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BREAKING UP THE LANGUAGE: THE STRUGGLE WITH(IN) MODERNITY IN J. H. PRYNNE'S *BITING THE AIR*

Abstract

The essays focuses on J. H. Prynne's *Biting the Air*. Taking as a departure point Adorno's idea of the role of art in society, it is argued here that Prynne's sequence of poems thematises a conflict between the supremacy of the science- and market-oriented narratives of suppression of society and the attempts to subvert that narrative through a reinvention of the signifying process of language. Prynne resorts to radical parataxis in order to undermine the ostensibly natural hegemony of accepted idioms of science and market economy, offering a dense network of meanings that cannot be reduced to a flat formula.

“Art is the negative knowledge of the actual world”.
Theodor W. Adorno, “Reconciliation under Duress”

“We heard them and it was not in this word order”.
J. H. Prynne, *Word Order*

Neil Corcoran foresaw that J. H. Prynne's poetry after *Brass* (1971) might run the risk of becoming so hermetic as to be virtually incomprehensible to all but the clique of “devoted explicators” (Corcoran 177). Boldly dismissive though he might sound, Corcoran does strike a point, since the first impression on reading Prynne is that his work adamantly and obdurately refuses to respond to any of the customary interpretive strategies and the woebegone reader is eventually impelled to profess ignorance of what the poems actually try to say. Paradoxically, this multifaceted lack of acquiescence in the traditional modes of reading constitutes a large part of the evocative power of these poems; they can hardly be approached with the methods of commentary that

focus, for instance, on the propositional content of particular images which, in a greater or lesser measure, eventually reveal a number of sustained messages. Instead, Prynne compels his readers to shed what they have come to regard as “their language” in favour of an entirely new reading experience and it is this experience that falls within the immediate ambit of this essay. I seek to explore Prynne’s search for the emancipation of language in his recent volume *Biting the Air* (2003) against the backdrop of Theodor Adorno’s discussion of the role of art in modernity. Only when this strategy of re-appreciation of idiom has been delineated will Prynne’s passionate involvement with and criticism of contemporaneity become transparent.

The early Prynne affiliates himself with hermeneutical/phenomenological investigations that share much of their intellectual impetus with Martin Heidegger’s search for Being. As Anthony Mellors argues, underlining the poet’s affinity with the writings of Charles Olson, Prynne’s “path to the Real is *through* the space of the figural. That is, the interest in what is thought to be fundamental or basic is not marked by a pathological refusal of metaphor but [...] proceeds along a Heideggerian track that carries interpretational impasse towards a form of *Dasein*” (Mellors, *Literal Myth...* 43). This brings Mellors to the postulate that Prynne seeks to approach reality through language. Even in the earliest books like *Kitchen Poems* (1968) and *The White Stones* (1969) the poet understands that even if the real lies beneath the film of words, we have access to it solely through the idiom. It is in *The White Stones* in particular that Prynne formulates what may be considered to have become his principal technique in the volumes of the last twenty years; words carry in themselves a twofold potential, the literal and “earthly,” to refer it to Heidegger’s term from “The Origin of the Work of Art,” and the figurative which, similarly to Heideggerian “world,” opens up the path to the perception of the true reality of Being. Mellors notes that “in order to escape the empirical naivety of the false literal,¹ the inheritance of (pejorative) meaning must be lifted up to a figural plane, there to be ‘concretized’ and made truly real again” (Mellors, *Literal Myth...* 45). The transition from the literal to the figural marks the passage to a mythical plane wherein the truth of Being may be apprehended and then brought back to the sphere of the literal. Prynne’s early poetics shares this premise with High Modernist employment of myth in such poets as W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot; however, myth cannot be used as a framework for the process of the elucidation of man’s condition in late modernity because the stability of the concept, which derives from a transcendental certainty that there exists an ontological order that can be approached through poetic utterance, exposes it to the processes of reification inherent in Western culture. Mellors makes a pertinent point when he observes that “unlike T. S. Eliot, who could not see that the drive to mythic order was already a constituent of capitalist

dissociation of sensibility and not an alternative to it, Prynne is aware that a poetic of mythic synchronicities without complication will only buy into the rhetoric of the 'market' and the advertising executive" (Mellors, *The Spirit of Poetry...* 189). The mythical plane is not resistant to the culture industry which thrives on turning all intellectual devices into reified language, clichés whose sole imperative is that everything sell at a profit. This is the condition of the late modern anti-essentialist, discontinuous self: "Just as [it] can adopt any discourse or persona, so capitalism can market any discourse or value" (Colebrook 150). The reference to "the advertising executive" implies such an appropriation of language by the market which strives to bring all fresh metaphors down to the level of communicative articulacy; this calcification of the "vital" language of poetry into platitude was already remarked by P.B. Shelley:

[Poets'] language is vitally metaphorical; that is, it marks the before unapprehended relations of things, and perpetuates their apprehension, until the words which represent them, become through time signs for portions or classes of thoughts. ; and then if no new poets should arise to create afresh the associations which have been thus disorganized, language will be dead to all the nobler purposes of human intercourse. (482)

It is the poet's task to renew language but such renewal must necessarily break away from the established norms and patterns of understanding. For Shelley, all but poetic language is dead, having lost its revolutionary potential. For Prynne, the idiom appropriated by the market represents such deadness.

Therefore Prynne presses his experiment to the utmost limits of intelligibility so that his language might never ossify into a commercial product. The risk he undertakes is that his poems may sacrifice meaning on the altar of de-marketability. Robin Purves aptly comments on this slow transition beyond the Heideggerian premise and the dangers it involves:

If the earliest of Prynne's works in the *Poems* collection appear to revise his even earlier philosophical interest in phenomenology so that a re-synthesised unity of knowledge is depicted by virtue of the equivocality of poetic metaphors, which are themselves framed inside the various perceptual acts of the speakers of the poems, these relatively consistent structures of perception are largely muted or absent (and increasingly so) in the latest work. The ensuing dearth of frames in late Prynne means that the work runs the risk of reliance upon sheer, linguistic equivocality, risking their abrupt dismissal as a collection of opaque beads and their sufficiently loose, syntactical stringing, the least important thing in the world, or risking their just-as-abrupt elevation to the status of a new, Delphic oracle. (59)

The further away Prynne moves from the "structures of perception," the larger the threat that he may either be plunged into readerly oblivion or,

theoretically even more perilous, interpreted out of his critical context. The latter case would expose him to the very forces of the market which he strives to subvert in that his work, given its insurmountable equivocality, may be susceptible of wildest of interpretations. Nevertheless, the most recent poems, and *Biting the Air*, as it will be argued, is a case in point, attain an unprecedented force of expression thanks to the radical reinvention of language that takes its clarity and pertinence from a modified form of figuration inherent already in *Kitchen Poems* and *The White Stones*.

One of the problems with language which Prynne tries to tackle in his poems is that the idiom has become subservient to economy in general and the need of incessant money circulation in particular. This point is amplified on in an early prose (in fact, “essay-like”) poem “A Note on Metal,” where Prynne posits that:

For a long time the magical implications of transfer in any shape must have given a muted and perhaps not initially debased sacrality to objects of currency-status, just as fish-hooks and bullets became strongly magical objects in the societies formed around their use. But gradually the item-form becomes iconized, in transitions like that from *aes rude* (irregular bits of bronze), through *aes signatum* (cast ingots or bars) to *aes grave* (the circular stamped coin). The metonymic unit is ed, and number replaces strength or power as the chief assertion of presence. (*Poems* 129)

By the metonymic association of number with power money attains greater significance than exchangeable objects. Even though the shift creates previously impossible chances for the development of trade, it is also conducive to the process of homogenisation. All aspects of human activity eventually come to be represented in monetary value, which privileges, for example, the invention of more deadly weapons over artistic production inasmuch as the former exerts immediate effects on the position of a given people in relation to its neighbours. Thus the ostensibly well-boding change paves the way to the creation of all-embracing systems of economy and hermeneutics that depends on market discourses.

It is against the backdrop of the “history of metal,” as a transition towards the hegemony of the number, that Prynne formulates his poetics. “For Prynne, poetry provides an index to the history of substance, an accidental etching of those displacements through which language traces locale and rhyme comes to approximate gold” (Blanton 131). Such emphasis on the relation of language to substance which makes the former into “a counter-currency” gives poetry a function beyond that of aesthetics. This suggestion “initiates a turn within and against the lingering abstractions of modernism itself, unleashing against the monumental structures of nation, empire, or capital that dialectical practice of de-art-ing or deaestheticization

of art in which Adorno located the possibility of aesthetic critique” (Blanton 131). Art cannot merely be an aesthetic pursuit because in this way it is sure to fall prey to reification. Therefore it is in the direction of Adorno’s perception of art that Prynne’s later poetry turns in an ever larger measure, since the task of the poem is to pull down the monumental² linguistic praxis of the day.

Adorno sees the crucial value of works of art not in their partaking of some generalizable concept of beauty but “in their power to let those things be heard which ideology conceals. Whether intended or not, their success transcends false consciousness” (Adorno 214). The great works of art, as Adorno likes to phrase it, overcome an ideological appropriation of reality by proffering an idiom that most clearly escapes the dominant modes of societally-accepted linguistic praxis. “Lyric poetry, therefore, shows itself most thoroughly integrated into society at those points where it does not repeat what society says – where it conveys no pronouncements – but rather where the speaking subject (who succeeds in his expression) comes to full accord with the language itself, i.e., with what language seeks by its own inner tendency” (Adorno 218). The purpose of art, and poetry is a most pertinent example, is to overcome the ossification of society in a twofold manner.

On the one hand “works of art are products without an obvious purpose, in a world where everything is presented as existing not for its own sake but for the sake of something else. They thus point to the fact that production is becoming the production of exchange-value for its own sake” (Jarvis 120). Referring this point to Prynne’s “A Note on Metal,” it appears that modern society plunges itself ever deeper into the realm of all-embracing systems and the power to unveil and prevent this process of increasing homogenisation lies with poetry. Adorno’s theory of the social role of poetry lays emphasis on the linguistic side of the mounting systemisation of life in that if language falls into the trap of fossilisation, that is when it strives solely for communicative expeditiousness, all human praxis must necessarily follow. Thus it is Adorno’s critique of “Lyric Poetry and Society” that underlies Prynne’s suggestion “that language might provide a counter-currency with an alternative and conscious relation to substance” (Blanton 131).

On the other hand, in poetry, language (at least theoretically) comes to enunciate its inner tendency, which is poles apart from the homogenised idiom that the society predicated on “metal” seeks. What poetry cannot harbour is the ossification of idiom and this incessant demolition of systemisation lies at the heart of language and constitutes its ownmost potential. Adorno usefully discusses the struggle with reification of language in “The Essay as Form.” He begins with drawing a parallel between the essay and art, suggesting that the former “shys away from the violence of dogma” (98).³ By dogma Adorno understands the modern infatuation with what

Prynne connotes in his idea of “metal”; pitched against all manner of systems of homogenisation and reification, the essay works primarily against received wisdoms as agents of false consciousness inasmuch as it begins with breaking up the fixedness of concepts as already-achieved patterns of knowledge. In lieu of using them as epistemic tools:

[T]he essay urges the reciprocal interaction of its concepts in the process of intellectual experience. In the essay concepts do not build a continuum of operations, thought does not advance in single direction, rather the aspects of the argument interweave as in a carpet. The fruitfulness of the thoughts depends on the density of this texture. (Adorno 101)

Concepts lose their unshakeable certainty and enter into intellectual play to the same extent as does metaphoric language or art. The dialectic that is at play within the essay creates a tension between the drive away from synchronicities of systemic thought and the search for critical enlightenment. “Disaster threatens intellectual experience the more strenuously it ossifies into theory and acts as if it held the philosopher’s stone in hand” (Adorno 105–106). In order to avoid this disaster, critical thought must progress by way of dialectic which is exemplified in the essay. No theory guarantees knowledge because what it seeks is an outer vantage from which things can be made into an intelligible whole; the efficaciousness of the essay hinges on its ability to “swallow up the theories that are close by; its tendency is always towards the liquidation of opinion” therefore, as “the critical form par excellence,” the essay “constructs the immanent criticism of cultural artifacts, and it confronts that which such artifacts are with their concept; it is the critique of ideology” (Adorno 106). The essay unravels the implicit functioning of ideology in every cultural artefact, thereby pulling down the concept of the work of art as commodity.

Adorno’s critique of concepts and theories complements his perception of the role of works of art; they thwart the working of exchange-value as principal mode of social organisation and do so by subverting the domination of concepts. Poetry, similarly to the essay, breaks the reification of language not only as an epistemic conveyor but, at a more rudimentary level, as a means of unhindered communication. Thus poetry subverts the sense-making patterns in language, which are the products of the age-old hegemony of the reified system of hermeneutics.

The task of rattling the fossilised linguistic cage that is vested in poetry carries with it a number of ethical issues.⁴ The criticism of language commonplace constitutes a pertinent background for the reading of Prynne. In his later poetry, he offers an image of man as ensnared in the linguistic praxis of the day. The language of modernity is derived from the systems founded by the hegemony of “metal” and therefore it is reified into a

medium of unobstructed exchange of information. Rod Mengham observes that in *Word Order* (1989) the coherence of contemporary Western society “is seen as that of a textured surface, where certain meanings are fused together in word orders that are dictated by a ruthless economy of exchange” (“A Free Hand...” 76). Modernity is here understood as a textualized space wherein one is caught up in professional jargons such as the idioms of economy and law. Man is shackled in those jargons as is (undialectical) philosophy in its concepts. Therefore what is at stake in Prynne’s poetry⁵ (at least since *The Oval Window* [1983]) is “a perpetual reconstitution of the self” (“A Lifelong Trasnfusion...”. 207). This is the context in which *Biting the Air* may fruitfully be situated.

The title *Biting the Air* implies an act of attacking something so elusive that it is virtually immaterial. This initial remark opens the path into the book in that the individual lyrics that comprise the sequence may be argued to thematize a conflict between the individual, in the poems represented by the pronouns “you” and “he,” and what seem to be means of exerting authority: the suggestion of ubiquitous medical hazard that demands solution at all costs and the omnipresence of clichés associated with rationality; these two are underlain with a furtive desire to ascend to and retain power on the part of some unidentified forces represented throughout the sequence by the grammatical category of the imperative. The first lyric in the book, opening with an ironic mockery of the underprivileged, delimits the space of the struggle between the individual and the power-obsessed imperative. The frameless equivocality of the language mentioned by Purves is here employed in a radically paratactic manner so as to undermine the immediacy of meaning-formation. This process is at play already in the first stanza of the sequence:

Pacify rag hands attachment in for muted
counter-march or locked up going to drainage
offer some, give, none ravine platter, tied up
to kin you would desire that. [...]

The introductory phrase states firmly that “rag hands” need to be pacified. Although the synecdoche connotes the impoverished, the word “hands” seems to be engaged in a double figuration in that it not only refers to the poor but also to those who perform manual labour and are perceived as disposable rags. Also, the pacification ushers in an ambiguity that informs the whole volume. It is at no point clear whether the labourers’ anger is to be abated or whether they are to be forcefully subdued. Appeasement and subjugation mark the two strategies in the poem by means of which the imperative seeks to extend its dominion. It is against this craving for domination that the “rag hands” appear to stand up, “in for muted / counter-march.”

The response on the part of the imperative is not to arrest the “rag hands,” for that would cause serious financial losses, “locked up going for drainage.” There is a syllogistic tinge to that phrase, as though being “locked up” were necessarily to result in “drainage.” Instead of risking such setbacks, the better alternative is to “offer some, give, none ravine platter.” The labourers are to be pacified by means of deception. The surprisingly frequent distribution of commas in the above phrase makes the line equivocal; on the face of it, the offers are to be made to some and are to be made good with “none ravine platter.” However, it is only the comma that prevents the line from reading: “offer some, give none,” in which case meeting the “rag hands” requirements would only be a ploy to deter the workers from decreasing their efficiency. The injunction “you would desire that” introduces the first pronoun in the sequence, which may denote one of the strikers as well as the reader. Be it either way, the line echoes with derisive smugness of the privileged who realise that “you would desire” to be offered and given something but the gift, distributed equally among all “rag hands,” turns out to be carrying lethal connotations, since

[...] Even hand
 bestowing pharmaceutical front to avoid, even
 flatline signal glitz perfection, slide under be-
 fore matter planning your treat advance infirm
 in legal glowing stunt. [...]

Despite the use of an anacoluthon (the “front to avoid” misses the object) and parataxis (“even / flatline signal” followed by “glitz perfection”), the fragment seems to be trained on some pharmaceutical mogul which is in the process of introducing a new medicine into the market, with the implication that only a financial success matters, hence the “glitz perfection.” Nevertheless, the medicine is by no means risk-free, as the “even / flatline signal” suggests the cessation of heartbeat; the “pharmaceutical front” further amplifies the idea that an attempt is made to disguise true intentions and avoid the “slide under.” Ironically, the hint at death occurs side by side with the pronouncement of “glitz perfection.” The first stanza ends with a cynical dismissal “in legal glowing stunt” of any prospective charges against the company, while measures are undertaken so as to prevent future collisions with the law: “drug outsourcing denies active pivotal racer hot-rod.”

Thus the medical corporate world is shown to be as obsessed with commercial power struggle as any other profit-oriented branch of business. This premise puts a new slant on the imperative opening the poem in the sense that the “rag hands” might as well be those on whom the new drugs are tested and whose fears of possible pernicious side-effects need to be allayed. The medical hazard glimpsed through various implications of the company’s

shady practices is then compounded with a discourse of rationality: “glinted horizons so // blue and bright forever we say, pinching the / promised drip.” The moment the horizons are seen to be “blue and bright forever,” filling one with hopes for the future, the image shifts violently from a pastoral scene to a hospital room. The former seems to be used to dispel the fears presented by the latter and the implication at this point in the lyric is that the drip will actually remedy the patient’s condition. Yet, this image is echoed in the final stanza:

[...] it is easy to make
a country prosperous and blue and bright over
and blindness forever in hand on hand proverb.

As it is easy to reap enormous profits in the medical business, so “it is easy to make a country prosperous;” this clause, surprisingly complete and coherent for the poem, enlarges the scope of the drug company’s success to cover the general robustness of a country’s economy with the suggestion that the success necessitates as well as depends on “blindness forever in hand on hand proverb.” The premise the poem elaborates is that a ruthless pursuit of financial gains is inextricably linked with the proverbial, and therefore rational and generally accepted, language. Just as the seeming hopefulness of the doctors, hopefully administering a drip, is tainted with blindness and personal desire for prosperity, so the country striving to become “blue and bright over” is shown to work on the above-mentioned assumption: “offer some, give, none.”

However, the last line of the first lyric in the sequence presents a complex denunciation of the proverbiality of language. The particular words cannot be ultimately fitted into a complete clause because there are a number of feasible ways of reading them, each syntactically valid. To mention just a few: 1) is the proverb “hand on hand,” suggesting agreement and perhaps clarity of expression? Or 2) is there a separation between “in hand,” as in having available or under control, and “on hand,” implying availability to proffer help? Or, still further, 3) is “blindness forever in hand,” indicating that the blindness is under control, and the last two nouns should be read as a single noun phrase: “hand proverb.” Even though there are still other possibilities inherent in that line, the three suffice to note the impossibility of a singleness of meaning which rationality might crave. Even in the seemingly comprehensible utterances, words retain their capacity for producing incommensurate meanings.

Throughout the sequence the notions of medical hazard and rational language are returned to and always their appearance is informed by the imperative (both as an injunction and a suggestion of utmost importance) to muster and command ever greater authority which is regarded as the ability

to enforce a given viewpoint. The viewpoint, in turn, is designed to keep people in the dark as to the true intentions of the imperative. As a result, its commands have only one, authoritarian meaning and, even if the words used in them can admit of a figurative reading, all other interpretations are dismissed as insignificant, “deny several utter margin.” The individual, a “you” or a “he,” is either threatened with “Thick mitts for / an early start,” or “Sated to a faculty / with snack extras.” What violence cannot achieve, persistent persuasion and demagoguery will: “By rate / entertainment we can bring it off, as on tap / to drug the market focus” and if the “bantling screamers” elect to oppose the imperative, “You know what this must / mean in forward trading.” Throughout the poem instances of proverbial language, impelling one to follow their ostensibly incontrovertible rationality, crop up so as to strengthen the logic promoted by the imperative: “Don’t make sores if / you can’t pay to dress their origin,” or to induce one to cooperate with the system by offering them some legal deals: “Step to the bar. Be a credit / witness. Speak real slow and with pauses.”

The medical/economic drive towards extending the hegemony over “rag hands” and the emphasis on proverbial language as the agents of rationality comprise the scene of reification in *Biting the Air*. Adorno’s ideas put forward in his analysis of the social role of poetry and the form of the essay undergird Prynne’s vision of late modernity as it is presented in the volume. Since, according to Adorno, poetry is best integrated in society when it says what society does not or cannot, it serves to expose the falsity of the medical hazard, the “fastidious report” which asserts in a tone of a Yeatsian prophecy that “This is the cancerous lace curtain fringing / a lake of toxic refuse, waiting to be born.” The imminent toxic catastrophe is covered up with “lace curtain fringing” whose surface may appear pleasant to the eye but it hides a dangerous truth. In order that the disguise might be revealed for what it is, a desire to maintain power at all costs, the proverbial language must be unmade. The possible resistance to reification of language is implied by the formal arrangement of Prynne’s sequence that speaks outside the dominant word order.

Consider, for example, one of the final sections of the sequence:

[...] Want more why otherwise
if you’ve only that so hoarse stop the spread,
make a child barrier clearance. Unsophisticated lips,
grand molars, ring ahead for service depending here
and now on homage to order [...].

The passage begins with what looks like a question, as in “Want more?” But the question mark is replaced with an interrogative pronoun “why,” thus introducing an indirect question that, in turn, is followed by a conditional

clause. This conditional, however, is interrupted with what appears to be an exclamation but again the exclamation mark is missing, substituted with an imperative “stop the spread.” What “spread” is meant opens to a plethora of meanings: the spread of “a fever racing across unbarred prime locations” that is mentioned in the following stanza but also the spread of the “Minute-men blather” or possibly the disjunctive, paratactic procedure of the whole poem; still wider circles of meanings accrue *ad infinitum*. It is this “veering” of sense, as Nicholas Royle has recently called the potential of literary language for sudden swerves between irreconcilable trains of meanings (Royle 2011: 38–39), that resists the “homage to order.”

This, however, does not mean that *Biting the Air* “will not communicate,” to quote a fine conclusion of W. H. Auden’s “The Watershed” (33), for Prynne arranges his anacolutha to evoke certain interrelations of words that create tensions. In the case of *Biting the Air*, these tensions seem to revolve around the notions of deception and subjugation through the rational, proverbial language pitched against resistance and perpetual destabilisation of meaning that open the idiom to larger fields of signification. The above fragment brings in associations with child-abuse (“a child barrier clearance”), aristocratic exploitation of the underprivileged (“ring ahead for service”) and man’s primitive instincts (“unsophisticated lips, / grand molars”). Each of these evocations paves the way for a different story but the dominant idea does not change: the unfair hegemony of “order” that the poem attempts to resist by parataxis, frequent use of anacolutha and strings of metonymies that offer diversified interpretive paths. Since the imperative cannot be criticised in its own word-order, for it would devour the indictments and reify them into a set of clichés, Prynne seeks to speak out through an idiom so pluralised and self-questioning as to prevent its easy consumption. In this sense, he joins Samuel Beckett, Arnold Schoenberg and Alban Berg, all of whom Adorno commended as resisters of the process of ideological reification of modernity.

Biting the Air addresses a pressing moral concern of the place of the individual in late modern society. The present is repeatedly demonstrated to be a space of illusions whose sole task is to ensure that the highest possible profits are made. In order to oppose that situation, as it appears, it is the language that needs to be emancipated and, to refer to one of Prynne’s principal precursors, allowed to remain “charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree,” for “If a nation’s literature declines, the nation atrophies and decays” (Pound 1960: 28, 32). Pound’s dictum finds its late modern implementation in *Biting the Air* as well as in most of the later Prynne. Singleness and stability, synonymous with the Poundian atrophy, derive from reification, the Shelleyan “deadness to all nobler purposes of human intercourse” and provide only apparent comfort, for it is in the constant breaking apart and restitution of language that a promise of freedom inheres.

As Prynne puts it in the ending of *Biting the Air*, “break a limit verge” or “be the shadow unendurably now calibrated.”

