains to me why I have been dealing with postcolonial literature. It is because it voices emotions such as anger, despair or joy. It starts as an outcry.

RBN: Yes, it is a shout! But it is also, most crucially, about the emotion of hope, said to be at the bottom of Pandora's box, because hope creates a future as well as desire for that future. Creating the future is an intellectual task because the future does not exist. It is a counterfactual entity and you call it up, paradoxically, by appealing to memories of the past. You recreate all those connections which have been erased. Without hope for this imagined future, you cannot be a postcolonial writer.

DF: What about the connection between emotions, language and story-telling?

RBN: We have spoken of story-telling and its possible evolutionary role. An equally basic connection between language and emotions has also haunted me for some years now. Unlike the other critical sensory apparatuses of touch, taste, hearing, smell and vision which are fully "cooked" within about a year of birth, my hypothesis is that emotion takes a long time to develop, as does language. In linguistic studies by Lennenberg and others, language has been shown to take about three to four years to develop. These "language milestones" are well described. What I am trying to track down in my research now are "emotional milestones" and how language

and emotion grow in tandem to give us the "grammars" of our cultures. The idea of these "stages" is that you are unlikely, let's say, to develop the emotion of shame before you have a basic repertoire of emotions such as fear or anger. Similarly, you will have to have the experience of expectation before you can experience disappointment. There is thus something of a "logic" to emotional development even if it is not very strict. Also, language choice, tone of voice, contextual familiarity and many other parameters all influence emotional growth, making us the variable "adults" that we come to be.

DF: How do you see your poetry *vis à vis* the work of other women writers in India? Are there any emotional affinities between you and other women writers?

RBN: There has been a great deal of recent effort to bring together women writers on different forums. I myself have formed friendships over years with many such writers, for example, with Bama, a Dalit writer who comes from the underprivileged caste. The big question in Dalit literature is: How does one forge a whole new language for self-expression? For, it so happens that the established and rich literary languages of India such as Marathi or Tamil contain terms for the lower castes which are highly derogatory. So, the task of Dalit writers, male and female, is not simply to reuse these languages, rich as they are, but to invent a fresh semantics. The friendships I have formed often have to do with linguistic issues.

I'd like to emphasize, too, that women writers in India today are such a critical force because they do not in fact confine themselves to commentary on women's issues alone. They write boldly and experimentally in Assamese and in Telegu, in a whole exciting array of Indian languages, and not only about sexuality, but about philosophy and about science. They even write science-fiction. At the other end of the spectrum, the interpretation of myth and legend is another thing that binds together women writers in India. How do we use the rich lore of oral myths and ancient legends we have inherited in the current context? For example, in my poem "Gargi's Silence," I am concerned with the motif of a woman in the ancient Upanishads who is not allowed to ask any questions of her guru.

These encircling questions—and the lack of them—define some of the ways in which affinities and friendships are formed amongst women writers and readers in contemporary India. We often have poetry readings which are amazingly multilingual, so this in itself is education. At such sessions we learn to appreciate the poetics of languages we do not know! Then, because we have at least twelve scripts in widespread use in India, the fact is we always feel a little

illiterate, whether we are men or women! Even if you can read five of these scripts, there are so many other languages and scripts you do not know. I always say we Indians had to invent reincarnation because you need several lifetimes for all this frantic language activity. Also, we could ask why most of the production by women writers in India is still in the form of poetry. Here, I suppose that women often write poetry rather than fiction because women's labour is often unpaid and round-the-clock, so we must grab those limited, interstitial moments. Other genres that have come to seize our attention in India are biography and auto-ethnographies, those untold stories of women, of Dalits, of entire communities. In this way, we are experimenting through genres and forms to express our inner lives.

Going back to previous issues in this conversation, I once wrote a poem about the history of the world. Now this seems a very "colonial" thing to do, to attempt to write a homogenizing history of "everyone." But my purpose was to emphasize that the recorded history of the world is a history of unremitting violence, especially violence against women who dare to ask intellectual questions such as Gargi in Indian myth, whom I've mentioned, or the Greek mathematician, Hypatia. I would say the story of Hypatia is international: it would resonate well with "postcolonial" Indian women today.

DF: Gayatri Spivak used an interesting phrase in a review of your book *Lying on the Postcolonial Couch*. She said you had given postcolonialism a decent burial. How do you envisage the future after postcolonialism, if there is an after?

RBN: The post of postcolonialism?

DF: Yes.

RBN: Well, that remark of Spivak's is in direct response to the opening sentence of my book, which goes like this: "Postcoloniality awaits consignment to oblivion." But to take the thought further, thank you for bringing up this point, for it is a metaphor I have always wanted to tease out—this rather Christian image of a "decent burial" which is, to me, a little bit at odds with traditional practices on the Indian subcontinent. Let me explain. The notion of a "burial" is interesting in an Indian context because it is a verbal transformation of the practice of "cremation" or the burning of the dead, which is the commonest form of death ritual in India. But if cremation is indeed the image we have in mind, then we have the presence of flames and fire, adding up to a very different image from an earth-burial.