NOTES

¹ Although Mellors omits to draw that parallel, “the false literal” understood as manacles in which man’s thinking is imprisoned may be referred to Heidegger’s idea that, among others, everyday language, idle talk, effects man’s reduction to a resource to be optimized; this process of curtailment Heidegger calls enframing (*Gestell*) and sees great art as capable of overcoming the stasis which enframing creates. This point is analysed at length by Iain D. Thomson in *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity* (42–48).

² The meaning of “monumental” seems to be underlain with Nietzsche’s critique of monumental history with “its depreciation of what cannot be universalized, of the individual, the detailed, the marginal, and the peripheral” (Lemm 97). It is obvious then that Prynne’s criticism of “metal economy” as subsuming all individual differences under the banner of numbers corresponds to Nietzsche’s excoriation of monumental history. Nietzsche is also scathing of the empowerment of the number in all areas, not only economy, since “the invention of the laws of numbers was made on the basis of the error [...] that there are identical things;” together with the presupposition that there are some essences undergirding everything “we are fabricating beings, unities which do not exist” (56).

³ Further on in the essay, Adorno advocates the close affinity the essay shares with art in terms of the disparity between the mode of presentation and the subject matter; he notes that “The consciousness of the non-identity between presentation and presented material forces the form to make unlimited efforts. In that respect alone the essay resembles art” (105).

⁴ Purves, analyzing the ethical problems involved in the composition of Prynne’s *Not-You* (1993), proffers some valuable insights into this dimension of Prynne’s writing as a whole (58–60).

⁵ And what may feature among the responsibilities of poets for the language, which Prynne discusses in his seminal essay “Huts.” At the end he observes that “As readers we do know, finally, that ruin and part-ruin lie about us on all sides, and so do the poets. It is needful and also better, finally, that this be most fully known. The poets are how we know this, are how we may dwell not somewhere else but where we are” (631–632).

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TWO EXERCISES IN CONSILIENCE: ANNIE DILLARD AND KURT VONNEGUT ON THE GALAPAGOS ARCHIPELAGO AS THE ARCHETYPAL DARWINIAN SETTING

Abstract

The aim of this essay is to compare how Darwinian references are used in the writings of two late 20th century American authors, Annie Dillard and Kurt Vonnegut who both choose the Galapagos archipelago as the focal setting of their symbolical narratives, as we see in Vonnegut's novel *Galápagos* and in Dillard's essay "Life on the Rock: the Galápagos." As far as Dillard's prose is concerned, she also depicts the archipelago in other short narratives from *Teaching a Stone to Talk* and *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. Although neither Dillard nor Vonnegut have a conspicuously political agenda, they both consider the theory of evolution a heavily ideological subject and both apply the Darwinian paradigm to describe nature and the human race within nature.

The turn of the millennium debate concerning the relationship between the sciences and the humanities is one of the most exhilarating issues in the contemporary intellectual life of the West. Ever since Edward O. Wilson advocated 'consilience' among all the branches of learning in the last decades of the 20th century, neo-Darwinist scholars have dreamed of charting an integrated body of knowledge extending from the theories of narratology and aesthetics all the way to theories explaining how atomic particles and photons behave. The only way for researching such a vast territory is within the Darwinian paradigm of evolutionary studies. Darwin's theory fascinates numerous scholars and writers precisely because of its universality: it brings an enormously large range of phenomena (from the scope of psychology, geology, biology, anthropology, and many other branches of science) within the simple compass of casual explanation.

The theory of adaptation by means of natural selection is crucial for the contemporary worldview and yet it stirs a lot of controversies. In Britain, the homeland of both Charles Darwin and Richard Dawkins, novelists reference the theory of evolution and describe 19th century Darwinian naturalists in order to discuss such issues as religion, rationalism, and the human nature. Antonia Byatt in *Angels and Insects* depicts the mid-Victorian spiritual crisis evoked by the publication of *On the Origin of Species*; Graham Swift in *Ever After* focuses on the loss of faith of the first readers of Darwin's book; Julian Barnes in *Before She Met Me* applies evolutionary psychology to describe jealousy; Hilary Mantel in *A Change of Climate* poses questions concerning the reconciliation of Darwinism and Fundamentalist Christianity. All these authors, among many others, look back to previous epochs – the Victorian era or the distant past of the human race – in order to explain diverse aspects of the human nature we have inherited from our ancestors. Yet, as far as American culture goes, the public debate on Darwinism and the theories targeted at proving Darwin was wrong is definitely not a thing of the past. Thus, American writers who apply Darwinian¹ references in their fiction are at the same time making a sort of ideological, if not to say political statement – just as was the case in 19th century Britain.

The aim of this essay is to compare how Darwinian references are used in the writings of two late 20th century American authors – namely, Annie Dillard and Kurt Vonnegut. Although neither Dillard nor Vonnegut have a conspicuously political agenda, they both consider the theory of evolution a heavily ideological subject and both apply the Darwinian paradigm to describe nature and the human race within nature. Interestingly enough, they also both choose the Galapagos archipelago as the focal setting of their symbolical narratives, as we see in Vonnegut's novel *Galápagos* and in Dillard's essay "Life on the Rock: the Galápagos." As far as Dillard's prose is concerned, she also depicts the archipelago in other short narratives from *Teaching a Stone to Talk* and *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*.

Nevertheless, Vonnegut and Dillard's texts are generically very different. Vonnegut's novel is a work of science fiction and a bitter social satire which depicts a luxurious tourist cruise to the Galapagos and a simultaneous global crisis followed by the outbreak of a virulent plague which kills everybody on Earth except for a handful of tourists marooned on a deserted island in the archipelago. They live on raw iguanas and fish, they breed and their children do the same, as do their children's children until, finally, after a million years of evolution in the hardship of the Galapagos, the human genotype 'improves' – we change into big, friendly, seal-like marine mammals who have flippers and long toothy faces to catch fish with and who are morally good and kind. With no hands and very small brains they are literally unable to do any harm to themselves, other creatures, or the planet, which represents huge

progress in comparison to what we are capable of doing, and what we are doing, now.

Annie Dillard's texts are very often discussed in the context of the American nature writing, for example by her biographer, Linda L. Smith who writes that Dillard's childhood in all her autobiographical writing is filled with memories of rock and bug collecting and looking at pond water through her microscope (4). "The spirit of Thoreau hovers over [her] writings" claim the editors of *Literature by Women* who also call her *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* "a *Walden* for the 1970s" (Gilbert and Gubar 2322). The critics emphasize that for Dillard naturalism and personal introspection are joined with mysticism and even with theology (Gilbert and Gubar 2322). Therefore, what she is interested in is the spiritual aspect of evolution. Her *Teaching a Stone to Talk. Expeditions and Encounters* and *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* are essay collections whose main subject is nature. In the former, a travel book, it is the nature of exotic places – in the latter, it is the natural life of a creek in Virginia near the narrator's home, as described in a number of snapshots in consecutive seasons of the year. Vonnegut's perspective is enormously vast, his narrative spans across the millennia showing how the mechanisms of natural selection work on an entire species which in its original shape is a dangerous misbegotten genus keen on ruining its members' lives and the global biosphere. Dillard's perspective is minute and she focuses on small creatures (muskrats, snails, snakes, and praying mantises) and on precise settings: one puddle, a small shrub, a hedgerow. Vonnegut paints a full-fledged picture of human nature; Dillard by meticulous descriptions of tiny things depicts the ways of nature, human nature included.

Both Dillard and Vonnegut systematically and obsessively reference Charles Darwin and both would agree with the following statement made by Michael T. Ghiselin, a Darwinian historian of science, where he praises the eminent Victorian as the founder of the modern scientific method:

Darwin was a great scientist because he asked great questions. He was an influential scientist because he seized upon those problems which, at the time, could be exploited in further research. His works retain their interest for the working biologist because they continue to generate new and useful theories. His thoughts have been historically important because they illuminated the path of investigation, regardless of where that path may lead. (241)

The origins of this method may be found in the young Darwin's trip to the New World, and primarily in his stay in the Falklands and the Galapagos. In one of his diaries, dated 1837, he writes: "In July opened first note book on 'Transmutation of species' – had been greatly struck from about month of previous March on character of S. American fossils – and species on Galápagos Archipelago. These facts origin (especially latter) of all my views"

(qt. after Ghiselin 33). Darwin's short visit to these islands is now a part of popular science folklore, numerous nature films mention the event, and the naturalist's name remains associated with the archipelago and its wildlife, particularly the rare animals with bizarre adaptations, the finches being the best example.²

In Vonnegut's novel we see the first trip of a new passenger ship called the Bahia de Darwin to the Galapagos. It is publicized and advertised all over the world as 'the Nature Cruise of the Century.' Bahia de Darwin is to retrace Darwin's route in order to celebrate the famous voyage during which *On the Origin of Species* was conceived. The narrator who is scandalized by the publicity of the cruise describes Darwin's 1835 visit in the islands in far less romantic terms. He calls the naturalist "a mere stripling of twenty-six" (12) who is "underspoken and gentlemanly, impersonal and asexual" (16) and who came to see boring, gray, disappointing, and rocky islands. Only the tremendous success of *On the Origin of Species* made people falsely maintain that the archipelago was interesting at all. The ship-wrecked passengers of Bahia de Darwin found them as they really were: dull, inhospitable, and chilly. The contrast of what things are in nature and how they are described in culture is very sharp, though admittedly, "there were no woodpeckers on the islands but there was a finch which ate what woodpeckers would have eaten. It couldn't peck wood, and so it took a twig or a spine from a cactus in its blunt little beak and used that to dig insects out of their hiding places" (131). Interesting as the finch is, it definitely does not make the archipelago worth visiting.

The picture of Darwin Dillard believes in is quite different and apparently derives from the standard text-books on the history of biology:

Charles Darwin came to the Galapagos in 1835, on the Beagle, he was twenty-six. He threw the marine iguanas as far as he could into the water; he rode on tortoises and sampled their meat. He noticed that the tortoises' carapaces varied wildly from island to island, so also did the forms of various mockingbirds. He made collections. Nine years later he wrote in a letter: 'I am most convinced (quite contrary to the opinion I started with) that species are not (it is like confessing a murder) immutable...' it is fashionable now to disparage Darwin's originality; not even the surliest of his detractors however, faults his painstaking methods or denies his impact. (*Teaching...* 117)

And yet his discoveries made all the difference and altered the way we view the universe, ourselves, and God. Before Darwin came:

We were all crouched in a small room against the comforting back wall awaiting the millennium which had been gathering impetus since Adam and Eve. Up there was a universe and down here would be a small strip of man come and gone,

created, taught, redeemed and gathered up in a bright twinkling, like a sprinkling of confetti torn from colored papers tossed from windows, and swept from the streets by morning. The Darwinian revolution knocked out the back wall revealing eerie lighted landscapes as far back as we can see. Almost at once Albert Einstein and astronauts... knocked out the other walls and the ceiling, leaving us sunlit, exposed, and drifting. (*Teaching...* 121)

In the light of this statement the Galapagos are the first, primordial place, both metaphorically and literally. Dillard describes these islands as “just plain here” (*Teaching...* 91). They are rocky plots of ground which blew up out of the ocean. Some animals drifted aboard, some plants were blown to them, and in the austere conditions these organisms evolved weird forms: “you can go there and watch it happen, and try to figure it out. The Galapagos are a kind of metaphysics laboratory, almost wholly uncluttered by human culture” (*Teaching...* 91). For Dillard each of the islands rises from the sea as “a chunk of chaos” (*Teaching...* 109) with rough and smooth parts and devoid of any life. It is empty and uninviting and yet stowaway creatures, shipwrecked creatures, and flotsam get there and evolve unmolested into “a Hieronymus Bosch assortment” (*Teaching...* 110).

Wildlife conquers all the space available, life abounds and yet is thrifty enough to make use of every particle. Such a statement, one which both Vonnegut and Dillard consider valid, is of course very old, it dates back to the very famous passage in *On the Origin of Species* describing the so-called ‘entangled bank’ vision of nature:

It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us... a Ratio of Increase so high as to lead to a Struggle for Life, and as a consequence to Natural Selection. (Darwin, *The Origin...* 54)

Vonnegut’s narrator is outraged that “Darwin’s law of Natural Selection” (79) works ceaselessly for millennia filling the Earth with resilient yet senseless life of every imaginable kind. The best-adapted organisms are born and die in the myriads and the only goal of all this life is to produce yet more life. In the Galapagos lives a blue-foot booby which is but a big stupid bird famous for its very complicated and majestic courtship dance. Before the global disaster, Mary, the protagonist of Vonnegut’s novel and a high school biology teacher, used to give her students extra credits if they wrote an essay on the courtship dance. Most of those who undertook the task claimed in their papers that boobies worship God. Only one insightful boy, subsequently killed in Vietnam, saw the dance for what it was: a manifestation of the

mindless, never-ending drive to multiply. Instead of an essay he wrote a poem, the boobies' eternal love song:

Of course I love you,
So let's have a kid
Who will say exactly
What its parents did
Of course I love you,
So let's have a kid
Who will say exactly
What its parents did
Of course I love you... (108)

Mechanically repeated the song goes on and on, generation after generation, but there is no meaning in it beyond generating yet another repetition. Nature is plentiful and tolerant of the clearly ridiculous mistakes evolution has committed. Vonnegut's examples of horribly maladapted and yet long-surviving species are the Irish elk with antlers the size of a ballroom chandelier that make it highly difficult for the animal to feed at all, and humans with their poisonous, overgrown brain keen on destruction of every kind.

Dillard conversely adores the entangled banks in the world and the bounty of nature, and the pressure the environment has on every creature, propelling them to evolve into an unimaginable richness of shapes: "Extravagance! Nature will try everything once. No form is too gruesome, no behavior too grotesque. If you are dealing with organic compounds then let them combine!" (*Pilgrim...* 66), she exclaims in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* where one plot of ground is the world in miniature. Its narrator, an avid reader of Darwinian natural history looks at the grass and the insects and finds out that that, yes, everything is just as the biologists say and "that the insects have adapted is obvious" (*Pilgrim...* 66). She ponders the top inch of soil and considers it to be the whole world squirming under her palm with an average of 1,356 larger organisms in every square foot and, probably "up to a billion" bacteria, fungi, and protozoa. All this richness is somehow connected to the narrator herself as they all belong to the gigantic living macrocosm. Thus, being capable of logical thinking, the narrator feels obliged to look for the meaning of nature: "If I did not know about the rotifers and paramecia... fine, but since I've seen it I must somehow deal with it, take it into the account" (*Pilgrim...* 95).

Humans, thanks to their spiritual place in the Universe, have to speak for the rest of Creation and the Darwinian perspective allows people to see the grand design of the universe. For the narrator, who is a reader of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Darwinism and Christianity complement each other:

De Chardin, a paleontologist, examined the evolution of species itself, and discovered in that flow a surge towards complexity and consciousness, a free ascent capped with man and propelled from within and attracted from without by God the holy freedom and awareness that is Creation's beginning and end. And so forth. Like flatworms, like languages ideas evolve... in the supple flux of an open mind. (*Pilgrim...* 120)

Darwin himself was aware that if the organic scale is topped by humanity it is so only because humankind fought to rise that high, which fact gives us all "hope for a still higher destiny in the distant future" (Darwin, *Descent...* 78). Yet, as he claims in the very last sentence of *The Descent of Man*:

We must however acknowledge, as it seems to me, that man with his all noble qualities, with sympathy that he feels for the most debased, with benevolence which extends not only to other men but to the humblest living creature, with his god-like intellect which has penetrated into the movements and constitution of the solar system – with all these exalted powers – Man still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin. (Darwin, *Descent...* 78)

Human minds are thus what they are because they have evolved from earlier forms. 'Much to the distress of our planet,' Vonnegut's narrator adds, because he firmly believes that the human brain with its lethal potential is the greatest mistake of nature. He rhetorically asks:

So I raise this question, although there is nobody around to answer it: Can it be doubted that three-kilogram brains were once nearly fatal defects in the evolution of the human race?

A second query: What source was there back then, save for our overelaborate nervous circuitry, for the evils we were seeing or hearing about simply everywhere?

My answer: there was no other source. This was a very innocent planet, except for these great big brains. (8–9)

Yet for Dillard humans were created "from a clot and set in proud, free motion" (*Pilgrim...*12) by the apparently merciless laws of nature. Evolution loves death and births equally and is "this whole business of reproducing and dying by the billion" (*Pilgrim...* 170). Yet all of it happens "ad majorem dei gloriam" and "we little blobs of soft tissue crawling around on this planet's skin" (*Pilgrim...* 175) are entitled to ask the big question, to look at the universe, and to worship its Creator. People or finches, we all are 'èmbellishments of random chromosomal mutations selected by natural selection and preserved in geographically isolated gene pools" (Dillard, *Stone...* 175) because all the organic matter participates in the gigantic Darwinian game:

Ça va. It goes on everywhere tit for tat, action and reaction, triggers and inhibitors ascending in a spiral like sparring butterflies within life we are pushing each other around. How many animal forms have evolved just so because there are, for

instance, trees? We pass the nitrogen around, and vital gases, we feed and nest, plucking this and that and planting seeds. (*Stone* 126)

Thus all the life on Earth is like a gigantic dance and a great race. Everybody is dependent on everybody else, and having a brain – i.e., being rational, being capable of seeing this dance and understanding its rules – is one of the greatest privileges imaginable. Once you have evolved and have acquired culture you start studying nature and you realize, thanks to, among other things, Darwinian biology, the intricacies of its design. We are the acme of Creation.

Vonnegut in his novel turns a similar idea of a perfectly adapted human race into a bitter irony. Over a million-year period the descendants of the Bahia de Darwin survivors evolve into perfect creatures. Thanks to the bottleneck effect their genetic pool is easily re-design so they will nevermore threaten the ecological balance of the Earth:

As for human beings making a comeback, of starting to use tools and build houses and play musical instruments and so on again: They would have to do it with their beaks at the time. Their arms have become flippers in which the hand bones are almost entirely imprisoned and immobilized. Each flipper is studded with five purely ornamental nubbins, attractive to members of the opposite sex at mating time. These are in fact the tips of four suppressed fingers and a thumb. Those parts of people's brains which used to control their hands, moreover, simply don't exist anymore, and human skulls are now much more streamlined on that account. The more streamlined the skull, the more successful the fisher person. (185)

In the light of the above passage the Darwinian bon mot quoted at the end of the novel reads very ironically: “progress has been much more general than retrogression” (291). This is paradoxically true – the overdeveloped human brain was a dangerous mistake of nature, and nature working slowly but steadily set this right by altering the human species in such a way as to make it harmless. *Galápagos* is the record of this alteration done in Darwinian discourse. Yet Dillard applies the very same Darwinian apparatus to emphasize the glory of Creation and the greatness of the Universe. She considers it tragic that “Fundamental Christians... feel they have to make a choice between the Bible and modern science” (*Stone* 119) because only with the help of modern science can you truly appreciate God's greatness and see beyond the apparent cruelty of death-loving evolution.

Dillard and Vonnegut being evolutionary theorists attempt to re-shape the paradigm within which the research in all possible fields of learning is conducted in order to achieve a consilient picture of how the universe works and how its nature can be studied. As artists they are neo-Darwinists because neo-Darwinism is the pivotal approach uniting the human sciences, the arts,

and the hard sciences. Thus, using precisely such a perspective both Dillard and Vonnegut seek to achieve new insights into the very nature of human beings. These insights concern the evolutionary understanding of human nature as a number of the “species-typical” or “universal” characteristics we all share:

An evolutionary perspective allows us to see ourselves both in the widest angle and with the most precise focus, as individuals solving particular problems within specific contexts, physical and social, using the cognitive equipment – including the predilection for culture – acquired through natural selection. (Boyd, et al. 3)

Human beings are therefore primarily creatures who have evolved and the theory of natural selection teaches us why and how this has happened. For Dillard both science and religion help us to understand nature. Vonnegut rejects Western religion with its insistence on God’s acts in history (Klinkowitz and Somer 209) and gives his narrator the voice of a “guru” whose message is “truth and fiction, truth against fiction. The forces of science... are shown on the side of truth, and art and religion are shown together on the side of fiction” (Klinkowitz and Somer 209).

Yet, despite all their differences, the Darwinian perspective allows both Dillard and Vonnegut to express their attitudes towards human civilization and its place within the natural environment of the planet, the human past and future, and the way culture and nature depend on each other. Both share a fascination with Darwin as well as the very profound expertise in the subject of his theory. For both authors the two most important issues Darwin discusses in his imposing oeuvre are ‘the entangled bank’ metaphor of wildlife depicted in *On the Origin of Species*, and the hypothesis concerning the evolution of the human brain and the human mind discussed in the final sections of *The Descent of Man*. And although their intimations provoked by the Galapagos islands are as ideologically far apart as possible, the above analysis of their texts inspired by this Archipelago clearly shows that they both are artists-cum-evolutionary theorists whose output is – as Wilson would have it – ‘consilient.’

NOTES

¹ As early as in the 1860s the American readers of *On the Origin of Species* pronounced the work atheistic. Darwin’s American friend, the naturalist Asa Gray, wrote: “to deny that anything was specially designed to be what it is is one proposition, while to deny the Designer supernaturally, or immediately made it so, is another: though the reviewers appear not to recognize the distinction” (138). Gray goes on to compare Darwin to Newton and maintains that the two scientists approach nature in a similar way, and yet no one accuses Newton of atheism in the way they accuse Darwin. Yet Darwin was for American fundamentalist

Christians an epitome of vile, unholy science: his book symbolized a threat to the vision of the Universe as a safe and godly place.

² It is only on the Galapagos Islands that the ‘Eureka!’ moment occurred, something comparable only to the inspiration Newton allegedly experienced in the orchard when the apple fell. On these volcanic islands Darwin famously noticed that species evolve if only transformation increases their chances of survival. Nevertheless, Darwin hesitated whether to publish his book for over twenty years as he was afraid to offend religious feelings of his contemporaries. Once his theory was intellectually ready – though physically only in the form of a sketchy draft – Darwin refrained from publishing it, but only prepared the manuscript for publication. He added to it a letter addressed to his wife to be opened after his death in which he commands her to have the paper published at her own expense. Yet, Alfred Douglas Wallace discovered the mechanism of natural selection independently and urged Darwin to publish *The Origin of Species* in his lifetime in order to insure his primacy.

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“IT CAME UP ALL THE TIME, LIKE A FIXATION ...”:
THE UBIQUITY OF RACIALLY-BASED PREJUDICE
AS PRESENTED IN DANZY SENNA’S *CAUCASIA*

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to present the problem of racially-based prejudice in the USA in the post-Civil Rights Movement era. The article is based on Danzy Senna’s critically acclaimed novel, *Caucasia* (1998). Being a so-called Movement Child of interracial couple, and growing up in the USA in the 1970s, Senna met with different kinds of biased thinking coming from both sides of the color line. The novel tells the story of a young, biracial girl, Birdie, and reflects Senna’s experiences. The article analyzes the different forms and levels of racial prejudice which Senna depicts in her novel to comment on the pervasiveness of the problem in the USA of the 1970s.

Published in 1998, *Caucasia* is a contemporary variation on the theme of racial passing. Its author, Danzy Senna (1970–), is a biracial daughter of the African-American scholar Carl Senna and the white writer Fanny Howe, who married in 1968, just a year after the legalization of interracial marriages in all of the US.¹ Growing up in racially divided Boston, Senna developed a strong black identity, complicated by the fact that her features define her as white (Boudreau 59). It can be argued that *Caucasia*’s main protagonist and narrator, biracial (but phenotypically white) Birdie Lee, is Senna’s alter ego; the novel mirrors many facts from the author’s life.

The plot of *Caucasia* revolves around the experiences of a mixed-race Bostonian family between 1975 and 1982. The family consists of an African-American father, Deck Lee (a Boston University professor), a white mother, Sandy (a social activist) and their two daughters, brown-skinned Cole and light-skinned Birdie. Both girls come to self-identify as African American even though the authenticity of white-looking Birdie’s blackness is commonly

called into question. Soon after the end of their parents' relationship, the mother has to go into hiding because of her involvement with a black militant group. The parents decide to split up their daughters. Deck, his girlfriend and Cole leave for Brazil in search of a racism-free utopia. Sandy and Birdie assume new identities; disguised as Sheila and her half-Jewish daughter Jesse, they lead a nomadic life before eventually settling in a small New Hampshire town. Tired of living a lie, Birdie runs away from home to reunite with her sister and father; she eventually finds them six years after their parting. The aim of this article is to explore Senna's outlook on the problem of racial prejudice in the USA in the post-Civil Rights Movement era – the times of her childhood and adolescence.

American racism and racial categorizing, as seen through the eyes of a biracial child, are among *Caucasia's* main themes. Senna mentions many instances of racism that the biracial family encounters. The plot includes a reference to a historical event, namely, the Boston busing crisis. In the 1970s the enforcement of Massachusetts' school desegregation law met with a strong opposition, resulting in years of protests and riots. As Birdie succinctly states: "Boston was a battleground... . *Forced integration. Roxbury. South Boston. Separate but not quite equal. God made the Irish number one. A fight, a fight, a nigga and a white ...*" (Senna 7). In the novel, Birdie and Cole get enrolled in a predominantly white school. However, the girls' first contact with public education is interrupted by a riot against busing white students to black schools. The conflict escalates and soon the girls are petrified to watch a TV footage of a black man being beaten by the mob (38–39). As a result of the riot the girls never reach their school and are later transferred to a private one, run by Black Power sympathizers, where they acquire radical ideas about race and race mixing.

Another instance in which racism becomes very real for the girls is when a group of Irish-American girls humiliates and insults Cole by pushing her and sticking chewing gum into her hair (40). Conversely, Birdie is bullied by black children at school; they call her ugly and threaten to cut off her hair (43–47). Moreover, whenever the family drives through white neighborhoods, Deck ducks down and hides under a blanket, while pretending before the girls that he is simply playing hide-and-seek (249). The most striking example of racism occurs when Deck, sitting in the park with Birdie, is interrogated by the police as a possible child molester and kidnapper (59–61). Although humiliated and furious, he is prevented from manifesting his frustration (Ibrahim 159; Boudreau 65).

Later on, when Birdie passes for white, she is exposed to racism to an even greater degree (Boudreau 65, 67–68). As people are unaware of her real background, they freely make racist remarks in her presence, e.g. her neighbor Nicholas tells her a racist joke (Senna 204). What is more, her friend

Mona and others use racial slurs and racial stereotyping on a daily basis (233, 248, 259, 263, 267, 269). They mock and spread gossip about a biracial girl, Samantha, calling her “Brown Cow” (223) and “Chunky Monkey” (252–253). All these actions and words are not directed towards Birdie, but she, nevertheless, feels immersed in racial hatred: “the white folks needed no prompting. It came up all the time, like a fixation ...” (248).

Ironically, it is not only the outside world that is guilty of racial prejudice. As Senna argues, racism is ubiquitous and can lurk even in a mixed-race family. The girls’ maternal grandmother clearly favors light-skinned Birdie. Her obvious preference is reflected in how she interacts with the girls when they come to visit: she talks only to Birdie (Dagbovie 98) ignoring Cole’s obvious attempts to attract her attention (Senna 103–104). Moreover, she obsessively tries to prove that Birdie could in fact be French or Italian and that she closely resembles a European relative (104, 107). While she presents herself as an unbiased person (e.g. commenting on the “delightful black man playing Jim” in a *Huckleberry Finn* adaptation), she makes such blatant mistakes as giving Cole a Golliwog rag doll – an offensive, grotesque representation of a black man (98, 104).

An ambiguous approach to race is also connected with the girls’ father, Deck. It is repeatedly suggested that he is a mulatto himself. When Sandy meets Deck, she does not think his skin is very dark nor his features very African; his curly hair makes him look Jewish and his features give him an appearance of a Native American:

[I]t was only his milk-chocolate skin that gave his race away. His face spoke of something other – his high cheekbones, his large bony nose, his deep-set eyes, and his thin lips ... reminded her of the drawings in her high-school history book of half-nude natives at the first Thanksgiving. (34)

However, Deck never considers himself to be a person of mixed race; he seems to ignore his bodily features that mark him as such; what is more, he increasingly cherishes his blackness. When he marries a white woman in the 1960s, it is an act of courage, and the couple is frowned upon by Whites and Blacks alike. However, a few years later Deck starts to question this decision. His fascination with the Black Power Movement results in the marriage falling apart. Deck starts to point to “strong black women as evidence of [his wife’s] inadequacy” (324). In one fight he calls Sandy a “fat white mammy” (7). In a final argument before their separation Deck reproaches her for having a privileged Wasp background:

It’s a law of physics... . People can’t ever truly get away from where they came from. And you ... need to go back to Cambridge... . You’re a Harvard girl at heart... . And I need to go to Roxbury. Find me a strong black woman. A sistah. No more of this crazy white-girl shit. (24–25)

Ironically, it is Sandy who is more radically engaged in the black resistance. While Deck is a theoretician, Sandy is a revolutionist. She gives shelter to political fugitives and collaborates with a black militant group, storing their weapons in her house; she also organizes community work (18–23). Still, Deck realizes that their interracial relationship is a mistake and their racial differences are irreconcilable. He decides to move into a relationship with Carmen, with whom, apart from her skin color, he has little in common. While Sandy is certainly a strong woman, she is not a strong *black* woman and, all things considered, that is what makes her unfit to be Deck's partner.

Deck's newfound interest in his black heritage affects not only his relationship with Sandy but also his daughters (Grassian 325). Although he firmly states that both his daughters are black,² his actions prove that he, like most other people, sees his daughters as different from one another and, what is more, clearly has a much stronger connection with Cole (Dagbovie 94). The reason for this preference lies in their different looks. Cole is dark-skinned and her features are more negroid than Deck's. She is synecdochically described as "the small dusky body, the burst of mischievous curls (nappier than his own), the full pouting lips (fuller than his own)" (Senna 56). Her appearance probably allows Deck to pretend that she is an offspring of a typical non-mixed marriage; according to Sandy, he is trying to forget that "[he] ever dabbled in the nitty-gritty land of miscegenation" (114). Moreover, Cole is "his proof of the pudding, his milk-chocolate pudding" (as Birdie puns)(56); she is the conclusive evidence of who he really is:

[Cole's] existence comforted him. She was the proof that his blackness hadn't been completely blanched ..., that he had indeed survived the integrationist shuffle, that he had remained human despite what seemed a conspiracy to turn him into a stone Her existence told him he hadn't wandered quite so far and that his body still held the power to leave its mark. (56)

As Sika Dagbovie aptly observes, "[e]ven Cole's name connotes black (coal, colored) and thus Cole represents the blackness that Deck tries to hold onto despite his anxieties that he sold out" (103). For Deck, the blackness of Cole's skin asserts his own true black identity, blurred by years of white education at Harvard, his conformity with white milieu and his marriage to a blue-blooded Cotton Mather's descendant (Boudreau 62).

Because of her appearance Birdie cannot perform a similar function and is treated by her father "with a cheerful disinterest ..., a kind of impatient amusement, as if he were perpetually tapping his foot, waiting for [her] to finish [her] sentence so he could get back to more important subjects" (Senna 56). Birdie is aware of her father's preference from an early age: "[H]e never seemed to see me at all [Cole] was his prodigy – his young, gifted, and black [W]hen they came together, I disappeared" (55–56).

Deck also insists that Cole (but not Birdie) needs a black mother. He tries to transfer the girl's filial love from his wife to his lover Carmen but ultimately fails (394). Although Carmen treats Birdie with "silent irritation" and "muted disgust," ignores her presence and jokes about her paternity (92–93), Deck never tries to correct her behavior (111–113; Grassian 326–327).

Deck persistently attempts to educate the rather uninterested Cole about his theories on the race relations in the USA, Black Power values and white people's prejudices. Ironically, it is the white-looking Birdie who absorbs his ideology, even though Deck's teachings are not intended for her (Senna 71–72). An interesting scene takes place during one of the girls' car trips with their father:

My father pointed to an interracial couple [with a baby.] ... [He] laughed a little and said, nudging Cole, gesturing toward the couple: 'What's wrong with that picture?'

My sister shrugged, blowing on her nails She didn't seem to remember the right answer – or perhaps didn't care – but I did and, throwing my hand in the air ..., piped in from the backseat, 'Diluting the race!' (72–73)

The absurdity of the scene is clear on at least three counts. Firstly, desperate for her father's attention, Birdie immediately responds to his question with the words she must have heard either from him or at school; however, in her fervor, she does not notice that she herself is a product of such "diluting." Secondly, Deck does not seem to remember that both sisters are of mixed-race. Directing his question at Cole, he does not envisage or expect Birdie's response. He laughs at his younger daughter's silliness because in her case the realization of her mixed heritage is inescapable; a light-brown girl is talking about adulterating racial purity. However, he does not see the absurdity of the fact that he would be pleased to receive a similar answer from Cole. Thirdly, Deck speaks to Cole as a black man speaking to his black daughter, while in fact both of them are biracial. If Deck is a mulatto then Cole is a quadroon. When Deck asks: "what's wrong with that picture?" it is as if he was asking: "what's wrong with us?"

According to Habiba Ibrahim, by describing how Birdie absorbs Deck's racial theories originally intended for Cole, Senna criticizes racial essentialism (165):

[It] undercuts the assumption that ... the personality of any visibly black subject would be primarily determined by raced concerns. While Cole shares with Deck the condition of being visibly raced black ..., she also occupies very different positions with regard to gender, age, and sexuality. (165)

Cole's disinterest in Deck's teachings suggests that "a range of black subjectivities [is] not easily united under a single banner of racial concerns"

(165). Moreover, even though Birdie's blackness is regulated differently than her father's or sister's and is not reflected in her looks, it is "not less viable" (165).

Another powerful image of the intricacies of biased thinking emerges from the scene in which Birdie's inquisitiveness leads her into asking her father some difficult questions. When Deck uses a derogatory term for a white person (ofay) in a conversation with his friend Ronnie, he is overheard by Birdie:

I was pretty sure "ofay" meant white, and without really thinking, I piped from the backseat, "Isn't Mum ofay?"

I heard Cole snicker into her hand beside me.

My father threw me a sharp look. "Yeah, but that's different."

"How?"

He sighed, about to launch into a long explanation, when Ronnie began to laugh "Kids are too smart for their own good. Always gotta watch your back." (10–11)

In the end everything is turned into a joke and Birdie never gets her answer because, of course, answering such a question is impossible. It can be argued that this situation bears resemblance to a classic Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale: "The Emperor's New Clothes." In the tale, it is the innocent child who exposes the nakedness of the Emperor and the hypocrisy of the adults. In the above-mentioned scene from *Caucasia* Birdie plays a similar role. Her insistent "How?" reveals the inconsistency and irrationality in her father's racially essentialist attitude. The fact that she is depicted as speaking in a high childish voice further increases the effectiveness of the image; the innocence of the child is contrasted with the indoctrination of the adults.

In yet another scene Deck uses the argument of racial purity. Ironically, arguing with a biracial man, Redbone, Deck calls him a "fake-ass half-breed" and questions the sincerity of his involvement with an unspecified black radical group; for Deck, Redbone "ain't no brother" (16). Redbone's retort is sharp: "Don't get black and proud on me. You're the one with the white daughter" (16). Sandy also casts racial slurs on Redbone, calling him "that high-yellow Uncle Tom sellout" in Birdie's presence (175). She, too, does not understand the irony of using such a curse in front of her mixed-race daughter.

Sandy, similarly to Deck and most other people in the novel, recognizes the racial difference between Birdie and Cole and thinks that her daughters' bodily features determine their racial identities (Boudreau 61). According to Kathryn Rummell, Sandy and Deck "reject the one-drop rule in favor of the visibility rule: Birdie looks white, and therefore is white; Cole looks black,

and therefore is black” (6). For Jewelle Gomez, Deck’s and Sandy’s conviction that their daughters are racially different is in fact a betrayal of their children (364). When the parents decide to split up their daughters, they base their “tacit agreement” on the girls’ looks – the darker-skinned Cole moves to Brazil with Deck, while the light-skinned Birdie goes into hiding with Sandy (Grassian 328). In the words of Dagbovie, “rather than racializing their daughters’ actions, they racialize the daughters themselves” (94). They fail to see that “how Birdie looks has nothing to do with who she is” (Boudreau 64).

For Sandy, as well as for Deck, Birdie’s racial ambiguity is most unwelcome. Birdie suspects that in fact both parents would prefer to choose Cole instead of her (Senna 275–276). In the case of Sandy, Birdie’s appearance is a constant reminder of her privileged white background, which she wants to erase. The daughter’s Caucasian features are a proof that the mother did not “wash out” all the blue blood that haunted her (193). What is more, when Sandy and Birdie go into hiding, Sandy explains that she became an activist for her black child – Cole (Grassian 327; Trudell 137). Birdie notes that it is not the first time that Sandy differentiates between her daughters: “[She] did that sometimes, spoke of Cole as if she had been her only black child. It was as if my mother believed that Cole and I were so different. As if she believed I was white, believed I was Jesse” (Senna 275). The repetition of the word “believed” and of the phrase “as if” seems to emphasize Birdie’s rejection of and irritation at such categorizing. Sandy’s comment “erases Birdie from blackness, causing Birdie to feel racially invisible” (Dagbovie 104); it makes her feel that her former life as a biracial girl was merely an illusion (Gomez 363).

Senna presents a vision of the world of her childhood and adolescence in which racially-based prejudice can assume different forms and have various intensity – from outright racial violence, through peer bullying and casting racial slurs, to holding essentialist preconceptions about racial allegiances. In Senna’s view, this prejudice is truly ubiquitous. Whites, who occupy the position of power, are biased against African Americans and vice versa. Additionally, African Americans discriminate against mixed-race people (while Whites simply do not recognize the distinction between blackness and mixedness). Ironically, even biracials hate other biracials (as evidenced by the “Diluting the Race” scene and the conflict between Deck and Redbone), thus becoming “the other of the other,” to use Eva Saks’ term (77). However, Senna’s outlook on the matter is not entirely bitter as the novel ends with a rather optimistic scene featuring an unnamed mixed-race girl riding an integrated school bus. The scene symbolizes the acceptance of ethnic multiplicity and envisions, however with caution, an alternative for American race relations.

NOTES

¹ Race-mixing in the American colonies was penalized as early as the 1660s in Maryland and Virginia (Zackodnik 11). Interracial marriages were first banned in Virginia (1691) and Maryland (1692), followed by Massachusetts (1705), Pennsylvania (1725) and other states. The process continued; in the year 1800 miscegenation was criminalized in the ten of the sixteen states and punished with “enslavement, exile, whipping, fines, and imprisonment” (Kennedy 144–145). After a period of relative acceptance of interracial relationships in the early 19th century, the tightening up of the law came after the abolition and the Civil War (Raimon 3; Saks 64–65). From the Reconstruction onwards the anti-miscegenation laws were strictly observed. When they were finally repealed by the Supreme Court in the famous *Loving v. Virginia* case (1967), there were still seventeen states that banned interracial marriages and cohabitation (Kennedy 144–146). All in all, 40 states had anti-miscegenation laws at some point (Foeman and Nance 542).

² In the final argument with Sandy Deck shouts: “Cut this naive, color-blind posturing. In a country as racist as this, you’re either black or you’re white. And no daughter of mine is going to pass” (Senna 27).

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THE GARDENING FALLACY: J. M. COETZEE'S MICHAEL K AS A PARODY OF VOLTAIRE'S CANDIDE

Abstract

The aim of the essay is to demonstrate that John Maxwell Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* can be perceived as a parody of Voltaire's *Candide*, a novel intended as a ridicule of Leibniz's *Theodicy*. While Voltaire proposed to withdraw from the world and "to cultivate one's own garden" as a remedy to Leibniz's ill-conceived optimism, Coetzee shows that Voltaire's praise of passivity and life in accordance with nature, symbolized by a retreat into gardening, is as erratic as Leibniz's philosophy. The essay concludes that Coetzee's Michael K can be treated as a caricature of Voltaire's Candide.

Nadine Gordimer (b. 1923), the 1991 Nobel Laureate for Literature, in her 1984 review of John Maxwell Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K*, claims that "the initial [in Michael K's name] probably stands for Kotze or Koekemoer, and has no reference, nor need to have, to Kafka" (Gordimer 3). While Gordimer is wrong to deny Coetzee's literary allusions to Kafka's work, especially to the short stories "A Hunger Artist" (1922) and "The Burrow" (1931), she is right to indicate that *Life and Times...* contains other literary references than those to Kafka (3). In my view, one of the most evident parallels is Voltaire's *Candide*, a 1759 satire on Leibniz's *Theodicy* (1710), the idea of sufficient reason and the hypocrisy of Catholic clergy. Both Coetzee's *Life and Times...* and Voltaire's *Candide* feature characters who, despite numerous misfortunes, endure in their search for peace, which for both of them means finding and cultivating their own garden. Moreover, the two works question the logic of warfare, popularize similar lifestyles, particularly that of peaceful and non-consumerist withdrawal, and advise to absent oneself from historical time. They also advocate silence as the only possible means to alleviating human earthly misery.

However, despite these similarities, the aim of this essay is to challenge the above-suggested hypothesis that *Life and Times...* is ideologically congruent with *Candide*. Rather, while Voltaire's work is a parody of Leibniz's optimism, Coetzee's novel seems to caricature Voltaire's remedy to Leibniz, that is, through exaggeration, it depicts the virtues of gardening, social absenteeism and enlightened silence as naïve and absurd. Accordingly, the essay will first investigate Voltaire's critique of Leibniz, then, it will demonstrate the similarities and differences between *Life and Times...* and *Candide*, and eventually, it will analyze the manner in which Coetzee criticizes Voltaire's work and his praise of self-sustainable gardening. The paper will conclude with the claim that, contrary to Voltaire's, Coetzee's hope for a successful dealing with hardship, violence and evil is significantly curtailed.

Nadine Gordimer's main charge against Coetzee is that in *Life and Times...* he advocates passivity, escapism from active struggle against political and social oppression, and idleness, all conveyed through the main protagonist's striving to retreat into gardening. She argues that the novelist "denies the energy of the will to resist violence" (4), while, taking into consideration the apartheid realities of 1980s South Africa, he should call for active defiance and fight against abusive politics. Consequently, although Gordimer admits that *Life and Times...* is "a marvelous work that leaves nothing unsaid [...] about what human beings do to fellow human beings" (5), she nevertheless perceives it as a deficient novel, mainly due to its misguided allegorism, that evades important social issues, such as the presence of apartheid in South Africa, by focusing on Michael K who is not only a caricatured simpleton but also ignorant of the history happening around him, or else who does not care for its course. Thus, owing to its lack of political involvement, which Gordimer ascribes to Coetzee's failure to relate private destiny to public life, the novel is only a partial success (Head 57). Gordimer also suggests that through its emphasis on passivity and indolence the novel contests the soundness of conscious opposition against repressive modes of power. Accordingly, due to the lack of his clear condemnation of the apartheid system, she almost accuses Coetzee of being inattentive to it (Gordimer 4).

It is astonishing that Gordimer so readily charges Coetzee with neglect of the on-going social issues, if not entirely with political escapism, especially that she herself argues in the above mentioned review that he depicts Michael K, a figure avoiding any engagement into socio-political matters, as a "simple man" (3), a caricature, an eccentric that eventually fails to make gardening a life-sustaining occupation. On the one hand, then, she argues that Coetzee praises garden-like idleness, for which she strongly criticizes him, but, on the other hand, she implies that he himself criticizes such a lifestyle by narrating a

failure of a profoundly idle character, that is, of Michael K, his pitiable gardener-protagonist. To accuse an author of promoting passivity, idleness and political escapism by describing a decline of an altogether inert and withdrawn figure, such as K, seems a contradiction in itself. While it is questionable whether Michael K fails as a gardener, the apparent inconsistency of Gordimer's argumentation, especially her suggestion about Coetzee's praise for escapist gardening, evinces an intertextual correspondence between *Life and Times...* and Voltaire's *Candide*, in which the ideas of gardening, silence and pensive withdrawal from social matters are commended as remedies to Leibniz's failed optimism, understood not in the modern sense as being positively helpful but in the classical one, that is, as being optimal.

Voltaire (1694–1778) intended *Candide* to satirize Leibniz's theory according to which the imperfections of the world, such as evil, suffering, and injustice, are merely apparent because almighty, all-knowing and good God could not have created an imperfect world which He would consider bad. Thus, although people, limited in their wisdom and in their will, may not see it, all the evils must eventually lead to some good. This is connected with another of Leibniz's ideas, i.e., that of sufficient reason according to which nothing happens without some reason, even the greatest misfortune, for all has already been predetermined by God. Accordingly, Leibniz would claim that despite ravaging wars, deadly earthquakes and other cataclysms there is some pre-established harmony which positively explains the course of the world. Adopting Leibniz's notion of sufficient reason, Voltaire exposed in *Candide* numerous logical defects of such a reasoning:

the nose has been formed to bear spectacles, thus we have spectacles. Legs are visibly designed for stockings, and we have stockings. Stones were made to be hewn, and to construct castles, therefore my lord has a magnificent castle; for the greatest baron in the province ought to be the best lodged. Pigs were made to be eaten – therefore we eat pork all the year round. Consequently they who assert that all is well have said a foolish thing, they should have said all is for the best. (2)

The absurdity of such logic is further revealed by the argument that the existence of arms serves as a sufficient reason for killing people in thousands. Other instances of Leibniz's ill-conceived philosophy include the misfortunes of an Anabaptist named James, who throws himself into the sea to rescue a selfish and ungrateful sailor from death, and who eventually drowns for he is denied help by *Candide*'s philosopher friend, Pangloss, arguing that “the Bay of Lisbon [has] been made on purpose for the Anabaptist to be drowned” (11). Voltaire mocks here the optimistic and naïve belief that evil is always balanced by good. James, who is righteous, dies when saving a corrupted sailor. Ironically, James falls victim to his own altruism. In

effect, evil is not balanced by good but, instead, it survives good. Having seen James's misfortunes, terrified Candide, who has meanwhile witnessed the atrocities following an earthquake, asks himself: "[if] this is the best of all possible worlds, what are the others?" (14). Voltaire questioned here the Leibnizian argument that natural disasters have some higher purpose and that there is some sufficient reason for their occurrence.

The idea of sufficient reason is further ridiculed by Voltaire on the example of a certain English admiral, sentenced to death only because it is customary to execute a high-ranked military man to encourage soldiers to fight more courageously. The logic of sufficient reason is also satirized when, at the end of all their struggles, Pangloss explicates to Candide that they have had to endure all the hardships to eventually find a safe and quiet retreat, a garden close to Constantinople, where they could live far from the distress of the world. Hence, all the misfortunes they have survived and all the lost lives have ultimately turned out necessary for them to find repose and a peace of mind. This final and profoundly ironic remark evinces Voltaire's critique that those who wish to make the world the best of all possible worlds or who want at least to make it possibly better usually make it worse than it is.

Similarly to Coetzee's Michael K, Candide travels throughout the world, witnessing much hardship, affliction and violence, and finally settling on a detached farm near Constantinople. At the end of his journey, Candide offers his friends, Pangloss and Martin, a surprising solution to the quandary of how to handle with the inevitability of evil in the world, a solution similar to the leitmotiv of Coetzee's *Life and Times...*: to "cultivate our own garden" (97). Candide adopts this message from a Turkish farmer who finds happiness and a peace of mind in absencing himself from historical time. When asked about the last events in Constantinople, especially about the death of some state officials, the Turkish farmer reveals to Candide, Pangloss and Martin, the latter being a Spanish amateur philosopher and a Manichean, the following truth:

I have not known the name of any Mufti, nor of any Vizier. I am entirely ignorant of the event you mention; I presume in general that they who meddle with the administration of public affairs die sometimes miserably, and that they deserve it; but I never trouble my head about what is transacting at Constantinople. (96)

The Turk takes pride in cultivating his little farm with his own hands for such a labour helps him to stay away from the misery of the outside world. He also explains that cultivating a garden "keeps off from [him] the three great evils – idleness, vice, and want" (96). However, such an attitude still does not account for "a horrible deal of evil on the earth" (96). Therefore, Candide asks a certain dervish, "who passed as the best philosopher in Turkey," what must be done to reduce the evil, and dervish's answer is to "be silent" (96). When

provoked by Pangloss to “reason with [him] a little about causes and effects, about the best of possible worlds, the origin of evil, the nature of the soul, and the pre-established harmony” (96), the dervish shuts the door in his face.

Candide is a severe critique of the Enlightenment school of optimism as well as of the idea that people can curtail their misfortunes by means of rational thought. Voltaire’s work roused much controversy, mainly in the Church, because, in addition to satirizing the Christian logic of the pre-established harmony, it also caricatured the churchmen’s hypocrisy and arrogance. Admittedly, *Candide* witnesses Catholic ruthless persecutions against deviations in belief; he observes friars’ promiscuity and their illegitimate children; he is flabbergasted by their avarice, ethnocentricity and insolence. Moreover, although Voltaire was rather a deist than an atheist, believing “in the existence of a God who is the creator and orderer of a cosmos regulated by natural law” (Bottiglia 27), in his novel he refuted the Christian idea of linear time and, instead, he adopted the ecological notion of circular time, which he exposed at the end of his work with the praise of a return to gardening. It could also be argued that such a gesture symbolizes a return to simplicity, if not entirely to tribal primitivism, or even to a pagan cult of the Earth. Such a solution was advocated approximately at the same time by Jean-Jaques Rousseau (1712–1778), a Swiss social thinker and a political philosopher, known for his praise for “the state of nature” in which “uncorrupted morals” prevail, and man can be free and happy.