The emotional impact of postcolonialism must reside, at least partly, in the images that it summons up. Burial in the Indian context conjures up reincarnation, cremation and even, perhaps, the

phoenix rising from the flames. Now, I gauge Spivak to be sympathetic to the idea of "burying" the postcolonial and moving on. We do not need the ghost of postcolonialism hovering around forever like the ghost in *Hamlet*, but if I am the one giving postcolonialism a burial, decent or otherwise, who exactly am I? Am I a ceremonial priest? The question is: Who is entitled to bury or to cremate? Women, Indians, theoreticians, poets, religious pontiffs? All or none? Or is the burial in question a phantom act, a phantasmagoric literary performance, a *tour de force à la* T.S. Eliot writing in *The Waste Land* of the sunken Ganges and the "burial of the dead"? The echoes of the potent metaphor of burial are everywhere and we need to think through them: How, if at all, do we bury postcolonialism? We know, after all, that postcolonialism is, at the very least, a phase of history and no phase of history is ever quite dead. I could, for instance, mention an endless succession of past scholars or poets and query whether they are dead, and I must say that I'd be very uncomfortable if I had to definitely respond: Yes, certainly, they are dead and buried! So perhaps I was mistaken in *Lying on the Postcolonial Couch*. Too premature a burial is no good thing. Maybe we should not be talking about burials at all but of births!

DF: Yes, you have changed the perspective by means of intercultural translation. The burial is never final. I would now like to ask you about your comment on Derrida's sentence about the impossibility of translation. Do you believe it as a poet or linguist?

RBN: Is translation impossible? The idea behind translating, whether we speak of texts or thoughts, is to ideally achieve something like "perfect" articulation even if we are dealing with only one language. But the idea of achieving perfection is, to my mind, impossible if language is our medium. To me any great masterpiece is flawed. And it is through these flaws that you encounter perfection. *Hamlet*, as I see, is flawed in this sense; it contains a lot of tacky language, it exhibits much incongruity and "madness" as well as an awesome transcendence in its expression. If someone translated *Hamlet*, she would first have to take on board this idea of flawed perfection. So, I think the idea of a perfect translation is as impossible as the idea of perfect linguistic articulation. Someone once remarked in jest that a good translation has virtues that the original does not possess. It moves away from fidelity, and creates an object of interpretation. It plays the language game consummately, which requires an understanding of the "rule" that you cannot draw a perfect grid for anything in language. You can only say "roughly" what you mean; you cannot ever speak "exactly," because even in mathematical formulas there

is room for interpretation. I would add that in India especially we are comfortable with this idea of, if you like, "unconsummated" translation. These matters are discussed by several Indian translation scholars in my (edited) book *Translation, Text and Theory: The Paradigm of India*. In India, we live in translation. We are natural-born translators. That means, too, that we live with the idea of an enabling "imperfection." And if the imperfectness of translation is endemic to the postcolonial condition, to the Indian context, I would maintain that it is also endemic to being human. How could we talk otherwise, we strangers who have just met, you from Poland and I from India?

DF: Now that you are in Poland I would like to ask you if you are familiar with any Polish poetry, in translation obviously.

RBN: A friend of mine, Keki Daruwalla, a well-known poet himself, once gave me a book edited by Miłosz. It was called *A Book of Luminous Things*. A lot of the poems in the book were poems in translation that Miłosz had collected from all over the world. Now, what makes this poetry Miłosz selected *not* get lost in translation? As I see it, what is translated in this marvellous anthology is not so much language-specific matter like puns but images, such as the old woman with white hair in one of the poems Miłosz collected, to whom her companion says: "your hair is like pearls." The answer to why this poem was chosen is obvious. It was because of its sheer luminosity, the luminousness of the imagery which shines through different language filters. I remember, in this context, my own poem "Genderole," addressed to a very famous Indian philosopher of the ninth century, Shankara, who talked about how we are all one, *advaita*. I must explain here that in Sanskrit you traditionally write all the words in a sentence or verse together, without gaps between them. So I wrote this poem in English about being a woman where all the words were strung together too, thus challenging Shankara, my imagined reader and the famous monist who believed "all are one" to now read me in this graphemic style, particularly because his own texts contain so many derogatory references, like those of Aristotle's, to women's lack of intellect. When this poem was then translated into Swedish, I thought to myself: O blow, how are the Swedes ever going to understand this poetic duel? This poem is so impenetrably embedded in culture. But when it was read at Lingkoping University, the discussion I had with the audience afterwards was great. This is a tribute to the translator and the role of translation itself for it showed how the translation coaxed the audience to understand not only the text, but why I'd deliberately made language a barrier in that poem. My view is that you cannot get equivalence in

translation, however hard you aim for it but you can certainly bring to birth an idea, a speech event; you can share "illuminations," to borrow a word from Walter Benjamin, also speaking here of translation. Luminous things are luminous in excitingly different ways and we have to be prepared to take on these differences. Miłosz expresses this breadth of vision when he takes poems from all over and illuminates different things. We understand our common humanity better through this altruistic gesture of Miłosz. I have read Szymborska, too, with enormous admiration. In her case, her voice is so direct, her ideas are so smart and moving that they seem to easily penetrate the barriers of translation and allow us to reach the heart of her poetry. Yet, there can be little doubt that I lose the flavour of Polish when I read Szymborska and that is a profound loss. This sense of loss is inevitable in poetry which uses the most intimate language, as you pointed out at the very beginning of this conversation, but loss characterizes all communication. Sometimes a text uses a language I am familiar with, yet fails to touch me; at other times, I know that a text is "foreign" and yet I can feel a deep empathy emanating from it and this seems to extend my emotional and intellectual reach. For me, it is this that is the great, intercultural reward of reading Miłosz and Szymborska, albeit in translation. They remind us to be human in every dimension. And this is another reason why I will never say my work is only for Indians. It is for them but not only for them. Even if a single Indian did not read me, I would still very humbly say to you, to my unknown audience, to everyone: "this is for you."

DF: Thank you. It has been a very profound and luminous interview.

RBN: Thank you for saying this!

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