Similarly to *Candide*, Michael K strives to live outside politics and society, and even outside historical time. After the death of his mother, Anna K, Michael finds an abandoned estate, the Visagie farm, where he settles. Not actually occupying the household, he begins to cultivate its barren soil in hope of growing his own food. Meanwhile, he chooses to inhabit a hole in the ground. Such a decision can be treated as a retreat to “the state of nature.” By living underground, Michael symbolically unites with the nature, therefore, he can be perceived as Rousseau’s “savage,” or, following Gordimer, a “simple” (2). Harelipped, orphaned, and rather mentally slow, Michael experiences great difficulties adjusting to the reality of the Visagie farm, but he eventually finds peace there devoting himself to planting and tending his small garden. He feels happy because when he dedicates himself to physical work his handicap becomes irrelevant. Moreover, the solitude of the farm provides perfect conditions for a withdrawal from the oppressiveness of the social order. It could be argued that the farm supplies him with a shelter from the outside world. Thus, in his own vision of himself he is compared to an underground creature, a mole or an earthworm, that is, to a being for which farmland is the natural habitat. Coetzee thus narrates Michael’s thoughts: “I am more like an earthworm, he thought. Which is also a kind of gardener. Or a mole, also a gardener, that does not tell stories because he lives in

silence” (182). Indeed, as Michael is “not clever with words” (48), which means that he finds it difficult to narrate his life, the stillness of the farm seems to ideally suit his needs. Since it is a place filled with silence, he can rest assured that, unlike in the outside world, there is no-one on the farm who will ask him to tell stories about himself. It must be mentioned at this point that although Michael refuses to narrate stories about his life he is nevertheless “full [of such stories], but the right words would not come” (48). He does not lack stories, then. He merely lacks the proper language to tell them. Therefore, unlike *Candid*, Michael does not merely choose to be silent; rather, he is forced to be silent; forced, as David Atwell suggests, by language, for it cannot satisfactorily express the trauma of his suffering (88–99).

Admittedly, in a world ravaged by violence, it seems that the only reasonable response to evil is willed silence. Man cannot do anything to eradicate hardship, inequality and pain, for, according to Leibniz, they are the necessary elements of our earthly existence. In this context, the sole expression of one’s protest against the inevitability of evil is to stay quiet and passive, limiting thus one’s susceptibility and proneness to that evil. Although Michael’s “mouth would never wholly shut” (139), and although throughout the novel he is only forced to speak and to take action, he remains consistently passive; he hardly ever talks to people, he sleeps most of the time, and he appears little interested in the outside world. He is happy, or at the very least, complacent, with the ability to simply survive. He does not wish to be remembered as a figure in history. He wants to live alone, in his solitude, beyond governments, politics or wars. Accordingly, he thinks that “perhaps the truth is that it is enough to be out of all the camps at the same time” (182), and by “camps” he may mean literal camps in which he has spent a substantial part of his life, but also camps in a more figurative sense, that is, the state, patterns of social behavior, and language. When asked to tell his story, he prefers not to say anything. When offered a drink, he is made to accept it, but he soon vomits it. When presented to a company of women, he feels embarrassed. Admittedly, Michael K does not feel he is part of earthly existence. He is a misfit; an eccentric, for whom a world of civil and political unrest is so hostile that he cannot even find an appropriate language to express his disgust with what he witnesses. Therefore, he remains silent, as only quietness can adequately express who he really is. In a sense, then, the most complete story of him is his quietude. Michael K is a natural character, an earthly being, living in an unnatural world. Consequently, his retreat to gardening must be perceived as a conscious and desperate effort to survive in a world of rules and social patterns that he hardly understands (Head 59).

Both for *Candide* and for Michael K land is like a mother: to be lived off but not to be colonized or to be subdued. The farm is a place of no want, no

desire and no vice. Both Candide and Michael K, as peaceful beings, choose to live on a farm as the only place where they can survive. For Michael, who wants merely water and seeds to live, the abandoned but arable Visagie farm seems to satisfy all his needs. If read in such a manner, *Life and Times...* conveys a minimalist but profoundly optimistic message that in the times of evil and inhumane social order, there is a way in which, as Michael claims in the last sentence of the novel, “one can live” (184).

However, in a world of a civil war, which affects every human being through conscriptions, riots in the towns, shortages of work and food, regular skirmishes, curfew, camps for refugees, failures of public services, Michael K’s resolution to grow his garden seems rather naïve. Moreover, taking into account that the Visagie farm does not appear to be the one he has been looking for, and that he nearly starves to death while trying to live on the plants he has grown there, Michael’s Voltairian idea of a sustainable and peaceful existence on the farm becomes entirely compromised. Although he strives to be free, to grow his own garden, and to “live by the rising and setting of the sun, in a pocket outside time” (60), as Voltaire recommended, his “freedom is defined [only] negatively” (Gordimer 5), that is, he never really achieves it. Both a life outside the farm and a life on the farm are equally dangerous and detrimental. When soldiers find Michael, he is so haggard by living on what he has grown that he can hardly walk or think clearly. Contrary to Voltaire’s idealized vision of the garden, the place where Michael lives is not one of idleness and happiness but rather one of decline and physical emaciation.

Coetzee satirizes Voltaire’s garden by denying its independence from the violence of the social order. Ultimately, nature is as cruel and unfair to those who would live according to its laws as is society to the socialized man. In this regard, Michael’s choice to live on a farm outside society and outside time proves to be a rather defective solution. He cannot escape violence, hardship and pain because they are present both in society and in nature.

The strength of Coetzee’s bitter caricature of Voltaire’s character is further exposed by the fact that in *Life and Times...* “virtually everybody seems to be of Michael’s opinion that it is best to be out of all camps at the same time” (Masloń 41). Accordingly, the army deserter who visits Michael’s farm reflects that there “is a war going on, there are people dying. Well, I am in war with no one. I made my peace” (Coetzee 64). A guard in the Jakkalsdrif camp where Michael is temporarily detained says that “the day I get orders to go north [to the front] I walk out. They’ll never see me again. It’s not my war. Let them fight it, it’s their war” (86). Similarly, all the army officials who manage the camps, the medical officer that takes care of Michael, and the commandant of the Kenilworth camp object to the war and intend to return to their previous occupations. The medical officer shares with Michael a belief in the idea of a circular universe:

War-time is a time of waiting What was there to do in the camp but wait, going through the notions of living, fulfilling one's obligations, keeping an ear turned all the time to the hum of the war beyond the walls, listening for its pitch to change? ... To me, listening with one ear to the banal exchanges of camp life and with the other to the suprasensual spinning of the gyroscopes of the Grand Design, time has grown empty (158).

Michael and the medical officer live from day to day. They indulge themselves in repetitiveness by following the circle of the Grand Design. However, for each of them the Grand Design stands for a different concept: for the officer it stands for history, whereas for Michael it represents nature. Bearing in mind the two explications of the Grand Design, it can be claimed that both history and nature operate according to the same overarching principle, that is, a "cosmic intelligence that has to run its course on its own so that balance is brought back by forces beyond [man's] grasp" (Masłóń 42). Therefore, similarly to history, nature is a realm of an utter lack of freedom. Admittedly, the laws of nature cannot be changed, questioned or abandoned. In this respect, Michael's endeavor as well as *Candide's* seem defective because they both must do what the laws of nature require man to do: they must eat, breathe, and socialize to survive. Consequently, the misconception that nature liberates from the social order, an idea proposed both by Voltaire and by Rousseau, seems as enslaving as the social order this misconception tries to evade. Such a misapprehension stems from the fact that the idea of liberating nature is essentially a cultural construct, i.e., the vision of nature as unaffected by the influence of civilization is ultimately a product of civilization. Hence, instead of being exclusive to each other, civilized society and the idea of liberating nature are mutually complementary.

In this regard, the farm is neither good nor evil; it is merely neutral. Michael chooses to ignore this fact and, in order to demonstrate the farm's positive value, he identifies it with his mother. He spills her ashes on the soil of the farm and believes that the plants he grows are his brothers and sisters, coming from the same womb. Accordingly, Michael romanticizes the place, which is very similar to Voltaire's approach in *Candid*, that is, Michael idealizes the garden as the place of peace and a repose from evil. It is this idealization that Coetzee criticizes when he depicts Michael K as a caricature of a gardener. The farm where Michael stays is not Voltaire's garden. Instead, the farm is a barren land that slowly kills. Furthermore, although the place to which Michael travels at the end of the novel is called "Côte d'Azure," evoking a vision of comfort and joy, it is not even similar to Voltaire's garden. Rather, it is the same old block of flats where his mother used to stay and struggle to earn a living by working as a domestic servant for a retired hosiery manufacturer and his wife. Inside the building there are stacked some usual garden utensils: steel chairs, beach umbrellas, vinyl tables,

a peg and some plaster statues. These objects, cluttered and unused, seem displaced and out of context. They look awkward and, so, they make the place appear grotesque. Thus, the flat he returns to, with its depressing surroundings, caricatures what is usually associated with garden and, particularly, with its Voltaire's idealized version. It is in this sense that *Life and Times...* could be perceived as Coetzee's parodied vision of *Candide* and Voltaire's praise for gardening. Unlike *Candide*, after months spent on a search for peace, instead of reaching a place of bliss and security, Michael K makes a circle and returns to the same shabby block from which he set off. The bitterness of the irony is enhanced by the fact that in addition to becoming a store for some unused garden gear the building has also turned into a squat for the homeless, i.e., a desolate place which signifies solitude and danger. Whether it is possible to treat such a place as a refuge from earthly evils, such as misery, inequalities and injustice, is highly questionable, especially that places like this are usually the products of these evils.

When at the end of *Life and Times...* Coetzee describes Michael's vision of his return to the Visagie farm, the general tone of this description is rather optimistic because it clearly reveals that, eventually, it is feasible to survive outside the social order, beyond the injustices and horrors of everyday life, and away from other evils of the civilized world. However, once analyzed as a satirical response to Voltaire's parody of Leibniz's *Theodicy*, the novel seems to offer a rather pessimistic view over the possibilities of a successful resistance against the oppressiveness of social institutions, war and violence. In this respect, while Voltaire's *Candide* is a parody of *Theodicy*, Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* is a parody of Voltaire's parody of Leibniz's defected philosophy. Therefore, following Gordimer's criticism, Michael K can be seen as a caricature; however, contrary to Gordimer's claim, he is a caricature not of the South-African anti-apartheid movement but of Voltaire's idealization of *Candide* as a self-fulfilled man-gardener.

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ALDOUS HUXLEY'S EARLY NOVELS: AN UNFOLDING DIALOGUE ABOUT PAIN

Abstract

The article examines four early novels by Aldous Huxley – *Crome Yellow*, *Antic Hay*, *Those Barren Leaves* and *Point Counter Point* – in connection to each other and to Huxley's essays, in terms of an overarching theme of a cycle of pain, and thereby connects the novels to *Brave New World*. In the course of the analysis, the methodological problems of approaching the novels as “novels of ideas” are discussed, focusing on the problem of reducing characters to type, which makes it more difficult for readers to notice the way Huxley constructs individual characters and the arguments he wishes to explore with them. Finally, implications of the existence of this overarching theme for reading strategies are discussed.

In a 1931 essay entitled “Obstacle Race,” Huxley wrote that “[t]hought has a life of its own A notion ... proceeds to grow with all the irresistibility and inevitability of a planted seed, or a crystal suspended in a saturated solution” (CE vol. III, 143). This paper is focused on such a growth of ideas in his early novels, specifically in *Crome Yellow* (1921), *Antic Hay* (1923), *Those Barren Leaves* (1925) and *Point Counter Point* (1928). However, while the metaphor of a crystal suggests linear expansion in time, Huxley's ideas often developed dialogically, continually supporting, contradicting and shaping each other.

The process will be studied from two different perspectives. First, there is the internal perspective of Huxley dialoguing with himself – it is fairly well established that one of his motivations for writing was the exploration of ideas for his own benefit (see e.g. Sion, 195). It should be noted, however, that since the author is an actual person, whose motivations and unrecorded thoughts are inaccessible, the study makes a distinction between Aldous

Huxley as a *person* and his *persona*, accessible through his publicly available writing, and will be concerned only with the latter.

The second perspective of relevance is that of the readers, who are invited to be the audience of Huxley's struggle with ideas – being published texts, the novels were, in practice, provided for the readers to experience. Consequently, while inquiring into how Huxley seemed to develop particular ideas in the four novels, the analysis will also include the question of what that can mean for the reader and how it may influence the process of reading.

It must also be noted that this article has to be restricted to a selected theme, since trying to do justice to the whole content of the four novels would require a book length study. In the present paper, the analysis is limited to one theme with dystopian implications: while Huxley's four earlier novels are, in terms of setting and structure, very different from the later *Brave New World* (1932), they do contain some traces of it and this analysis is concerned with one such strand of traces.

1. True to type

A problem that needs to be addressed first is the novels' collective reputation – the texts from the twenties are relatively often discussed together (e.g. Sion) and classified as “novels of ideas,” the definition of the genre being often taken straight from *Point Counter Point*, where it is suggested that: “[t]he character of each personage must be implied as far as possible, in the ideas of which he is the mouthpiece” (299).

Two significant problems may arise from looking at the novels collectively and paying excessive attention to this “mission statement.” The first is the creation of a certain narrative of Huxley's development, seeing each book as, essentially, an improvement on the previous one. An example of this is offered by George Woodcock, who states that the “novels grow in complexity and quality – with the special exception of *Brave New World* – as they proceed from *Crome Yellow* to *Eyeless in Gaza*.” The problem lies in that, while it is generally true that each consecutive novel from the twenties can be seen as an improvement in the scope and complexity of the narrative told, habitual thinking about the novels in this manner creates a risk that the earlier novels will be ignored or overlooked, in favour of the later ones.

Secondly, if the dedication of the novel of ideas *to* ideas is taken too simplistically, it may interfere with seeing individual novel characters *as* characters. Given that there is only a certain number of important idea combinations to be expressed, significantly different characters may be fit into a few general types (e.g. “the scientist,” “the harlot,” “the intellectual”),

the differences between them being purposefully overlooked. The risk is especially high, if the analysis spans a number of books.

For instance, Woodcock expresses an opinion that “that the excitement of the ideas makes up to a great extent for the shallowness of many of the characters, who are often little more than Jonsonian humours” (63). He then suggests (among other things) that “women [...] – with rare exceptions – are the enemies in Huxley’s world” (128), and attributes the portrayals of the older female characters to the author’s “chronic misogyny” (163). There are, however, potentially much more interesting ways to read the various female characters, if one conceives of them not as a class, but as a group of characters with individual histories.

A similar fate befalls the main focalising characters (Denis Stone, Theodore Gumbriel Junior, Mr Calamy and Francis Chelifer, and Philip Quarles), who are not infrequently collectively described as variants of the failed intellectual type. For example, Milton Birnbaum classes them all as “cerebrotonicis,” and sees them as frustrated and hampered by a “Hamlet-like [...] indecision and inability to execute their plans” (48). In consequence, both Calamy and Francis Chelifer seem to be reduced to type, for neither of them actually demonstrates significant inactivity and indecision: by the end of the novel Calamy embarks on a quest for mystical enlightenment, while Chelifer takes a frustrating job and lives in an unpleasant lodging house out of conviction (AH: 97), in sharp contrast to a number of other Huxley characters, who feel cripplingly embarrassed in the presence of poverty and misfortune.

An even more troubling case of simplified interpretation, one also most likely to happen to the main focalising characters, involves identifying them as author-mouthpieces. Some instances of such identification may even have mildly humorous or absurd results, as when David Izzonotes that while Philip Quarles’s wife had an affair, it “did not happen in real life” (91). In other instances, when it is actually highly probable that Huxley had given one of those characters a particular idea he agreed with, depending too heavily on the notion of an author’s mouthpiece can lead to overlooking things other characters have said in probable agreement with Huxley.

There is, for example, Mrs Betterton, a generally satirical character, who delivers a quotation from Shakespeare on the virtue of feasts being rare (PCP: 55), which Huxley later repeats in the 1929 essay “Holy Face” (CE vol. II, 363). A similar thing happens to Illidge, a devout Communist working as a research assistant, apparently suffering from an inferiority complex, a man eventually cajoled into committing a murder, who delivers the following lines:

‘Asymmetrical tadpoles! [...]’ He thought of his brother Tom. Who [sic] had weak lungs and worked a broaching machine in a motor factory at Manchester. He

remembered washing days and the pink crinkled skin of his mother's water-sodden hands. 'Asymmetrical tadpoles!' (PCP: 66)

The language used in the passage, especially the evocative "pink crinkled skin of his mother's water-sodden hands," echoes Huxley's own sentiment, a mixture of concern and embarrassment, evident in essays he wrote after encounters with people forced to do gruelling physical labour (see *Jesting Pilate* and "Sight-Seeing in Alien England,"). There are many ways in which Illidge is not Huxley, but in this instance the author and character seem to be in significant agreement.

The purpose of this demonstration is to challenge a commonly held idea about the novels of ideas – the genre has a reputation of being inattentive to characters and plot, but while Huxley, admittedly, did not create very memorable characters in his early novels, a critical approach that actively overlooks the individuality of particular characters only exacerbates the problem. The characters, however flawed, have more to offer than first meets the eye, an example of this hidden complexity being Myra Viveash from *Antic Hay*.

2. The wounded flapper

In his online essay, Jake Poller describes Myra as a "an archetype of the despairing, pleasure-seeking, sexually promiscuous post-war flapper" (paragraph 4), in line with such previous critics as Woodcock, who classifies her as embodying "the Circe figure [...] who reduces her victims to animality or stupidity" (45). This type of sentiment is sometimes tempered with an admission that Myra is also a victim – Poller describes her as "a sympathetic figure, goaded by grief into an endless succession of affairs" (paragraph 8), while Jerome Meckier calls her a "victim of the war," whose "despair can be traced to the battlefield death of [...] the only man she apparently ever loved" (69), but he still insists on an interpretation in which Myra is one in a series of female characters re-enacting "Huxley's recurrent negative myth, the collision of idealistic males and vapid or heartless females to signify reality's refusal to correspond to the presumptuous designs of the mind, [...] life's inability to imitate art" (68).

This seems to still be a reductionist reading, even if Myra is accorded some measure of sympathy. While it is true that at least three male characters in the novel – Theodore Gunbril, Lypiatt and Shearwater – lose their heads over her and pursuing her leads to personal tragedies for them, their "idealism" can only be taken seriously if one reads them as reliable narrators of their own condition. That can be done, and is especially common with

a focalising character like Gumbriil, but is not the only reading apparently justified by textual evidence.

Lypiatt's most direct impulse to commit suicide is learning how lowly Myra thinks of his art, i.e. learning what many other people have previously told him. And even then, in his deathbed confession, he does not abandon the pretence of being larger than life, going so far as to compare himself to Hamlet (AH: 214). His propensity for bombastic grandiloquence is, however, perhaps best represented in a scene in which Myra has agreed to sit for one of his paintings:

'You make me suffer a great deal,' said Lypiatt ... quietly and unaffectedly [...] 'I am very sorry,' she said; and, really, she felt sorry. 'But I can't help it, can I?' 'I suppose you can't,' ... his voice had now become the voice of Prometheus in his bitterness. 'Nor can tigresses.' ... 'You like playing with the victim,' he went on; 'he must die slowly.'

Reassured, Mrs Viveash faintly smiled. This was the familiar Casimir. So long as he could talk like ... an old-fashioned French novel, it was all right; he couldn't really be so very unhappy. (74)

Myra admits she knows she is hurting Lypiatt and the reader is told she even "feels sorry" for causing him pain. However the locus of agency in breaking away from this relationship lies, to a significant extent, with Lypiatt, who refuses to honestly face the facts. On the verge of doing so, he reverts to faux tragedy, eventually prompting a real one.

The second victim, Shearwater, has previously estranged his wife, Rosie, to pursue his research without any distractions. In response, after repeated attempts to win his attention, his wife has an affair and, by the time Shearwater has embroiled himself in an affair with Myra and wishes to come clean to his wife, there is no communication between them. The opportunity for healing missed, he is last seen running a potentially lethal experiment on himself.

And, finally, there is Gumbriil Junior. He perhaps best fits Meckier's notion of a "male protagonist pour[ing] [his] own untenably idealistic notions" (68) onto a woman, since there actually is a woman he seems to idealise. Yet, when presented with an opportunity of pursuing a life with her, he throws it away. While Myra does press him strongly to accompany her for lunch, he could probably refuse and catch the train out of London to meet Emily, if he had enough conviction. Instead, he creates a fiction of "the clown," who "couldn't be called to account for his actions" (161–162). That to refuse to take responsibility for oneself *is* a fiction, is made obvious the next morning, when he attempts to meet Emily and finds the rented cottage empty.

Both Shearwater and Gumbriil follow a pattern of behaviour that leads to inflicting pain on others and later reaping painful consequences for

themselves, the pain being magnified in the process. Rosie is initially greatly distraught at her husband's lack of interest in human contact, but, by the time Shearwater needs her, she has moved on to accepting a life of emotional separation. Gumbril clearly mourns the loss of Emily, but ultimately leaves her wounded by his actions.

The pattern also manifests in Myra – she has lost the love of her life in the Great War and is now unable to live fully. She admits that the neon signs in Piccadilly, which for Gumbril epitomise “[r]estlessness, distraction, refusal to think, [...] an unquiet life,” “are her” (231). Having children she calls “the most desperate experiment of all,” a final bid for connection she is unwilling to actually resort to, apparently for fear it may not succeed (242).

3. The destructive cycle

This pattern of inflicting harm in response to an initial catastrophe and, thereby, perpetuating pain can be observed, in varying contexts and to varying degrees, in all of Huxley's early novels. In general, it begins with an experience of the Great War (a shatterer of values and individual lives), personal trauma or a general sense of alienation. The exposure then leads to a destructive reaction, such as an affair or the adoption of a harmful lifestyle, which, predictably, leads to damage to other characters and their initiation into the cycle.

To begin, somewhat anachronistically, with *Point Counter Point*, we have, among others, Marjorie who is propelled into an affair with Walter Bidlake by her alcoholic husband, leaves her emotionally unsatisfying but economically independent life, and ends up pregnant and unhappy as Walter begins to pursue the beautiful and unscrupulous Lucy Tantamount. There is Walter himself, disliked by his father, embroiled in an affair he initiated but has no wish to continue, painfully afraid of confrontation, and grovelling at the feet of the woman he wants to have. She, in turn, is a child of the War, who came “out of the chrysalis ... when the bottom had been knocked out of everything” (138), refuses to “agree to anything in ... life ... for more than half an hour at a time” (156) and envies people who are sufficiently detached to have “fun” without being unhappy, even if that also precludes true happiness.

Then there is Lord Tantamount who attempts to clumsily lecture his daughter about proper morality while wildly underestimating her exploits and who ensconces himself in his highly abstract research. There is his assistant, Illidge, both deriding his employer and deriving his livelihood from that which he derides, plagued by a sense of inferiority, a theoretically devout communist goaded into becoming an unwilling accomplice to murder as a test of convictions. The dynamic can also be seen in the life of his partner in

crime, Maurice Spandrell, who plans and performs the murder, aspiring to diabolism in a lopsided search for God and in an attempt to wound his mother's feelings, to take revenge for her remarriage.

Finally, there is the main focalising character, Philip Quarles, and his wife. Their marriage is damaged by an affair Elinor pursues, prompted by her husband's detachment. Her lover is later murdered by Illidge and Spandrell, ostensibly for political reasons, which traumatises her, and additional strain is then put on the couple by the death of their child. As if that were not enough, Quarles is also disabled and the disability seems to be one of the factors apparently exacerbating his detachment.

Crome Yellow does not deal with tragedies on such a monumental scale, so its destructive cycle is harder to notice – the main symptoms are “the inherent lack of proper human communication” (as noted by Wim Tigges – Barfoot 21) and self-delusion. The two characteristics seem to be most strongly embodied by the focaliser, Denis Stone, whom Tigges describes as “self-centred and self-preoccupied” (Barfoot 21), and by the intellectually aspiring but naïve Mary Bracegirdle.

Denis' ego crisis is made evident when he encounters caricatures of himself:

Denis was his own severest critic; so, at least, he had always believed. [...] His weaknesses, his absurdities—no one knew them better than he did. Indeed, in a vague way he imagined that nobody beside himself was aware of them at all. It seemed, somehow, inconceivable that he should appear to other people as they appeared to him; inconceivable that they ever spoke of him among themselves in that [...] mildly malicious tone in which he was accustomed to talk of them. (136)

When he later attempts to share this experience, he speaks in defensive generalities, as if his feelings were common facts:

The individual [...] is not a self-supporting universe. There are times when he comes into contact with other individuals, when he is forced to take cognisance of the existence of other universes besides himself. (140)

This is met measure for measure when Mary Bracegirdle, the addressee, proceeds to similarly explain her own predicament, an affair with another guest:

The difficulty [...] makes itself acutely felt in matters of sex. If one individual seeks intimate contact with another [...], she is certain to receive or inflict suffering. If on the other hand, she avoids contacts, she risks the equally grave sufferings that follow on unnatural repressions. (141)

At this point, the narrator overtly tells the reader that the two are talking at cross purposes, too preoccupied to notice each other's pain. When Denis eventually manages to make Mary his confidante, the result is no less

disheartening – she convinces him to stage an emergency departure from Crome and his unrequited love interest, but he loses heart before the plan comes to fruition and leaves frustrated, surrounded by “funeral imagery” (Barfoot 23).

What happens to Denis can be interpreted as an extreme case of a problem that plagues many of the characters. Mary, with her newfound experience of heartbreak, prescribes a cure that is tailored to her own needs rather than his, just as many other characters either live in their own worlds (e.g. Mr Wimbush) or give advice without true regard for the one they are advising, seemingly communicating but actually isolated. Such is the case of Mr Scogan, more interested in the hypothetical Rational State than in current problems, or of Barbecue-Smith, who advises Denis to use his automatic writing technique despite the difference in goals. *Crome Yellow* can be read as the first in a series of novelistic explorations of the cycle of pain, here mostly in the guise of egocentric isolation.

Those Barren Leaves partly breaks the pattern and is the most optimistic of the books. While unrequited love and possessiveness (Mrs Aldwinkle), alienation from reality (Miss Thriplow), existential discontent (Francis Chelifer), and even death make their appearances, the resolution is smoother than in the other texts. The cynical Thomas Cardan attempts to marry a mentally challenged woman for her money, but in doing so saves her from her murderous brother, and she dies of natural causes shortly after experiencing some freedom. Mrs Aldwinkle’s niece is able to break free from her aunt’s influence and marry well, despite the aunt’s protestations. Calamy embarks on a promising quest for enlightenment, his last words – and the closing words of the novel – being: “he was somehow reassured” (230).

To summarise, the exploration of the cycle of pain begins with *Crome Yellow*, focusing mainly on miscommunication, egoism, and mental isolation, expands in *Antic Hay*, diminishes in *Those Barren Leaves*, and explodes in full force in *Point Counter Point*, which portrays many different varieties of suffering in significant detail. It must be noted, though, that in the two bleakest novels there are characters who manage to avoid most of the pain.

In *Antic Hay* the one who seems to escape without major damage is Emily. While her character is relatively difficult to decipher, because she is focalised mainly through Gumbriel and last seen through her farewell letter to him, she nevertheless distinguishes herself by responding to Gumbriel’s affected philosophical ruminations about the disharmony of modern life with “You make things very complicated” (148). Furthermore, in the letter announcing her permanent departure, the tone is mild and accepting, in contrast to the mental gymnastics other characters engage in when pained.

In *Point Counter Point* at least two characters have strategies for dealing with reality. One is Mark Rampion, commonly read as an exponent of D. H.

Lawrence's philosophy (see e.g. Woodcock), who appears to be living a rather satisfactorily simple life with his wife Maria. The other is Mrs Quarles, who, dealing with an adulterous and incompetent husband, stands by traditional Christian ideas. She believes the young are mistaken in focusing on "happiness," since "good times [...] simply cannot be had continuously," and that it would be better to ask "How can we please God, and why aren't we better?," since, in the course of answering this question in practice, people "achieve happiness without ever thinking about it" (352–353).

Yet, even though both Mrs Quarles and Rampion offer venues of escape from the cycle of pain, Huxley seems not to endorse either of their positions. Christianity may have a spokeswoman, but it is also represented by Burlap, who is full of pious ideas about Saint Francis but drives his secretary out of work and into suicide. Rampion is treated comparatively mildly, but is portrayed as didactic, impractical, domineering and somewhat of a puritan.

4. Implications

In the four works – although in *Those Barren Leaves* less intensely than in others – the reader is presented with a cycle: hurt individuals react to their own pain in ways that cause further hurt and proliferate pain. While avenues of escape are suggested, in the more pessimistic novels they are also either downplayed or deprived of authorial approval, so it is never clear whether they are legitimate paths of escape or personal delusions.

There are at least three interesting implications of the presence of this theme in Huxley's work. Firstly, it seems to inform *Brave New World* – in his foreword to it, Huxley assured readers that the World Controllers "are not madmen," even if they are not, strictly speaking, sane (BNW: xii), but the novel does not necessarily deliver on this assessment. The snapshots of atrocities offered by Mond in chapter three might explain why a more stable state was considered necessary, but not why that state could not tolerate any suffering at all.

It is easier to seriously consider the notion that the World State's total aversion to suffering is not an absurd overreaction, if every potential unhappiness is looked at through the lens of the cycle of pain Huxley seems to be concerned about. From that perspective, while his argument may still be extreme, it is at least better delivered – the reader is openly faced with the argument that pain may lead to more pain irrespective of scale and, therefore, if the objective is to create total social stability, it does make sense to eradicate pain completely, at whatever cost.

This leads to the second way in which such readings may be beneficial. Huxley's early novels seem to follow a pattern whereby each consecutive

novel modifies the tone and message of the earlier one. The effect is not properly visible, however, in selective readings – the early novels reward an organic, chronological process of reading, proceeding from one text to another not merely to establish some canonical idea about Huxley as a writer, but to truly listen in to the dialogue he is having with himself. While reading only selected texts still remains an obviously valid strategy, the benefits of a more organic approach are worth noting.

Finally, in the process of reading texts in this manner it is possible to discover a different way of committing to the notion of dialogicality in literature. In an actual dialogue it is necessary to listen and resist the impulse to reduce the other party's statements out of convenience. Similarly, Huxley's early texts reward the reader who is willing to see them as more than just social critiques with typecast characters, or *roman à clef* repositories of biographical data. While they do not actively resist being thus reduced and there may be good reasons to reduce them, they also hide some complexities that may be difficult to notice, if the reader opts for a reductive framework.

In his defence of the novel of ideas, Meckier asserts that "In *Point Counter Point*, Huxley has an abundance of explanations of what life is and ... can see through them all" (34), but it seems he also *speaks* through them. Huxley seems to dismiss his character's worldviews, since none of them contain an ultimate answer to the questions posed by life, but he is also generous enough to let many of the characters state their positions in full and to give them touches of genuine humanity. But he will be caught in the act of doing so, only if the reader pays close attention.

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PRETTY MAIDS ALL IN A ROW: POWER AND THE FEMALE
CHILD IN FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT'S *THE SECRET
GARDEN*

Abstract

This article explores Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1911) as a "hybrid" text and an example of "exploratory fiction." Of primary interest is the parallel between Mary's growth and the garden's rehabilitation. Through Mary Lennox, arguably Burnett's most complex fictional child, the novel challenges traditional patriarchal values with a depiction of female-based power dynamics. The novel makes a significant contribution to the shift in the way the female and the child was stereotypically portrayed in literature before the twentieth century.

Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1911), like other early works of girls' literature, is paradoxical due to its seemingly conservative themes, which on the surface appear to reinforce gender roles even while they simultaneously allow for feminine self-exploration and expression. As Mary Jeanette Moran argues, novels like *The Secret Garden* can be considered "hybrid" texts that blazed a path for later groundbreaking female characters like Nancy Drew (33). In this way, Burnett's writing helped to launch the development of feminist undercurrents in girls' literature in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and later led to the depiction of the spirited, outgoing heroines we are so familiar with in popular culture today, as seen in blockbusters like Pixar's Oscar-winning animated film *Brave* (2012). However, as Lindsay Lowe reminded us in a March 2013 article in *The Atlantic*, this emphasis on the image of the spunky, extroverted girl unnecessarily overshadows the depictions of more reserved and thoughtful, yet equally brave female heroines. While Mary Lennox investigates the mysteries of the secret garden and the mysterious cries in the manor, she

develops her power of imagination and creativity, yet maintains her quiet strength. This subtle strength can be, as Lowe contends, “all too easily mistaken for meekness—and any female character who even *appears* timid or uncertain will inevitably face criticism for playing into antiquated gender stereotypes.” I argue that through Mary Lennox, perhaps Burnett’s most complex fictional child, the novel pushes past these rigid gender stereotypes and challenges traditional patriarchal values with a depiction of female-based power dynamics.

On the surface, a reading of the basic plot of the novel appears to project conventional distinctions of gender and class. Notably there is also a parallel between Mary’s transformation from a sickly child to a vibrant girl on the verge of young womanhood and the garden’s rehabilitation. An orphaned Mary is sent to live at her uncle’s house where she brings a garden back to life with the help of Dickon, a lower-class boy who loves nature. She discovers her ill cousin, Colin and helps return him not only to good health but also to a relationship with his father who has been distant and aloof. At the end of the novel, the relationship between the father and son is the focus, while the garden, Mary, and Dickon are seemingly forgotten. This has caused some to criticize the politics of the novel and what they see as the reinforcement of patriarchal values. The shift in narrative focus from Mary to Colin as protagonist is certainly a troubling aspect since Mary is clearly the center of the earlier part of the story and the reader is drawn into the development of her character. When the focus moves to Colin, Mary’s role is no longer as prominent.

Although some view the narrative shift as evidence of a marginalization of Mary in the later parts of the novel, I view the text as more flexible. Building upon Tim Morris’s notion of “exploratory fiction,” the text can be opened up for an interpretation that, rather than being didactic, instead presents patriarchal values in a way that questions them without supporting them (94). This is the agenda I see at work in Burnett’s novel. This type of fiction commonly features “withdrawn narrators and disjunctions of perspective and tone” similar to those in *The Secret Garden* (Morris 95). Reading the novel as exploratory fiction makes it less problematic and it helps account for the change in focus in the story. In this context, the narrative shift does not necessarily take away from Mary’s storyline, and it does not indicate a compromise and surrender to patriarchal values. The novel accommodates both Mary’s development of power through her rehabilitation of the garden as well as Colin’s restoration of health and position in his family. One storyline does not erase the other. Mary’s power is not lessened by the emergence of Colin’s story during the second half of the book.

The concept of “power relations” in children’s culture is a key context for comprehending Mary’s development. Morris’s view of childhood as a form of

“Otherness” that is always “insufficient, always wrong, always in need of guidance and correction” is a useful lens through which Mary Lennox can be studied (10). The child as Other helps define the “default value” of our culture by being its opposite. After Mary loses her parents in India, she comes to England as an Other and she must be acculturated into English society. In a sense then, when she arrives at Misselthwaite Manor, Mary begins a “quest” and her search is not simply for independence, but rather for a family and acceptance.

Mary makes a place for herself at the manor by adapting her behavior and her language. She learns to do things for herself through her interaction with Martha, who is very unlike her servants in India who did everything for her. Martha helps Mary transform from a stiff, passive child into a healthy and playful girl. The skipping-rope that Mary is given symbolizes her initiation into her new environment and a new stage in her childhood. As she learns to skip rope, she becomes happier, bolder, and more robust, which eventually leads to her admittance into the English culture of the manor. England offers her the possibility for change. Her physical appearance begins to alter as she gains weight and her complexion becomes rosier. Due to her new physical activities, she gains an appetite for the healthy English food she is served. She learns to dress herself and entertain herself outside during the day. She does not have to rely on others to take care of her. This transformation provides her with a new sense of independence and self-reliance.

Not only does she begin to do things for herself, but she also begins to think differently: “Since she had been living in other people’s houses and had had no Ayah, she had begun to feel lonely and to think queer thoughts which were new to her” (12). Mary’s experiences from the beginning of her stay at the manor start to alter her not only physically, but also mentally. She modifies her attitude towards other people and as a result, she is excited that they are starting to like her and that she is actually capable of liking them. Her attempts to use Yorkshire dialect with some of the servants display her willingness to accept them (and be accepted *by* them) and to want to communicate with them in their native way of speaking. Consequently, her world view expands greatly as she experiences these new feelings and relationships.

Mary’s process of acculturation into English life is also aligned with her development of becoming more feminine; she begins to fill out and become more attractive as the influences of the English culture take effect (Foster and Simmons 180). However, Mary’s deviance from conventional femininity could also be seen as her source of power. It is because of the unconventional way she was brought up that she has learned to follow her own impulses. Mary was not raised by her mother and influenced by the idea of traditional

female roles. She had no stereotypically feminine role model. Since she was not close with her mother or any other female maternal figure for the first ten years of her life, she does not behave as a female child typically would. Mary is described as “not at all a timid child” who “always did what she wanted to do” (35). This kind of behavior goes against stereotypical female roles of submission and obedience. Due to these qualities, Mary does not listen when she is told to forget about the garden and the cries she hears in the house. Instead, Mary follows through with her own ideas and as a result of this she restores not only the long-neglected garden but also the family of Misselthwaite Manor.

These characteristics of determination and stubbornness are vital to Mary’s source of power. Mary’s transformation is linked to these power dynamics and to her experiences with her environment, which she seeks to shape based on her own desires. Her growth is inextricably connected to her relationship with the garden. Both have been neglected and unloved for ten years. Her future is also tied to the garden because as she weeds and digs in it each day, her health and attitude improve along with the regeneration of the garden. As Phyllis Bixler contends, the environment mirrors Mary’s internal state and when she recognizes this, her self-awareness develops (96). Mary is no longer the lonely, contrary girl that she was at the beginning of the story. She realizes that she has something to offer to those around her and this develops her confidence and changes the way she treats others.

Although Mary is usually credited with having power, at least in the earlier parts of the novel, the presentation of gender and power as a whole is complicated. A projection of female power is present in the story but it is often considered unresolved and sometimes overshadowed by other tensions. Mary’s process of self-discovery relies on the regeneration of the garden and the restoration of Colin’s health. However, a strong connection can be made between the garden and Mary’s development of individual creativity and identity. For awhile, Mary’s garden is a space of female authority, but critics like Shirley Foster and Judy Simmons see it as eventually being integrated into the adult world when Mr. Craven returns to the manor at the end of the story (174).

Although the focus of the novel is primarily on stereotypically female themes, there are still some aspects that do not fit in with gender norms. For example, the male characters in the story are not aggressive, and in particular, Mr. Craven does not fit into the typical patriarchal authority role. On the contrary, he is sensitive and withdrawn due to the death of his wife. When he finally meets Mary, he acknowledges his submission to the advice of Mrs. Sowerby. He follows her suggestion of letting Mary grow strong by playing outdoors before trying to start any future training or education with a governess. Although Mr. Craven “thought [Mrs. Sowerby] rather bold to

stop [him] on the moor,” he describes her as a “respectable woman” who says “sensible things” (120). Mr. Craven defers his authority to this “healthy-minded” woman; she is a stark contrast to Mr. Craven who describes himself as “too ill, and wretched and distracted” (120, 122). Mrs. Sowerby is the stronger of the two characters and she has the power to influence what happens to Mary. Mr. Craven benefits from this female-dominated power-structure and he is ultimately strengthened at the end of the novel through the changes that Mrs. Sowerby, Martha, Dickon, and Mary create by bringing renewed life to the manor and restoring the health of his son.

Interestingly, the activities of the children are not split up into gender roles either. Mary and the boys alike participate in home-centered activities like gardening. In fact, Dickon is most closely associated with the act of gardening and nurturing. He is first introduced to Mary in a scene where she observes him playing a pipe and “charming” the animals around him. She notes that he smells of heather, grass, and leaves “almost as if he were made of them” (99). He seems to her like “a sort of wood fairy” that was “too good to be true” (118). From that first meeting on, the two develop a friendship based on their mutual interests. Dickon is a child of nature and through him, Mary is able to make the garden come to life and begin her own transformation as well.

Mary’s transformation could be viewed as merely a characteristic of a fairy-tale story, but in the context of gender and power, Mary can also be examined as what Foster and Simmons call the “female author prototype” through her story-telling abilities (178). Her talent in telling stories adds to her power. When she tells Colin about the garden, she makes it come alive to him. Before he ever leaves his room, Mary makes Colin see the garden in his mind and he begins to feel that he would like to experience the fresh air of the secret garden. When Mary proposes that some day he might be able to go out on the moors, Colin has a look on his face as if he was “listening to a new sound in the distance and wondering what it was” (148). In this way, Mary begins to change the way Colin views the world and himself. Martha even suggests that Mary has “bewitched” Colin. Although she has done no actual magic, her power with words strengthens her and those around her.

However, the novel does not merely celebrate female power. According to Foster and Simmons, the ambiguous representation of gender is a destabilizing device (179). At the beginning of the novel, Mary is described in an unflattering way: “she was the most disagreeable-looking child ever seen ... she had a little thin face and a little thin body, thin light hair and a sour expression ... her face was yellow because she had been born in India and had always been ill in one way or another” (1). This deconstructs the idealized view of childhood that is often portrayed in literature. Because she is not a pretty and vibrant girl at the beginning of the story, others dislike her and

comment on her disagreeable appearance. Following the English nursery rhyme, Mary is “quite contrary” at first, but after tending the garden, she begins to grow more attractive like the “pretty maids all in a row” in the song. Martha encourages her to spend time outside in order to increase her appetite and put some color into her pale complexion. The gardener, Ben Weatherstaff thinks she is not good-looking and that she must have a nasty temper. His blunt words surprise her because “she had never heard the truth about herself” and it makes her start to question her appearance and attitude (40). Even though this kind of thinking eventually leads her to change in a positive way, it is also troubling that she is considered ugly just because she does not possess the traditional qualities of feminine beauty.

The relationship between Mary and Colin is also an important aspect of the problematic representation of gender and childhood in the novel. Similarities between the two children are highlighted, and in this sense, Colin can be seen as Mary’s “double.” When they first meet they are not sure if the other is real or a ghost. It turns out that both are very much alike; they each suffer from neglect and isolation and initially they are both presented as weak. Mary and Colin undergo a change that allows them to grow stronger and become more accepted.

As Mary learns to break free from the trap of isolation she is eventually able to help Colin do the same. Foster and Simmons suggest that the novel at least temporarily challenges stereotypes of gender and class through Mary and Colin’s alliance against the adults (182). Again, in an attempt to reject their positions in society, they try to speak the Yorkshire dialect of the servants, and they also defy the authority of Mrs. Medlock and the doctor by ignoring their insistence that Colin is too ill to go outside. In the children’s sphere, hierarchy breaks down. Mary starts to get along with Ben Weatherstaff and Martha, and she develops a deep relationship with Dickon, all of whom belong to a lower class.

Gender roles break down also as the two main male characters, Colin and Dickon, show some feminine qualities. Colin is initially described as frail and delicate; his supposed illness can be compared to common female maladies of that era such as hysteria (Foster and Simmons 184). He has to be socialized and transformed in order to fit into the conventional male role that he takes on at the end of the novel. In the garden he becomes physically strong and by the end of the novel he is able to beat Mary and Dickon in a race. He also grows intellectually when he escapes the confinement of his sick room. In the garden Colin practices his skills at lecturing. He enjoys doing this because when he grows up he plans to “make great scientific discoveries” which he “shall be obliged to lecture about” (276). When his father returns, Colin walks back to the house as a young man and the future master of the manor. He is no longer the weak and sickly child that he was at

the beginning of the story. Similarly, Dickon possesses positive female qualities passed down from his mother. The nurturing maternal values of Mrs. Sowerby are carried on through her son Dickon when he is depicted as protecting and caring for animals, as well as mentoring Mary and Colin. In the same way that a child flourishes under the guidance of a kind and gentle mother, they respond to his influence positively and this is a significant factor in their growth.

The garden itself also offers a space where class and gender hierarchies are discarded. It is set apart from the patriarchal world of the manor. In the garden Mary is liberated and reawakened. Within the garden, Dickon provides the protective, nurturing qualities that play into the “magic” of the place. He kindles Mary’s dormant femininity and she in turn acts as a civilizing force on Colin. The final scene of the novel is troubling though because the garden and Mary seem to lose some of their power, and Colin leaves the garden to go back to the manor with his father. As Foster and Simmons indicate, the feminine is absent from this scene, which goes against the blurring of female and male boundaries that has been explored throughout the rest of the book (189).

Dickon, the representative of the lower class, is also missing from the final scene, resulting in an apparent return to social hierarchy and gender divisions, which is perplexing. This conflict can be viewed as a return to the conventional model of the feminine; however, the significance of the main action of the story, which exalts the freedom and creativity of the female, cannot be ignored when examining the possible underlying message of the novel. While some argue that female power is ultimately unresolved at the end of the novel, I believe that Mary’s search for power itself is more significant than the possible problem of the ending.

Mary’s journey and growth throughout the novel is not weakened by her lack of prominence at the end. The significant part of the story is the process of her transformation. When she arrives at Misselthwaite Manor as an orphan she seems to be extremely powerless, but Mary’s lack of parents can actually be seen as an opportunity for independence. Her narrative is part of the orphan story convention popular and prevalent in nineteenth and early twentieth century children’s literature. Mary’s unusual upbringing in India where she was ignored by her parents and taken care of by servants equips her with the ability to survive in the lonely environment of the manor. It never occurs to her that she might need permission to wander around the house and the gardens, so this does not impede her exploration and eventual discovery of the secret garden and Colin.

Mary acquires power because of her lack of adult guidance, but she has to adjust her use of that power in her newly forming relationships at the manor. In India she had power over her servants and she viewed them as

“obsequious and servile”; she is puzzled at Martha’s cheerful chatter because the servants in India “did not presume to talk to their masters as if they were their equals” (25). Mary finds herself in a different situation with the English servant Martha. She quickly learns that although Martha is of a lower class, she must still be treated with respect. Mary has to find a way to implement her power without oppressing others. This leads her to take on a maternal source of power instead. In the early parts of the story, she uses her power to create change in the garden and then later she functions as a more supportive, maternal force in the recovery of Colin (Griswold 207). By having Mary mother her male “double” Colin, she is aligned with the other sources of female power: Mrs. Sowerby, Colin’s dead mother, and the garden itself.

This concept of mothering is an important characteristic of the challenge to patriarchy in the novel. As Bixler describes, Mrs. Sowerby is a nurturing “Earth Mother” figure to Mary and Colin and she looks after them as if they were her own children (99). Even though she does not have very much money, she buys Mary the skipping-rope and she sends both the children milk and bread to help them grow healthy. She also nurtures them emotionally by evoking the spirit of Colin’s dead mother during her visit with the children. When Colin asks Mrs. Sowerby if she believes in magic, she responds by telling him that his mother’s spirit is present in the garden. She also helps reunite the boy with his father by sending a letter asking Mr. Craven to return from abroad. The letter from Mrs. Sowerby, along with the dream that his wife was calling him, are the two crucial elements that drive the reconciliation between Mr. Craven and his son when he returns to Misselthwaite Manor.

Despite some of the troubling aspects of the novel, it does ultimately challenge patriarchal values, although sometimes more subtly than one might like. Mary might not be as outgoing and assertive as feisty Merida from *Brave*, but Mary does search for and gain power through her experience with the garden. She is not merely a passive girl that is ruled by the adults around her. As a girl on the brink of young womanhood, she is developing a voice for herself and actively participating in the world around her. Even though the time period and culture in which Mary lives only allow her to have partial or temporary authority, she still uses that power to grow and develop as an individual. Significantly, Mary’s search is just as important as the outcome. Although the novel ends with a focus on the restoration of the father-son relationship and Mary is not foregrounded, she is also not silenced. Mary is important as a character who is setting the stage for future female fictional characters who are able to be powerful in less subtle ways. *The Secret Garden* confronts traditional patriarchy through its function as a “hybrid” text that changes the way the female and the child were stereotypically portrayed in girls’ literature.

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HEART OF DARKNESS: PIERCING THE SILENCE

Abstract

‘Dead silence’ can resonate with more meaning than the spoken word, the absence of oral discourse signaling the presence of an unsettling subject, as Edward Said commented in *Culture and Imperialism*. *Heart of Darkness* pierces this silence through its assessment of Victorian society’s corrosive capitalist core. The novella’s symbolism and collapse of binaries anticipates modernism, and these techniques allow Conrad to censure white men, both those with real and petty power; and white women, who are depicted as colonialism’s passive or active enablers. This portrayal ultimately condemns the characters’ brutality even as it expresses cynicism about humanity’s potential for compassion.

Occasionally, within a literary work, conversational “dead silence” resonates with more meaning than the spoken word, the very absence of oral discourse signaling the presence of a socially unsettling subject. So suggests Edward Said in evaluating an episode in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* for *Culture and Imperialism*, his seminal book on postcolonial literary theory. While the characters in Austen’s novel readily banter on a variety of trivial topics, the heroine Fanny Price meets “dead silence” when she queries her uncle about the slave trade. Commenting on this incident, Said writes that Austen’s sensibility was insufficiently attuned to this controversial issue in 1814, when *Mansfield Park* was published, but “[i]n time there would no longer be a dead silence when slavery was spoken of, and the subject became central in a new understanding of what Europe was” (96).

By the late nineteenth century, writers like Joseph Conrad recognized that the virtual enslavement of Africans in the guise of colonization was a crucial concern for those seeking to genuinely comprehend the underlying bases of society in Victorian England and Belle Époque-era Continental Europe. Unlike Matthew Arnold, whose 1869 work *Culture and Anarchy*

extols canonical Western art and literature as a means for human perfectability and the antidote to anarchy (148), Conrad, in his novella *Heart of Darkness*, suggests that the façade of Western artistic achievements merely cloaks Western imperialist aims, or, in Said's terms, that culture and imperialism are inextricably and deleteriously intertwined. *Blackwood's Magazine* first published Conrad's text in 1899, near the apex of European colonialism, which for Conrad seemingly coincided with the European people's pinnacle of moral depravity. His late Victorian work was lauded by literary critics near the turn of the century (Garnett 606, James 347–348), despite its disturbing assertion about humanity's boundless capacity for evil, a tendency manifested by European hegemonies through their oppression of colonized peoples.

By 1975, when Nigerian author Chinua Achebe delivered his landmark address "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," one University of Massachusetts professor emeritus claimed that the novella was the country's most widely taught text (Zasky). The rise of postcolonial literary theory, pioneered by Said's writings, has tempered contemporary praise of *Heart of Darkness*, but its critique of Victorian society's commercial foundations¹ within the period itself remains perceptive. To explore why, this essay will first present a brief historical overview of European colonialism in Africa, particularly the Congo Free State, and discuss Conrad's expeditions within the colony in 1890. This context significantly informs *Heart of Darkness*, whose compelling assessment of nineteenth century English society's corrosive capitalist core arises from the work's use of universalization and symbolism, along with its innovative collapse of binaries in a fashion that anticipates modernism. These techniques allow Conrad to censure all levels of Victorian society through his text: white men, both those with real and petty power; and white women, who are depicted as colonialism's passive or active enablers. This portrayal ultimately condemns the characters for their brutality towards fellow humans even as it expresses cynicism about humanity's potential for compassionate behavior.

European intervention in Africa dates to the early fifteenth century, when the Portuguese captured Ceuta (a city now disputably in Morocco), but what became known as the "scramble for Africa" intensified in the nineteenth century (Christopher 1, 13) with the burgeoning Industrial Revolution, which required raw materials to feed factories in colonizing countries. Britain's participation in New Imperialism within Africa commenced with its invasion of the Cape region of modern South Africa in 1795 (Baranov 84), and other European hegemonies, including France, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Austria-Hungary, the Netherlands, Russia, and Sweden-Norway, advanced rivaling claims in Africa until 1885. That year, those colonial powers, along with the enfeebled Ottoman Empire, formally

partitioned the continent at the Berlin (or “Congo”) Conference, with the conferees agreeing to operate within prescribed “spheres of influence” (Chamberlain 124–125). European maps of Africa reflected these rapid shifts in territorial demarcation from the century’s inception until its waning years; moreover, the most expansive “blank space” (71) Marlow recalls as residing at Africa’s heart—the Congo River Basin—had become *terra cognita* following Henry Morton Stanley’s explorations in the mid-1870s (Chamberlain 26). The continent itself could be designated *terra* European by the time *Heart of Darkness* was published in book form in 1902; only Ethiopia and Liberia remained free from European control (Sullivan 156). The novella depicts African colonization as implicating vast swaths of Europe by tracing Marlow’s journey to the Congo’s core through figures and entities from several European countries. Marlow, an Englishman (131), departs from Europe for the region on a French steamer (78) and, upon arriving at the Congo River’s mouth, continues his journey inland with a Swedish captain (80). He presumably pilots a steamship on behalf of a Belgian trading company, replacing a murdered Danish captain (72).

Marlow’s predecessor Fresleven was felled when the brutality he inflicted on African natives redounded to him (72–73); in actuality, incessant cycles of retributive violence punctuated lives in the Congo Free State after King Léopold II of Belgium began ruling the region as his personal fiefdom in 1885. Earlier, in 1878, Léopold had founded the International Congo Society, a capitalist enterprise whose foreign investors he covertly bought out to pursue his imperialist visions, meanwhile maintaining the International African Association as a philanthropic front with a close nexus to the economic organization (Wesseling and Pomerand 89); in the text, the fictitious—but in a sense realistically named—International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs appears as the Association’s analogue. Kurtz pens an eloquent report for the Society (127), but despite his altruistic representations on its behalf, Kurtz, a commercial Frankenstein with an insatiable desire for ivory (137), scribbles in his report’s lurid pragmatic postscript: “Exterminate all the brutes!” (128). Kurtz executes his own macabre advice, decorating his property’s perimeter with decapitated heads (137); similarly, Leon Rom, a Matadi district commissioner and subsequent head of the *Force Publique*, kept severed African heads in his flower bed (Cowie 152). Léopold’s lackeys, including Rom, infamously implemented his megalomaniacal orders; they imposed stringent rubber and ivory quotas on native laborers (Hochschild 229–230), and villagers who failed to meet the insufferable standards for rubber collection suffered dismemberment, with hands becoming a form of currency amassed by white officers and used to tabulate bonuses (Forbath 374). When one Congolese village protested, white soldiers conducted a raid in which junior officers were, according to

a contemporaneous account, ordered “to cut off the heads of the men and hang them on the village palisades ... and to hang the women and the children on the palisade in the form of a cross” (Bourne 253).

It was into this royally-sanctioned inferno that Conrad descended in 1890 after obtaining an appointment to captain a steamship through his aunt, much like his ostensible alter ego Marlow in the text (Sherry 11). Conrad traveled painstakingly from Bordeaux, France to Matadi in the Congo, then from that district to Kinchassa (two hundred miles, as does Marlow (80)), and, finally, to Stanley Falls, the “heart of darkness” (Sherry 14). Kurtz, who Marlow pursues into the Congo’s interior, is speculated to be modeled after Leon Rom (Firchow 131), or Georges Antoine Klein (Klein translates as “small” and Kurtz means “short”), a Belgian ivory trader aboard Conrad’s steamship traveling upriver (Oates 4). As a result of witnessing brutalities on his voyage inland and coping with near-death bouts of dysentery and fever, Conrad endured life-long physical debilitation and depression, retiring from a seafaring life to become a writer, one whose unremittingly bleak view of human nature developed from his ordeal in the Congo (Oates 6). He would later describe the place as one where he discovered the “vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and human exploration” (Sherry 14).

Yet Conrad’s genius, evidenced in *Heart of Darkness*’s use of universalization and symbolism, arises from his ability to express how his profoundly personal experiences provide philosophical and psychological insights about human proclivities. Marlow apparently endorses this idea of the raconteur’s responsibility; he articulates an intent not to bother his listeners with what personally happened to him during his expedition to the Congo (70). Conrad universalizes the text by deliberately neglecting to name the places depicted within it; while the paper’s foregoing discussion has detailed the work’s historical context at measured length, *Heart of Darkness* itself contains no references to particular locales. Marlow finalizes his appointment as a steamship captain for an unnamed company in a “sepulchral city” (155), and the Congo Free State and Congo River are never explicitly mentioned, though Conrad leaves sufficient clues for the perceptive reader to discern where the novella’s climactic events transpire. By not overtly situating these incidents in a circumscribed geographic area, Conrad enables the reader to imagine them occurring in any African colony, one overseen by Britain or another European hegemon. The general anonymity of the characters reinforces this expansive interpretation; while Marlow and Kurtz are named, most of the text’s other characters are designated by their occupations—for example, the “clerk” (75) and the “chief accountant” (84) – indicating how colonialism reduces even white men, its purported beneficiaries, to mere functionaries and symbols of the moral

malaise afflicting Western European society. Symbolism most acutely pervades the novella's descriptions of the Congo's heart as a ravaged corporeal space outwardly embodying the degraded state of mind of its inhabitants—most notably the white ones.

Heart of Darkness consigns humanity to perpetual wretchedness by invoking archetypal dichotomies like good versus evil, civilization versus savagery, light versus dark, order versus chaos, and present versus past and exposing each binary's affirmative side as a sham. All binaries in the text derive from the classic good versus evil distinction, and Marlow begins his narrative with an admonitory self-examination, contemplating how the Romans who conquered Britain nineteen hundred years ago, when the island was a dark, savage wilderness (68-69), had a "fascination of the abomination" (69) resembling that of their nineteenth century descendants—Europeans undertaking "fantastic invasions" (138), Marlow's ironic yet accurate description of colonial forays. Modern evil nonetheless seems qualitatively different to Marlow, who exclaims: "I've seen the devil of violence, and the devil of greed, and the devil of hot desire; but, by all the starts! These were strong, lusty, red-eyed devils, that swayed and drove men—men, I tell you. ... [I]n the blinding sunshine of that land I would become acquainted with a flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly" (82). In the Congo's depths, Marlow almost yearns for the evil of yore, whose perpetrators harbored comprehensible motives, and even an "uncomplicated" savage sight like the staked heads surrounding Kurtz's residence perturbs him less than the "lightless region of subtle horrors" he must navigate through (138–139). Marlow surmises that only those rare humans utterly divorced from modern life—fools too obtuse to know when darkness is assaulting them and sublime individuals desensitized to all but heavenly sights and sounds—can remain impervious to the near-omnipotent forces of evil (126–127). Typical mortals are susceptible to being readily seduced by Kurtz-like demagogues who apply "common everyday words" to pernicious ends (149). Kurtz's single-minded determination to hoard ivory for the Company precipitates his downfall (137–138), and his character's exploits prefigure Hannah Arendt's theory about the "banality of evil," that perpetrators of appalling crimes may not initially be deranged fanatics, but ordinary citizens whose overzealous fidelity to some bureaucratic enterprise ineluctably saps them of regard for the moral consequences of their actions (287).

The amorphousness of contemporary evil terrifies Marlow, and while he never clearly elucidates what actuates the villains of his day, the text suggests that the very technological improvements heralded as indicators of progress perversely embolden humans to act on their basest primeval inclinations when afforded an opportunity. Marlow distinguishes the Romans who

vanquished British Isle natives from nineteenth century Britons based on the latter's "efficiency" (69), the touchstone capitalist value that equips them with the means to commit carnage on a scale inconceivable to their ancestors. Moreover, the pretext of civilization justifies their actions (70), serving as a redemptive idea in the estimation of colonial apologists like Rudyard Kipling, whose influential poem *The White Man's Burden* was published in 1899, the same year as *Heart of Darkness* (Kipling 12). Jingoistic texts like Kipling's encouraged colonizers to smugly congratulate themselves for installing railways and conveying steamships to Africa while using these innovations primarily as tools for political and economic aggrandizement instead of indigenous improvement. But the "dead carcass" of an overturned, undersized railway car (81) Marlow spies in the Congo underscores the essential futility of these efforts, and the text often alludes to colonialism's ephemerality, describing progress, the ideological basis for colonialism, as a "dust bin" (128), with the "wild" merely "waiting patiently for the passing away of this fantastic invasion" (91). The Congo Free State's decrepit condition, with the International African Association endeavoring to conceal brutality through the maintenance of charitable pretenses, substantiates Marlow's grim analysis of humanity's voracious appetite for evil; during Léopold's dictatorship from 1885-1908, the Congolese population dropped by half, to about eight million (Kakutani), indelibly scarring the "wild" so that liberation in 1960 (Helmreich 231) was accompanied by internal turmoil that has persisted into the present century (Turner 200–208). *Heart of Darkness* thus reveals that the "good," and attributes associated with the quality, including civilization, light, order, and the progressive present, are inventions, a position that aligns the novella more with modernist literature than canonical Victorian works.

Conrad applies these philosophical concepts to indict nineteenth century European society, particularly Victorians whose unparalleled, dazzling commercial prosperity masked inner moral decay, in his opinion. *Heart of Darkness* exempts no social sector from culpability for colonialism's adverse aftereffects; upper echelon Victorian society's affluence was predicated on appropriating raw materials from abroad, and the laboring classes sustained the factories that transformed these materials into finished products sold in both the mother country and her foreign satellites. While laissez-faire capitalism's inhumane excesses had been mitigated somewhat within Britain since Dickens composed *Hard Times* mid-century, many flourishing entrepreneurs apparently felt no ethical compunction in abusing African natives even more harshly than they had white children until laws restrained them from doing so. The Company's callous accountant thus makes "correct entries of perfectly correct transactions" fifty feet beneath the doorstep from which Marlow sees a "grove of death" occupied by overworked native

laborers (86), and an aspiring brickmaker describes how Kurtz, a “universal genius,” would have truly flourished if “adequate tools–intelligent men” were available (98), reflecting an extreme utilitarian view of humans’ function in the world.

A society that sanctions such demoralizing perceptions of its members corrodes the souls of those at its acme, the white men who blindly pursue wealth, both the overseers and the overseen, and the women who accept the fictional ideological explanations the men proffer for their overseas coups. Kurtz, the inner station chief whose mother was half-English and whom all Europe contributed to making (127), is gifted with a panoply of civilized qualities, as he paints (94), recites and pens poetry (145), plays music (157), and writes tracts (157). He brings civilizing intentions to the Congo, an attribute that exalts him in the eyes of his beloved Intended. She remains unwaveringly convinced of his rectitude, lamenting his loss to the world while glorifying his words and example (162–163), and his aborted engagement to her symbolizes what he terms “right motives” (152) – “humanizing, improving, instructing” (104) –gone awry because of his ivory fixation; his single-minded pursuit of some essential but elusive “whiteness” without blackens his soul within. Marlow describes Kurtz, who leaves “not a single tusk ... above or below ground in the whole country” (125), as literally becoming his ivory, “an animated image of death carved out of old ivory” (140) whose head resembles an “ivory ball” (125). For the Company, though, Kurtz’s sole objectionable quality is his use of unsound methods (142–143) to extract ivory, not his moral infamy, and Marlow’s haunting by Kurtz’s ghost at the Intended’s pristine home in the “sepulchral city” suggests the illusoriness of civilization and the immense personal sacrifices needed to maintain its artifice, what Kurtz apparently realizes on his deathbed when he whispers “The horror! The horror!” (154). His words refer not just to the brutality he inflicted on African natives, but also to the bestial condition of other white men who are willing to hang their own to reap additional ivory profits (104). The novella also depicts white women as colonialism’s cheerleaders at home, with some possessing at least partial knowledge of its atrocities, such as two female clerks “guarding the door of Darkness, knitting black wool as for a warm pall, one introducing, introducing continuously to the unknown” (75) and a secretary who gazes upon Marlow with “desolation and sympathy” while he signs his employment contract with the Company (74). Marlow’s aunt and the Intended, representative of the majority of white European women at the time, are more passive enablers, having Kipling-esque visions of “weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways” (77), to quote the aunt. Men, including Marlow, perpetuate the women’s fantasies about colonialism’s nobility; he ultimately informs the Intended that “[t]he last words he pronounced was – your name” (164), discerning that the truth

would destroy her “beautiful world,” an Elysium that keeps the world of men like Marlow from further degenerating (125).

While, like an Elysium, *Heart of Darkness* has imaginary characteristics, it truly is, in Conrad’s words, “experience ... pushed a little (and only very little) beyond the actual facts of the case” (Hochschild 143), presenting a nuanced critique of nineteenth-century European society. The text depicts Kurtz, the embodiment of European virtues, as “hollow at the core” (138), and the only certainty that emerges from its murkiness, its description of Marlow’s “inconclusive experiences” (70), is a belief in the ineradicable nature of evil. The book is thus more disturbingly descriptive than prescriptive, but its candor is commendable, as evidenced in Marlow’s acknowledgement that “conquest of the earth ... mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves,” which “is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only” (70), an idea the text exposes as a fabricated construct to conceal in some sense a more trivial, yet sinister, pecuniary objective, a backbreaking “devotion to efficiency” (69). In articulating the unspoken, Conrad’s fin-de-siècle novella pierced *Mansfield Park*’s “dead silence” about the centrality of colonial subjugation to Victorian society and, in doing so, induced its readers to ponder the morality of their silence amidst surface splendors obtained at an excruciating human cost.

NOTES

¹ And European society’s generally, though this essay will primarily discuss the narrower criticism in light of the class’s focus.

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PARODIC AND POST-CLASSIC, BRITISH DECADENT AESTHETICISM RE-APPROACHED

Abstract

Considering the fact that postmodernism may, from a certain viewpoint, be called “neo-Decadence” and Oscar Wilde a “pre-postmodernist,” this essay approaches the affinity between Decadence and postmodernism in terms of their shared *post-classical* and parodist condition. Indicating the insufficiency of the romantic/classicist model, and taking as the point of departure Symons’s description of Decadence as the disfiguring of the “classic,” it looks at Decadent subversions through Linda Hutcheon’s twofold parodist paradigm. It shows how Decadence, which is doubly parodist – in the stylistic sense (as in Max Beerbohm) and in social sense (as in Wilde) – subverts its classical heritage, thus, anticipating postmodernist strategies.

“Jameson’s argument characterizes postmodernism as neo-Decadence. Reversing this equation, it is perhaps equally plausible to describe Wildean ‘decadence’ as pre-postmodern ...”

Andreas Höfele

Postmodernism’s ethics of taste ... seems to be (at least as we shall see in Rorty’s version) largely a rehash of fin de siècle aestheticism ...”

Richard Shusterman

An attempt to authoritatively classify British Decadence would be naivety, or daring. On the scale from neo-romantic to neo-classicist, British Decadence is difficult to place. The romantic view of Decadence – allowing critics to accommodate Walter Pater’s, Oscar Wilde’s, Algernon Swinburne’s, and the Pre-Raphaelites’ engagement with Romantic literature – was famously legitimized by Yeats’s admission: “We were the last romantics” (33). However, a consistently romantic outlook, rather problematically, excludes

the works of Yeats's contemporaries – aesthetes, Arthur O'Shaughnessy and Austin Dobson; satirists, William Henley and G. S. Street; parodists, Beardsley and Beerbohm, as well as other Decadent Rhymers, Richard le Galienne and Arthur Symons – all of whom would invoke the urbane spirit of the Augustan age.¹ Significantly, the purist classification into the neo-classicist and neo-romantic was a source of discontent expressed by the most illustrious representatives of British Decadence and by its early critics, including Pater, Wilde, and Holbrook Jackson.² It was voiced once again, when modernism was teetering into postmodernity, with Irving H. Buchen's stating that Decadence merited the label of "the self-begotten or bastard child of both Classicism and Romanticism" (19). Buchen's graphic description of Decadence puts emphasis on its synthesizing quality; but it introduces yet another significant metaphor: that of Decadence as progeny. In that, Buchen seems to have recaptured the direction of Symons' definition of Decadence, formulated in "The Decadent Movement in Literature," as that which is coming after: an amalgamation of the classicist and romantic – but also a mannerist distortion of the "classic." In the often-quoted definition Symons says: "If what we call *the classic* is indeed the supreme art – those qualities of perfect simplicity, perfect sanity, perfect proposition, the supreme qualities – then, this representative literature of today, interesting, beautiful, novel as it is, is really a new and beautiful and interesting disease" (859; my italics). He understands "classic" as the attribute of art characterized by permanence and universality.³ Decadent, in turn, appears to be an attribute of a latecomer; accordingly, Decadent art is neither neo-romantic, nor neo-classicist, but rather *post-classic*. As Symons has indicated, it is a creative distortion of the classic, a repetition involving a variation; and, as Symons has left for us to infer, it is a process depending on the strategies typical of parody.

1. Stylistic parody: Max Beerbohm's dialogue with forms

The procedures of Decadent parodies anticipate the parodist tactics of postmodernism.⁴ On the force of Hutcheon's theory, parody is a way of coming to terms with the daunting legacy of the inherited aesthetic and political forms. Hutcheon states that parody is a never-ending opportunity for contemporary artists, allowing them to "refunction those forms to their own needs" (*A Theory of Parody* 4). Significantly, in her *Poetics of Postmodernism*, by employing examples from postmodernist architecture, Hutcheon indicates that postmodernist parody has a "deferential," rather than destructive, nature. In her words, it is a "loving, if ironic, refunctioning" of the past (34). Within the realm of Decadent literature, and in relation to

Wilde, the centrality of “deferential” parody and its restorative potential is stressed by Andreas Höfele who, similarly to Hutcheon, sees parody as a response “to history, to a heightened awareness of both the burden and the offering of the past” (152). In the context of French Decadence, referring to Jules Laforgue, Michelle Hanoosh explains that, by parodying conventions and particular works, a Decadent generates new forms which are of the same standing as the original ones. In fact, the idea of the original is blurred, and the sense of hierarchy is lost since *paroidia*, in Greek meaning antiphon, is “something sung in imitation but with a difference” (11), with *para* invoking the idea of a parity, or parallelism, not a ladder of authority.

In Decadence parody was a way leading out of the impasse created by the amassing of the finished, or classical, forms.⁵ As poignantly put by John Gordon, “where there is little prospect for original utterance ... the art of parody is ... a logical consequence” (51). Critics agree that Decadence was weighed down with the artistic bounty inherited from the long nineteenth century. In an evocative allegory, Silke Maria Weineck describes Decadence as an epoch suffering from the Laios complex, a father-figure tenaciously holding onto his legacy, coping with a plight opposite to that which plagued Oedipus. Its problem is “the surplusage of (inherited) *forms*” impossible to accommodate (40) – a predicament noted, independently, by Max Nordau, as a “dilemma of accumulation,” and by Nietzsche, who saw the decadent as “buried under the accumulating debris of all times” (qtd. in Weineck 41, 43). Notably, British Decadent Aestheticism was all the more burdened with tradition since, if compared with French Aestheticism and Decadence, it was much belated. Within a short span of a decade – or perhaps within just the first five years of the 1890s, the borderline being drawn by Wilde’s trial – British literature produced works which simultaneously promoted and parodied Decadent sensibility, just as the emblematic *Picture of Dorian Gray* was both a breviary and a parody of Decadence.⁶

The irreducible ambivalence of Decadent parodies – and an anticipation of the post-modernist dialogue of forms – is clearly demonstrable in Max Beerbohm. In “Diminuendo,” for instance, Beerbohm both targets and exploits Walter Pater’s “new euphuism” as a literary style killing all spontaneity of expression. In the first lines of his essay, tongue in cheek, Beerbohm confesses:

I was angry that [Pater] should treat English as a dead language, bored by that sedulous ritual wherewith he laid out every sentence as in a shroud – hanging, like a widower, long over its marmoreal beauty or ever he could lay it at length in his book, its sepulchre. (163–164)

But this mockery is also a perfect imitation, a repetition “with a difference,” down to Pater’s habit of multiplying metaphors (*his book, his*

sepulcher), excessive formality (*marmoreal* rather than marble) and, as in the proleptic reference, the tendency to end long descriptive phrases with just one morbid word (*sepulcher*). On the same playful note, in the biblically solemn and religiously monotonous recitation of the accomplishments of the Prince of Wales, “Diminuendo” provides a parallel to Pater’s purple passage on Mona Lisa, juxtaposing the lengthy chant about the “She” who “is older than the rocks” (*Renaissance* 80) with the mantra focused on the “He” who “has hunted elephants”:

He has hunted elephants through the jungles of India, boar through the forests of Austria, pigs over the plains of Massachusetts ... He has marched the Grenadiers to chapel through the white streets of Windsor. He has ridden through Moscow, in strange apparel, to kiss the catafalque of more than one Tzar...⁷

“Diminuendo” also includes a comical response to Pater’s appeal to live passionately for the sake of the moment: a reply to Pater’s reminder that a “counted number of *pulses* only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life” (*Renaissance* 152; my italics.). In an imitation of Pater’s style, and with a comical reassurance, Beerbohm responds to Pater by setting for himself the task of exploring life through the morning paper: “Humanity will range itself in the columns of my morning paper. No *pulse* of life will escape me (“Diminuendo” 159; my italics).

The same parodist method, extensively described by scholars,⁸ is used in “A Defence of Cosmetics,” where Beerbohm employs the style of Victorian sages (Ruskin and Carlyle; but also of the American sage, Thoreau) to hail the fact that the “Victorian era comes to its end” (2), but also in order to mock Decadent preciousness in appearance. By using inflated style for a trivial purpose, he also burlesques the means (the language), not only the target (cosmetics), of his parody. Effectively, the “deferential” parodist parallelism supersedes his essay’s satiric aim.⁹ It must be said that Beerbohm’s essay was misread by his contemporaries. A Victorian response to “A Defence of Cosmetics,” as indignant as it is unwarranted, in itself is a many-tiered parody. Erroneously taking at face value Beerbohm’s support of make-up, as S. N. Behrman indicates, *Punch* reacted to his essay with a spoof on cosmetics – an anonymous “Ars Cosmetica,” a parody of Isaac Watts’ poem “Against Idleness and Mischief,” written in 1715, which, in 1867, had been parodied by Lewis Carroll as “How doth the little crocodile” (qtd. in Landow). A long chain of parodies ensues. By turning their style into a travesty, Beerbohm parodied the Victorian sages, whose style he apparently used to parody the Decadents; but his parody was misread, and parodied by *Punch* with a spoof which, in itself, was a parody of Isaac Watts’s religious verse. The result is one parody opening onto another in a multiplication of *parallel* lines. Trying to defend himself in a letter included

in the second volume of *The Yellow Book* – by apparently striving to explain the true target of his burlesque – Beerbohm confuses his readers even more. He states that his aim was to parody the style of Decadent literature (not of the sages): “paradox and marivaudage, lassitude, a love of horror and all unusual things, a love of argot and archaism” (284). Cosmetics aside, now Beerbohm claims that he hits the Decadent style, not the hilariously distorted style of Victorian sages, or – more challengingly – suggests that the Victorian and the Decadent, earnestness and perverseness – or the classic and its parodic distortion – run parallel. He shows that the target is ever-shifting, or perhaps, that there is no target to parody, only a formal opportunity.

2. Social parody and the disappearance of the original: Oscar Wilde’s knee-breeches

For social parody, no figure was a more tempting subject than that of Wilde, who more than taunted his parodists.¹⁰ In fact, “an easy, if not eager target” (King), Wilde rose to fame by teasing his American public. The story of Wilde’s choice of the knee-breeches for his American tour – duly mocked by Beerbohm¹¹ – may seem as trivial as it is illuminating by bringing forth the social dimension of parody, stressed by Hutcheon in her *Politics of Postmodernism*. To appreciate the parodic force of Wilde’s frivolous apparel one should recall that, according to Hutcheon, parody also subverts social, political and ideological practices.¹² Hutcheon opposes Frederic Jameson’s (classicist) view of parody, which legitimizes only the parody of the “unique styles” and relegates other forms of repetition to the category of “‘pastiche’ or empty parody.”¹³ To Hutcheon, postmodernist parody performs a liberating role by resisting any “totalizing model,” any “closure” (*The Politics* 94–95, 99). (In that, it differs from modernist parody which was inclined in the direction of classicism.)¹⁴ The new wine bursting the old wineskins, parody shows that forms and formations – artistic and ideological – live longer than the structures of power and sensibility which they served and by which they had been sustained.

In the light of postmodernist theory of social/political parody, Wilde is the parodist par-excellence. Boldly confronting American audiences with his lectures on Aestheticism, and affronting them with his notorious velvet knee-breeches, the British eccentric assumed the role which one might be tempted to term as that of an *ex-centric*¹⁵: he would de-center authority from the center point, destabilize both the aestheticist and philistine discourses from within.

Wilde toured the United States, introducing Americans to the Aesthetic movement which, at the same time, was being mocked by W. S. Gilbert and

Arthur Sullivan's comical opera *Patience, or Bunthorne's Bride*. A box-office success in London in the spring of 1881, *Patience* repeated its success in New York in Autumn the same year. The opera features two aesthetes, Reginald Bunthorne and Archibald Grosvenor, both modeled on Wilde's mannerisms. A month after the opera arrived in New York, its producer, Richard D'Oyly Carte, invited Wilde-the-arch-aesthete to come to America and give readings on Aestheticism. Displaying great business acumen, D'Oyly Carte used Wilde as a "curtain raiser" (Pine 35). While Wilde's lectures furnished ideas, the opera would provide their ludicrous realizations. The motive was unapologetically economic: parallel profits, in which Wilde had his share, were drawn from both the opera *tournee* and the lecture tour.

Wilde apparently revelled in the ambivalence of the whole enterprise. Not only did he expound on Aestheticism but he also illustrated its tenets by his sartorial eccentricity. While delivering lectures, he would be donning the velvet knee-breeches, with which he alluded to Bunthorne's aesthetic dress. He wore them on the day of his first lecture, 9 January 1882 (156–157).¹⁶ He also used them for self-promotion. Soon after his arrival in New York, he was photographed in his knee-breeches by celebrity photographer Napoleon Sarony. The breeches turned into his trademark. They also became an issue. Ellmann recounts the occasions on which they caused more than a stir. The sight of them outraged Wilde's co-lecturer, Archibald Forbes, the man who would have a gentleman pride himself on his war medals rather than on velvety garments (166–167). Henry James, as Ellmann surmises, was "revolted" by the breeches Wilde wore on the occasion of the party they both attended in Washington (170). Finally, they provoked Boston students into blatant mockery. But Wilde was quicker with his ironic response than they with their scorn, so that the young men seated in the first two rows and wearing the offending breeches, each of them holding a sunflower, were greeted by the conventionally clad Wilde who, having condescendingly pronounced the boys "sincere," nevertheless expressed the wish to be "save[d] from [his] disciples" (173–174). Ultimately, it was left open to question whether Bunthorne's dress was modeled on Wilde's, or whether Wilde copied Bunthorne's dress. Significantly, the relationship between the two was that of postmodern parody as parallelism rather than of classicist parody as criticism.

While Wilde's American audiences were allowed to feel superior in making a connection between Wilde's and Bunthorne's dress, the knee-breeches, as Ellmann indicates, had one more significance of which Wilde's American public would be oblivious: they were part of the official dress of the Apollo Lodge at Oxford (157). Indeed, the picture which Sarony took of Wilde wearing the knee-breeches is currently displayed on the website of the Apollo as an example of how formally the officers of the Lodge should dress.

Given that Wilde was initiated into Oxford free-masonry in the year 1885, that is, three years after his return from America, the knee-breeches he donned in America were a sign of the allegiance that he was yet to make. They were a sign without any legitimate referent. Their status was that of an infinitely malleable sign (or an empty signifier, in the postmodernist idiom): a sign of free-masonry, illegitimately assumed at the time; an emblem of aesthetic rebellion; an index of aestheticist effeminacy, turned into a sign of solidarity with the mocked aesthete and, mischievously, as in the Boston experience, exposed as a sign of grotesque incomprehension of the spirit of aestheticism on the side of its mockers. In a simplified twofold scheme, Wilde's knee-breeches were a sign of the classic – Renaissance, exceedingly formal – attire and of the parodic, aestheticist excess. Or, perhaps, they were all of these at once: a sign of a rebellion against being framed by some totalizing view?

From Symons's point of view, they might have been seen as post-classic, but from the postmodernist perspective, they are also parodist and liberating: marking their owner's refusal to be pinned down, his escape from the nightmare which, some thirty years later, T. S. Eliot would describe as being contained within "a formulated phrase." The modernist reference allows for an introduction of a useful concluding contrast. If, as the examples of Beerbohm and Wilde show, to be a Decadent means to conduct a parodist play with classical forms – be it textual or sartorial – then to be doubly parodist, as in Hutcheon's twofold parodist model – in art and in life – means to be a post-classic Decadent and a harbinger of postmodernism. By way of a postscript, it may not be inapposite to note that postmodernism comes after the epoch which, as in Eliot's and T. E. Hulme's theories – and in contrast to Decadence – expressly allied itself with the classic. In that sense, as well, postmodernism is post-classic and, as Jameson would have it, neo-Decadent.

NOTES

¹ In Britain, the claim of Romantic allegiance is explained by John Stokes and critiqued by Graham Hough; in Poland, it was asserted by Maria Niemojowska. The view of European Decadence as romanticism gone morbid was established, in 1930, by Octavio Praz's *The Romantic Agony*. An alternative tradition – based on the distinction between decadence, decadentism, and decadent romanticism – was established by Walter Binni. See Drake 72–78. On the other hand, the neo-classicist spirit is stressed by Holbrook Jackson (91) and William Buckley (214).

² In the year 1876, Pater argued that Romanticism and Classicism were but two aspects "united in perfect art" (*Appreciations* 260); his disciple, Wilde, claimed that "[s]uch expressions as 'classical' and 'romantic' were [...] often apt to become the mere catchwords of schools"

(“The English Renaissance in Art”). In 1922, Jackson saw Decadents as “romantic in their antagonism to current forms, but ... classic in their insistence upon new” (57).

³ The idea of the classic as going beyond “the classic-romantic antithesis” (22) and implying permanence and universality is explained by Frank Kermode (15-45).

⁴ The context of postmodernist parody has been stressed in the interpretations of Wilde. Andreas Höfele classifies Wilde as a “pre-modernist” on account of his *Poems* (imitative of Romantic tradition), *The Critic as Artist* (parodically related to the Platonic model and Victorian sage style), *Canterville Ghost* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Martin Middeke calls Wilde “proto postmodern,” considering the significance Wilde’s biography had for Peter Ackroyd. John Gordon sees Wilde’s *Poems* as an anticipation of post-modernist pastiche. While Höfele’s, Middeke’s, and Gordon’s concerns are with Wilde’s literary works, the present essay focuses on the interaction between literature and social practice.

⁵ For the critical and creative potential of parody, see Riffaterre (on Lautréamont’s *Maldoror* as parodying and, thus, unmasking romantic clichés); Dowling 28–29 (Decadent “participating” parody as a mode of “self-transcendence”); Thornton 28 (Decadent self-parody as “self-preservation”); Buchen 22 (Decadent parody and self-parody in the service of “cosmic” satire). For the potential of parody in the postmodernist context, see Crapanzano 431–432 (on discourse structured as parody).

⁶ Cf., e.g., Höfele on the novel as “neither clearly parodic nor clearly non-parodic” (158).

⁷ For the complete passage, see “Diminuendo” 154–155.

⁸ See, e.g., Homay King, “Mocking the Victorian Sages: Beerbohm’s ‘A Defence of Cosmetics’”; Ariel Sabar, “Beerbohm’s ‘Defense of Cosmetics’”; Leni Zumas, “Beerbohm as Sage and Aesthete: Difficult Definitions.” *English* 137 (1992). *The Victorian Web*. 20 Dec. 2013 <<http://www.victorianweb.org>>.

⁹ An analogous process of parodist self-transcendence is apparent in Aubrey Beardsley’s *Venus and Tannhäuser*. The theme of Wagner’s opera is comically reduced to a theme of a quasi-pornographic prose piece, but only to be cast in the form of mock-heroic epic, so that Beardsley could, eventually, laugh at the reverse of sexual indulgence – the artistic over-refinement and dandy-esque preciousness. A satire on the Decadent obsession with sexuality turns into a parody on the myth of Decadent rampant lasciviousness (Dowling 29).

¹⁰ For the satires and parodies of Wilde, see, e.g., Ellmann 128–129, Goldfarb 369–371, Dowling 29–30. The most significant ones appeared in 1894, including Jocelyn Quilp’s *Baron Verdigris. A Romance of the Reversed Direction* (on cruel aestheticism espoused in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*); G. S. Street’s *The Autobiography of a Boy* and Robert Hichens’s *The Green Carnation* (both aimed at Wilde and Bosie). The latter was used against Wilde by the prosecution. However, ironically, as noted by Regenia Gagnier, before he went to trial, Wilde had advertised *The Green Carnation* (37–38).

¹¹ See Beerbohm, *Letters to Reggie Turner* 287.

¹² Hutcheon insistently underlines the social embeddedness of art (e.g., *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 25) and parody’s role in subverting social, ideological and political forms of representations (e.g., *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 34–35).

¹³ For Hutcheon’s polemic with Jameson, see, e.g., *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 27.

¹⁴ Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, e.g., was parodic in the modernist, that is, formalist sense, by employing literary and mythological motifs to evoke a sense of formal fragmentation, but simultaneously, to create a unified satiric effect, or a *closure* – a satire on the contemporary dissociation from myth.

¹⁵ Cf. Hutcheon, “Decentering the Postmodern: The Ex-centric,” *A Poetics of Post-modernism* (57–73).

¹⁶ References to Wilde’s American tour, unless otherwise noted, come from Ellmann’s *Oscar Wilde*.

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THE STRANGE CASE OF MR. HYDE: A VICTORIAN VILLAIN AND A VICTORIAN DETECTIVE REVISITED

Abstract

The paper discusses one of the latest revisions of Doctor Jekyll's dark side, Mr Hyde, as depicted in a graphic novel by Cole Haddon and M.S. Corley *The Strange Case of Mr. Hyde*. The text is a sequel to Stevenson's novella and sets his character in 1888 during Jack the Ripper's autumn of terror. What makes it stand out among other adaptations and appropriations is the combination of a Victorian and a modern villain – Edward Hyde and Hannibal Lecter, as well as giving voice to a Victorian police detective – a character that was ignored by the majority of nineteenth-century writers.

Victorian villains and monsters have never been better – they come back in all shapes and sizes, including that of protagonists. Judith Halberstam called monsters “meaning machines,” with those “of the nineteenth century metaphoris[ing] modern subjectivity as a balancing act between inside/outside, female/male, body/mind, native/foreign” – they “can represent gender, race, nationality, class, and sexuality in one body” (Walker 79, 83). Robert Louis Stevenson's Mr Hyde is one of such late-Victorian monsters. In Cole Haddon's and M. S. Corley's *The Strange Case of Mr. Hyde* (2011) he is joined by another infamous villain, Jack the Ripper, and a determined Scotland Yard detective ready to break a few rules while hunting for the serial killer. As is the case in the majority of neo-Victorian texts, this graphic novel gives voice to those who were denied it in the nineteenth century: to Hyde, but also to the policeman. Used to the great consulting detective created by Conan Doyle, we tend to forget that not only Scotland Yarders, but also other pre- and post-Holmesian detectives were usually presented as lacking in both skills and ingenuity. Haddon's text is not only another postmodern revision of Doctor Henry Jekyll's foul and dark side: it adapts

Stevenson's Hyde and H. G. Wells's Colonel Adye to meet modern audience's needs and expectations, very self-consciously incorporating numerous pop-cultural tropes and characters, and offering conscious readers more than only pure entertainment.

The idea to link Edward Hyde from Stevenson's novella (1886) with Jack the Ripper dates back to the 1888 murders. At the beginning of August 1888, two adaptations of Stevenson's story premiered on London stages: Thomas Russell Sullivan's at the Lyceum Theatre and Daniel Bandmann's at the Opera Comic Theatre (Danahay and Chisholm); on the last night of August, the body of Mary Ann Nichols, the Ripper's first canonical victim, was found. Throughout September, many journalists and reporters compared the killer to Jekyll's doppelgänger, as evidenced by quotes from the *Globe*: "One can almost imagine that Whitechapel is haunted by a demon of the type of Hyde, who goes about killing for the mere sake of slaughter," or the *Pall Mall Gazette*: "There certainly seems to be a tolerably realistic impersonification of Mr. Hyde at large in Whitechapel" (Smith 77). The press in general speculated that the killer might have been a mad doctor and stressed the contrast between the working class crime area and victims, and the presumed middle or upper-class offender – another theme present in Stevenson's novella, as Jekyll lives in a better-off area and Hyde takes rooms in Soho. If it was indeed a gentleman who committed the Whitechapel murders, it would mean that "contemporary criminological theory, which held that delinquents displayed visibly atavistic traits, was based on an illusion" (Ruddick 192). The parallels between the Ripper and Stevenson's character were further strengthened by the fact that Hyde's misdeeds and other probable crimes are not described, apart from the trampling of the girl witnessed by Enfield¹ and the murder of Sir Danvers Carew overseen by Jekyll's maid. What he was up to in the nocturnal "labyrinths of lamplighted city" (Stevenson 15) is left unsaid.

Among numerous cinematic adaptations of Stevenson's text there are two films which combine the story of the experimenting doctor with that of Jack the Ripper: *Dr Jekyll and Sister Hyde* (1971) and *Edge of Sanity* (1989). The former was produced by the Hammer Films – the company famous for its horror and monster movies, whose works and actors Cole Haddon seems to be nostalgic about ("Interview," "Exclusive Interview"). *Sister Hyde* is the result of Jekyll's experiments to extract the elixir of life from female hormones, and the Whitechapel murders are the side effects of obtaining these hormones. It is much easier to move about the area for a female – even one wearing garish red dresses – since the suspect is a male wearing a tall hat and a dark cloak, the now-iconic costume of the gentlemanly Ripper. The *Edge of Sanity* was received as a potential "cautionary fable for our time" (Canby), a warning against the use of drugs. Its Jack Hyde is created through

a combination of Henry's childhood trauma and his adult experiments with cocaine and pain killers, with the repressed double read in an overtly psychoanalytical manner. Both productions end on a similar note: Jekyll, aware of Hyde's growing strength but unable to stop it – and unwilling to submit to justice and the resultant humiliation – commits suicide, thus ending the autumn of terror. Cole Haddon's Hyde is quite unlike these movie versions: not only is he not the Whitechapel murderer, but he assumes an active role in finding the killer. He is also hardly reminiscent of Stevenson's creation, which reflected the concerns of its time.

The late-eighteenth-century ideas on physiognomy as expressed by Johann Caspar Lavater, combined with the mid-nineteenth-century notions of criminal anthropology as described by Cesare Lombroso, and degeneration, as introduced by Benedict-Augustin Morel, were widely debated in the 1880s, and the features of a “degenerate” were summed up in the early 1890s by Max Nordau. In 1880, Edwin Ray Lankester stated that “[t]he full and earnest cultivation of Science – the Knowledge of Causes – is that to which we have to look for the protection of our race – even of this English branch of it – from relapse and degeneration” (5). Ironically, six years later Stevenson published his “riddle of atavism” (Pick 165): a story of “an English professional man – the epitome of civilised development” (Greenslade 84) who relapses into a savage state due to his scientific experiments, and whose doppelgänger takes the form of a degenerate criminal:

Edward Hyde was so much smaller, slighter, and younger than Henry Jekyll. Even as good shone upon the countenance of the one, evil was written broadly and plainly on the face of the other. Evil besides (which I must still believe to be the lethal side of man) had left on that body an imprint of deformity and decay. ... the hand of Henry Jekyll (as you have often remarked) was professional in shape and size: it was large, firm, white, and comely. But the hand [of Edward Hyde] ... was lean, corded, knuckly, of a dusky pallor and thickly shaded with a swart growth of hair. (Stevenson 51, 54)

Not only does he have a primitive physiognomy – Hyde incorporates post-Darwinian evolutionary discourse of the ape within by manifesting simian behaviour: attacks “with ape-like fury” (22), plays “apelike tricks” (61), and generally is “apelike spite[ful]” (62). Stevenson exposed what many Victorians did not want to admit: that the criminal type does not have to be the “other” – a foreign savage, an outsider, or a problem stemming from the influx of immigrants – he may very well be found within a white middle-class London gentlemen. Using David Punter's phrase, he presented them with “an urban version of ‘going native’” (3), a savage in the civilized world.

The first longer description of Edward Hyde presents his monstrosity in rather vague terms:

He is not easy to describe. There is something wrong with his appearance; something displeasing, something downright detestable. I never saw a man I so disliked, and yet I scarce know why. He must be deformed somewhere; he gives a strong feeling of deformity, although I couldn't specify the point. He's an extraordinary-looking man, and yet I really can name nothing out of the way ... I can't describe him. And it's not want of memory; for I declare I can see him this moment. (Stevenson 11–12)

It is the readers' job to fill in the blanks and it is their imagination that sets the limits. The majority would probably envision a big, disfigured brute, since such a portrayal has been disseminated in popular culture. It can be traced back to the earliest stage adaptation performed at the Lyceum Theatre in 1888, and is present in the silent film version of 1920; Hyde's simian characteristics are in the foreground of the 1931 adaptation, and a combination of the two reached its apogee in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (1999). However, Alan Moore's and Kevin O'Neill's postmodern/neo-Victorian depiction adds a more human side to Hyde's personality, and other recent revisions, for example the BBC's *Jekyll* (2007), expand that trace. *The Strange Case of Mr. Hyde* goes further: the deformed monster is invisible, since Hyde's persona has overtaken Jekyll's body without any damage to its attractiveness; what is more, the evil side is veiled in genius and cooperates with the police.

While Stevenson's story is "dominated by the representation of aging bourgeois professionals, doctors and lawyers," and "Jekyll represents the end of a certain kind of middle-class masculinity, [and] Hyde represents the possibility of an alternative life of activity, energy and growth" (Smith 37, 39), Haddon's sequel, which takes place during the autumn of 1888, five years after Hyde's presumed death, offers a revitalised super villain. First of all, unlike the original Jekyll, who is "a large, well-made, smooth-faced man of fifty, with something of a slyish cast perhaps, but every mark of capacity and kindness" (Stevenson 19), Mike Corley's drawings depict the body that looks fifteen to twenty years younger, is slim and attractive.

Haddon upgrades Hyde to a criminal mastermind. While the Hyde-persona's misdeeds belong to a different time, they are still remembered; moreover, he has learnt from them and now, under the cover of assisting in the Ripper investigation, is capable of manipulating Scotland Yard officers into giving him access to the source of his super-human strength – the serum he invented. It is all the easier for him, since his is not a split personality: he is Hyde but looks like Jekyll, and there are no signs of him transforming into a hideous monster.² The only time the readers are offered a glimpse of the monster is the scene at Madame Tussaud's, where a wax likeness of Hyde is exhibited and his status of a celebrity is established. Stevenson's doctor's written confession states that "Jekyll was now my city of refuge; let but Hyde

peep out an instant, and the hands of all men would be raised to take and slay him” (Stevenson 57). Haddon’s Hyde knows better and uses the unchanged body as a cover. He is still considered to be “a creature so **lacking** in basic morality” (Haddon 19, original emphasis) but as it turns out, moral pretence is what poses a greater threat to the society than a handsome and clever criminal.

Corley introduces Hyde step by step: a smooth but firm hand (17), feline green eyes (18), oval face in the shadows (19) – that and the very prison surroundings are reminiscent of the movie introduction of Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), and the comparison to Lecter is what differentiates this appropriation of Hyde from other recent afterings. Chesterton’s division of detectives and criminals as representing civilisation and barbarism respectively, with the former being “the original and poetic figure[s]” and the latter “the children of chaos” has been out of date for some time now, and postmodern detective stories have blurred that division, even exploited it “to the limit” (Marcus 247). Hannibal the Cannibal is not only an imprisoned criminal – he acts as a detective as well. When the readers first meet Hyde, he is kept under lock and key (similarly to Lecter) in the Scotland Yard basements or dungeons; having only one (ex-) friend visiting, “Jekyll, H.”, as the cell door plate says, does not have many pastimes. A visit from a Clarice Sterling-type naïve young law enforcement official arouses his interest and makes him work on the Whitechapel serial killer, whose exceptional physical abilities resemble those of Hyde. Lecter denotes what the creator of the graphic novel “love[s] most about villains: their perspective is often far more interesting than the heroes’. They’re foils for that reason, to help challenge the heroes’ generally far more naïve ideals” (“Exclusive interview”). The complex relationship between Hyde-Hannibal and the young Inspector Thomas Adye, a Clarice Sterling figure, deserves attention.

Stevenson’s novella “*implies* the presence of a detective” but he is, in fact “a nonentity” there (De Young 183, original emphasis). Inspector Newcomen of Scotland Yard enters the scene after the murder of Sir Carew, and his actions are limited to the searching of Hyde’s Soho apartment and the decision to simply wait for Hyde at the bank. Such a lack of initiative on the part of a policeman should not be surprising, since the Victorians were distrustful of detectives. The ones they knew – be it from newspapers, like Vidocq, or from fiction, like Dupin – were not only foreign but French, and the whole concept of policing the middle and upper classes seemed unacceptable due to the British “tradition that figured the detective as a low, criminal, and foreign Other, and detection as an activity tainted by elements of duplicity, prurience, and the invasion of privacy” (De Young 181). In Haddon’s text, Newcomen is a Chief Inspector, and collating his actions with those of the historic 1888 chief commissioner of the

Metropolitan Police, Sir Charles Warren, or his *From Hell* counterpart and co-operators presented by Alan Moore, reveals certain similarities.

Inspector Thomas Adye of Scotland Yard is the proper hero of the graphic novel. The readers of H. G. Wells's *Invisible Man* (1897) are familiar with the name, as one Colonel Adye, the chief of the local police, is working on the Griffin case, to which the Ripper case is made a prequel. However, in Wells's text, similarly to Stevenson's story, it is the representative of the middle-class, doctor Kemp, who decides what should be done and is more active than the police. Haddon's Inspector Adye is a different man. He is first seen in a church, listening to a sermon on morality and the internal war between the Good and the Evil taking place in every man (11). The text is a quotation from the 1920 adaptation of the Jekyll and Hyde story, which begins with a caption: "In each of us, two natures are at war – the good and the evil. All our lives the fight goes on between them, and one of them must conquer. But in our hands lies the power to choose – what we want most to be, we are." (original emphasis) Thomas Adye is a partly idealistic, partly naïve policeman who wants to change his social position but remain decent and religious: "I simply strive to be a better sort of a man." Hyde, however, perceives him as "pompous, uptight, boring" (20) and sees as much as Lecter did when he first met Agent Sterling. Adye is neither a gentleman nor a common peeler: his education cannot conceal his East End roots, but his modern approach to conducting criminal investigations, forensic science included, makes him stand out from among other Scotland Yarders. He dreams of the world of the upper classes, e.g. of riding in first class train carriages (25), but once he is offered entrance into that world and discovers what hides behind the facade of appearances, he does not want to part of it. Thus he avoids the fate of Stevenson's Utterson and Jekyll, whose "allegiance to a particular class-bound notion of respectability has effectively dehumanised them" (Smith 38).

Even though Adye does not belong to Jekyll's class of "educated professional men with an elite access to the classics that both shapes their thinking [...] and gives them a medium of privately shared communication" (Linehan 22), he is well-read. Not only is he capable of maintaining a conversation with sarcastic Hyde, but also shares his knowledge of the classics and their sentences: Seneca on religion, Cicero on wisdom, or Marcus Aurelius on evil (Haddon 32, 35–36), which serve as remarks on contemporary attitudes to morality.³ However, Adye tellingly does not comment on a sentence from Confucius: "Learning without thought is labor lost" (60). The detective acquires certain knowledge from the criminal and learns from his experiences. Although Hyde does not facilitate Adye's transformation from a naïve idealist, he does speed up the process; in the meantime, he grows fond of the detective, which does not stop him from

being Hyde – similarly to Hannibal tutoring Clarice, he is also patiently waiting for an opportunity to use what he has learnt during his imprisonment. One more element that links Hyde and Adye is their appearance: similar height and built, similar hair colour and hairstyle; wearing a formal dress while attending the Griffin dinner party, with waistcoats matching their eye colour and identical white bow ties, they look on a par.

While “Victorian audiences tolerated the detective if he stayed in the ghetto in which they had mentally confined him” (De Young 187), neo-Victorian audiences not only accept the detective and expect him to solve the case, but also sympathise with him. Recent changes introduced to the character of Inspector Abberline, who was in charge of the real Ripper case, are reflected in Haddon’s text as well. In the film version of *From Hell* (2001), Sir Charles Warren, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, comments on Abberline: “He has that kind of cleverness you’ll sometimes find in the middle classes. A cheap sort of intelligence, but effective nevertheless.” Alan Moore’s portly middle-aged officer was transformed into a romantic and sexy detective further humanized by his romantic involvement with Mary Jane Kelly. Cole Haddon’s Adye, however, is not romantic – his first awkward meeting with Mary Jane leads him to a suspect whose imprisonment becomes the detective’s springboard to the society, but once disappointed, he quickly returns to his area to “bed a whore” (52) and pour out his problems to her. Unfortunately, unlike in Moore’s version (but like in the historic one), there is no hope for this Mary Jane. It is her avoidable death, together with the discovery that Hyde has already deduced the identity of the Ripper and kept it to himself, that turn Adye against his criminal helper/mentor.

When the identity of the Ripper is revealed, Hyde takes revenge on both the killer – yet another doctor who has gone to the bad, and further developed the serum – and those who were covering his actions. His reasons, however, are not altruistic: he craves for the super serum, but also for fame – the “elaborate” murder of Mary Jane makes him “look like a rank amateur” (76), and vengeance is too mundane a reason: “Call it a point of professional pride, but I couldn’t bear it if I were only remembered as London’s **second-worst** villain. I want it to be **my name** that sends shivers down their spines and keeps their little ones up at night.” (79, original emphasis) Hyde is egocentric – his experiment led to many evil deeds, but it does not make him the villain of this story; and neither was he the real villain in Stevenson’s text. While in the source text he inflicts self-punishment, the sequel continues the Hannibal Lecter theme: Hyde uses the opportunity to escape long-term imprisonment and remains at large when the story ends.

The Strange Case of Mr. Hyde retains the accusations made by *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, which “uncovers the crimes and hypocrisies

of a middle-class character” (De Young 195). The villains are the authorities who instead of learning from Jekyll’s mistakes, cover up crimes committed by his follower in exchange for a recreational serum-based drug called Liberation and under the false pretence of “performing a public service by cleaning up Whitechapel” of prostitutes (Haddon 71).

Stevenson’s characters have been analysed from various perspectives: degeneration theory, post-Darwinian, psychoanalytical, spiritualistic. Jekyll may be read both as a tragic hero and allegorical villain, or a negative exemplum (Linehan 8); he has even been read as a medium for the double Hyde (Clayson). Hyde may be Jekyll’s alter ego, the devil himself, or “the *unacknowledged* colonizer of Jekyll’s mind” (Linehan 21); he is “stitched together from a variety of parts, [i.e.] critical perspectives, and at the same time defies, through this multiplicity of meanings, clear classification” (Walker 83). No wonder such “a peculiarly modern monster” (Walker 84) was recycled to meet postmodern needs. If Stevenson’s Hyde was a consequence of degeneration brought about by modern civilisation, Haddon’s Hyde is a product of intertextuality brought about by postmodern culture, but, even though he is a veritable super villain, he is reduced to being Adaye’s sidekick. A Victorian ‘non-existent’ police detective has little room in contemporary fiction. Stevenson’s ineffective inspector is merged with historic and fictional police authorities engaged in the Ripper case, and another ineffective colonel is transformed into a neo-Victorian Abberline/Sterling character. The readers, well acquainted with crime fiction and crime series, sympathise with him not only as the hero of the story, but also as a fellow investigator learning the ropes in the postmodern world of Haddon’s and Corley’s creation.

NOTES

¹ See Richard Dury’s “Strange language of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde” (44) on the indecent associations of the trampling incident.

² Had a paraphrase of or a reference to Ozzy Osbourne’s song “My Jekyll doesn’t Hide” been included in any of the panels, it might have become a pop cultural comment on Hyde’s appearance.

³ These commentaries are reminiscent of those made by Sergeant Godley, an assistant and friend of Inspector Abberline in the film adaptation of Alan Moore’s *From Hell* (2001), who was commenting on the events citing Shakespeare.

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“DARKLING I LISTEN”: MELANCHOLIA, SELF AND CREATIVITY IN ROMANTIC NIGHTINGALE POEMS

Abstract

The present article is an attempt to look at selected Romantic poems which concentrate on the image of the nightingale. Starting from Charlotte Smith's sonnets and continuing with poems by other writers of the period, I will try to trace the link between nature and poetic convention in English Romanticism. While some of the nightingales which sing in Romantic poetry seem deeply symbolic, other forsake poetic tradition and stubbornly persist in their birdy nature, resisting descriptions in terms of melancholia or woe. Nevertheless, the fate of Philomela, whose sad story of violation identifies the nightingale with loss, suffering and poetic creation, still remains an important context for Romantic nightingale poems.

Since the famous myth of Philomela, retold by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*, the image of the nightingale has been deployed by writers to signify loss, pain and longing. At the same time, the nightingale's music in poetry has been characteristically linked to love, and consequently romanticized. This paper proposes to look at the image of the nightingale in early 19th century poetry, from Charlotte Smith's sonnets, through John Clare's and S.T. Coleridge's conversational poems, to Keats's ode, in order to see how this literary motif functions in English Romanticism. The Romantic nightingale, apart from symbolizing poetic creativity and inspiration which usually result from melancholy and suffering, has one more distinctive feature: it also remains a bird from a woodland, with its tiny body and tawny feathers, perching on green boughs and migrating south when the summer is over – in short, apart from a literary symbol, it also retains its natural characteristics. This observation allows for ecocritical readings of Romantic nightingale poems,

where the relationships between poetry, poets and the physical environment come to the fore.

The story of Philomela, which usually overtly or covertly underwrites poetic encounters with the nightingale, is a well-known mythological narrative of abuse, suffering and poetic song. In Book VI of his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid relates a shocking fate of two sisters, Philomela and Procne, the daughters of the king of Athens. After five years of living apart from her family, Procne requests her husband Tereus to fetch her beloved sister, Philomela, from Athens. Tereus becomes obsessed with Philomela's beauty and on the way home first he rapes her and then, in order to prevent her from telling her fate, cuts her tongue out. Philomela, however, tells her story by the way of art: she weaves a tapestry which testifies to her traumatic experience. Procne's revenge is shocking: she takes Itys, the son she bore to Tereus, to a shelter near the Thracian sea, where both sisters murder him and dissemble his body into pieces. Procne serves her murdered son to Tereus for dinner, and soon afterwards the sisters present Tereus with the mutilated head of Itys. Tereus pursues Procne and Philomela, who flee from Thrace. On the way, gods intervene and save them by changing them into birds – and thus, in Roman tradition, Philomela becomes a nightingale, while Procne is transformed into a swallow. Hence, the image of the “tongueless nightingale” has been frequently employed by poets, and it has come to signify creative experience arising out of loss, darkness and solitude, where the meaning is to be found beyond words – in the tragic, soaring music of the nightingale. Philomela transformed her tonguelessness into her victory: first, weaving her story into the tapestry she became an archetype of a female artist; secondly, her nightingale music can be interpreted as a recompense for her lost human voice. Therefore, in “Evening Star and Evening Land” Geoffrey Hartman describes the “Philomel moment” in English poetry as “the post-prophetic moment, when the theme of loss merges with that of voice – when, in fact, a ‘lost voice’ becomes the subject or moving force of poetic song” (164). Thus, the association between the poet and the bird became commonplace: the bird renders its tragic past experience in the most moving music, and the poet longs to sustain the fleeting moment of prophetic insight and frequently sings of its irrecoverable, irretrievable loss.

In English literary tradition preceding Romanticism, the most famous poetic statement on the nature of the nightingale was made by John Milton, who in *Il Penseroso* described the music of the nightingale as an expression of melancholy (ll. 61–62). Moreover, in the Invocation to Book III of *Paradise Lost* Milton compared himself, the blind poet, to a nightingale who “sings darkling” (ll. 38–39). Romantic poetry seems to first emulate, and then transform this equivocation of the nightingale's song with sadness and loss, and in doing so, Romantic poets resort to another tradition – the Sapphic

one. Sappho, in a poetic fragment, evokes the nightingale's joyful aspect, calling it "the messenger of spring, the sweet voiced nightingale" (McKusick 35). Yet, Sappho's lyrics have always been associated with (unfulfilled) desire. Hence, this resulted in another quality of her verse: the oxymoronic bitter-sweetness of love, known as the notion of *dulce amarum* (Maxwell 32). The province of *dulce amarum* is well recognized in the verse of Charlotte Smith, John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley.

Charlotte Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* collection features three poems that employ the nightingale motif. The first of the triad, "To a Nightingale," is the most conventional of the group, as the bird becomes traditionally associated with melancholy, suffering and darkness. In these terms Smith evokes famous lines from *Il Penseroso*, where Milton explicitly defines the nightingale's song as "most musical, most melancholy" (ll. 61–62). For Smith, the bird's lament is "the tale of tender woe" (l.2), stemming from "sad course" but resulting in "sweet sorrow" (l.3) Smith alludes to the painful story of Philomela, when she suggests that the bird is now "releas'd in woodlands wild to rove" (l.10) but in her past she was a "pale sorrow's victim" (l.9), possibly betrayed and cruelly wronged by someone whom she deemed a friend (l.11). Moreover, there is little doubt as to the fact that the nightingale sings of her own story from the past (l.8). The music of the nightingale in this poem, then, functions both as inspiration to a poet, whose task is to translate the notes of the song into words of a poetic text, and as a recompense for the past loss and pain by a right "to sigh and sing at liberty," a privilege envied by the poetic speaker of the sonnet.

It is in the other two poems by Smith, "On the Departure of the Nightingale" and "On the Return of the Nightingale" that the conventional qualities of literary nightingales fuse with Smith's engagement with the actual natural processes. The poems relate the migration of the nightingale after summer and its return during spring. As some critics point out, Smith's poems echo her contemporary theories as to why the nightingales disappear in winter: "There were two competing hypotheses: do they migrate south, or do they hibernate, either in hollow trees, or perhaps underwater? (McKusick 38). Smith alludes to these theories, when she muses: 'Whether on spring thy wandering flights await/Or whether silent in our groves you dwell' ("On the Departure of the Nightingale," (ll. 4–5). Moreover, despite still very conventional poetic apostrophes ("soft minstrel of the early year" l.2, "sweet poet of the woods" l.1) Smith demonstrates her skills of intent and careful observation of nature: whoever wants to look for a nightingale, "shall glide / Through the lone brake that shades [her] mossy nest" (8–9). It is this emphasis on natural places and natural process, rather than artificial and conventional literary motifs, which predominate in the third poem of the triad. "The Return of the Nightingale" celebrates the awakening of the earth

in spring and the renewal of the natural cycle. The nightingale is now associated with an “instinctive power” that brings this regeneration and with a “soft voice of young and timid Love” (ll. 5–7). The poems also engage the theme of artistic vocation: it is the music of the nightingale that “charm[s] the wondering poet’s pensive way” (l.11), just as the previously discussed sonnet identified the bird as a “sweet poet of the woods” (l.1).

Samuel Tylor Coleridge’s use of the nightingale motif well exemplifies the two competing tendencies, the literary and the natural, in talking about the nightingale in Romantic poetry. The bird features in Coleridge’s verse twice, in “To the Nightingale” (1795, published 1796) and, more famously, in “The Nightingale: A Conversation Poem” (1798). While the first of the two texts emulates Miltonic tradition in associating the nightingale with melancholy and sadness, in the second poem Coleridge offers a corrective on the first and also presents himself in a different light: not a poet resorting to the use of fixed poetic diction, but a writer looking at the world with a fresh perception, working to defamiliarise symbols which have been too much burdened by overused mythological and literary associations.

“To the Nightingale” is a courtly love lyric (Fay 216), where the poet invokes the nightingale, pays tribute to the bird’s song and acknowledges its potency, in order to declare his preference for the voice of his beloved Sara. Nevertheless, before the nightingale loses in the competition, its associations are thoroughly established: it is the “Sister of love-lorn Poets, Philomel!” (l.1) singing when “the full-orb’d Queen [...] shines above” (l.8). The bird warbles “sad [its] pity-pleading strains” (l.11), and Coleridge directly quotes from Milton calling it “‘Most musical, most melancholy’ Bird” (l.17). The use of this last quotation deserves most attention, since it is repeated in the next poem, “The Nightingale: A Conversation Poem,” but its meaning changes. What is more, by resorting to repetition Coleridge wants his readers to notice this change and ponder its implications. It is, after all, only three years between the writing of both poems; why then, if the nightingale was a sad, suffering Philomel in the first text, has it transformed into a joyful spirit of nature in the second? And, even more poignantly, why does Coleridge want us to mark this transformation so much that he repeats exactly the same Miltonic phrase, but this time shows it as artificial and overused?

In 1798 poem, Coleridge exposes the convention he himself previously used as ridiculous: “A melancholy bird? Oh! idle thought!/ In Nature there is nothing melancholy” (ll. 14–15). Further, he eagerly explains the roots of the convention:

But some night-wandering man whose heart was pierced
With the remembrance of a grievous wrong,
Or slow distemper, or neglected love,

(And so, poor wretch! filled all things with himself,
And made all gentle sounds tell back the tale
Of his own sorrow) he, and such as he,
First named these notes a melancholy strain.
And many a poet echoes the conceit; (ll. 16–23)

In the struggle between nature and culture, nature wins; the poet traces the habit of tracing the theme of neglected, unrequited love in the song of the nightingale to both egotism of the poet who used it for the first time and the lack of originality and reflection on the part of writers who emulate it; in the process, Coleridge indirectly rebukes himself for having done so three years previously. The change may have been related, it seems, to the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads*, which collection, as Wordsworth tells us in “Advertisement,” was to be experimental and original in both form and contents:

The majority of the following poems are to be considered as experiments. [...] Readers accustomed to the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers, if they persist in reading this book to its conclusion, will perhaps frequently have to struggle with feelings of strangeness and awkwardness [...] they will look round for poetry, and will be induced to enquire by what species of courtesy these attempts can be permitted to assume that title. It is desirable that such readers, for their own sakes, should not suffer the solitary word Poetry, a word of very disputed meaning, to stand in the way of their gratification; but that, while they are perusing this book, they should ask themselves if it contains a natural delineation of human passions, human characters, and human incidents; and if the answer be favorable to the author’s wishes, that they should consent to be pleased in spite of that most dreadful enemy to our pleasures, our own pre-established codes of decision.

Wordsworth insists that our “pre-established codes of decision” stem from convention and should thus be disregarded. Two years later, writing the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*, he will similarly argue that the tendency to echo unreflectively certain fixed poetic conceits (in a misguided assumption that they grant the text a poetic quality) should be rejected. Despite the fact that his claims in the “Preface” gave rise to the famous Coleridge-Wordsworth controversy, Coleridge must have converted to the latter conviction, as his 1798 poem evidences. Moreover, he uses “The Nightingale: A Conversational Poem” to radically alter his image as a poet. He states that it is “In ball-rooms and hot theatres,” that young people “still / Full of meek sympathy must heave their sighs/O’er Philomela’s pity-pleading strains” (ll.37–39); in contrast, he chooses to look for a nightingale which is the product of nature and not culture, a “merry bird” which sings “delicious notes” (ll. 43,45). Coleridge presents himself to the reader as a poet writing in a “green language,” recording consciousness of “the influxes/Of shapes and sounds

and shifting elements” (ll. 27–28) together with an awareness how important the changes of weather are for vegetation: “Yet let us think upon the vernal showers/ That gladden the green earth, and we shall find / A pleasure in the dimness of the stars” (ll. 9–11). The nightingale as a symbol has been thoroughly defamiliarised.

If Charlotte Smith and Coleridge hovered on the brink of the literary and the actual, the truly Romantic preoccupation with nature is demonstrated by another poet of the period, who, because of his preoccupation with the common, low themes, earned the label of a “peasant poet”: John Clare. In his representations of nature which are at once truthful and poetic, Clare is unprecedented. “The Nightingale’s Nest” is totally devoid of poetic conventions: the nightingale is what it is – a bird in green woodland. If one wants to find the bird’s nest, one needs to come “[c]reeping on hands and knees through matted thorn” (l.13) struggling with bushes and entangling foliage. The description of the bird is similarly de-romanticized: “and her renown / Hath made me marvel that so famed a bird / Should have no better dress than russet brown” (ll. 19–21). The description of the singing bird, which follows, also emphasizes intent observation and sensitive, if almost scientific scrutiny:

Her wings would tremble in her ecstasy,
And feathers stand on end, as ’twere with joy,
And mouth wide open to release her heart
Of its out-sobbing songs. (ll. 22–25)

The outstanding quality of Clare’s poetry lays in his extraordinary skill to observe the world as objectively and closely as a man of science, who is yet endowed with truly Romantic sensitivity. Thus, he takes the readers on a botanic and ornithological journey of discovery, as when he describes the nightingale’s nest:

How curious is the nest; no other bird
Uses such loose materials, or weaves
Its dwelling in such spots: dead oaken leaves
Are placed without, and velvet moss within,
And little scraps of grass, and, scant and spare,
What scarcely seem materials, down and hair; (ll. 76–81)

Yet, at the same time Clare also speaks as a true nature lover: in his poem we hear both the fascination with the natural places, plants and birds and a deep respect for them. As Jonathan Bate notes, “‘The Nightingale’s Nest’ begins from the sense of intimacy not only with the bird, the nest and its environment, but also with the reader” (368). Furthermore, the poem gives us a “sense of stumbling upon a secret, gaining access to something magical

and precious, but also fragile and vulnerable” (Bate 379). It is with the voice of an ecologically-minded poet and an insightful, considerate person, not a dispassionate scientist that Clare urges the reader to

put that bramble by –
Nay, trample on its branches and get near.
How subtle is the bird! she started out,
And raised a plaintive note of danger nigh,
Ere we were past the brambles; and now, near
Her nest, she sudden stops – as choking fear,
That might betray her home. (ll. 55–61)

Unlike in Smith’s sonnets, Clare’s image of the nightingale is not invested with sorrow, melancholy or woe; neither does the bird personify love or hope – in short, it does not function as a literary artifact any more. Similarly, the poet does not project his own emotions onto the nightingale – what is more, personal feelings of the speaker do not encroach on the theme of the poem. Instead, his poem records a sense of awe and wonder in the presence of the commonplace. If it is Keats who speaks of a “camelion poet,” a poetical character who, unlike the “Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime” does not observe the world through the prism of his own mental states, it is Clare who in the “The Nightingale’s Nest” perfectly demonstrates this concept.

Despite the ecologically-oriented strand in Romantic poetry, the tendency which made the creative poet identify with the singing nightingale strongly prevailed in the poetry of the period. “A poet is a nightingale,” Shelley says in “A Defense of Poetry,” “who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why” (1031). This famous identification of the poet with the nightingale and poetry with the bird’s song underwrites “Ode to the Nightingale,” unquestionably the most famous of the nightingale poems. Keats’s nightingale is both a muse and an artist. Decidedly female, it is invoked as the “light-winged Dryad of the trees,” while the speaker listens to its rapturous song in “embalmed darkness.” “Darkling I listen” confesses Keats, echoing Milton’s opening of the third book of *Paradise Lost*, where the poet’s fate is compared to that of the nightingale which “sings darkling, and in shadiest covert hid” (196.39). Keats’s poetic nightingale, however, has lost most of its natural qualities described by Smith, Clare and Coleridge. Instead, it becomes a poetic artifact. Keats, although he uses a real song of a real nightingale as a springboard for his poem (as the sources tell us), in the course of his poetic meditation transforms the bird from a natural creature into a symbol of poetic vocation and permanence, located in the unseen,

unreachable world of ideals which a mortal man can only glimpse for a moment, but whose sustaining is impossible. It inhabits a shady, green recess which is not touched by time, nor pain or death. The nightingale is the mythical Dryad, a wood nymph, and its song metamorphoses from the happy warbling the poet hears as he starts writing to a triumphant anthem, primarily defying mutability and change:

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn; (ll. 61–67)

The song of the bird makes Keats approach this supreme moment in the life of any creative artist, the state of heightened consciousness that borders on spiritual pain (“My heart aches,” says Keats in line 1), which is a precondition for writing. The Sapphic tradition visibly surfaces in the Ode. Delight and happiness in the bird’s song result in sorrow and pain when the speaker realizes his own predicament. Thus, when Keats proclaims that he will fly to the nightingale on the wings of poesy, he longs for the imaginative union with the bird, getting immersed in its song not from a safe distance, but experiencing it as his own. Hence, as Harold Bloom observes, this encounter allows Keats to detach, even for a moment, from “the world of mutability, where every increase in consciousness is an increase in sorrow” and to inhabit the realm of the bird, “the world he has at once entered and created” (Bloom 408–409). What such process entails is the symbolic identification of the poet with the nightingale, his poetry with the bird’s song. To get dissolved in the song of the bird and in the process of artistic composition is to achieve transcendence. Paradoxically, Keats’s poem is pervaded by concepts of death and dying – when he has achieved the union with the bird, more than ever it seems “rich to die,” “to cease upon midnight with no pain” when the nightingale is “pouring away [its] soul in ecstasy” (ll. 55–57). In this context, death means entering a state of permanent, not temporary union with the ideal. As he stays alive, this intimate moment of contact is broken and the poet hurls down to his habitual self: “Forlorn! The very world is like a bell / To toll me back from thee to my sole self” (ll. 71–72). The intensity of the imaginative experience results in ontological questioning: the boundaries between the world of reality and the world of imagination become unstable. Keats ends his ode with a pervading question: “Was it a vision or a waking dream? / Fled is that music: do I wake or sleep?” (ll. 79–80).

As I hope to have demonstrated, Romantic poets frequently and eagerly resorted to writing about the nightingales, but their perspectives differed. Some of the poems discussed in the present article encourage readers to adopt an essentially ecological understanding of their relation to the natural world and consequently strive to alter the tradition which, by the force of the Classical and poetic heritage, divorced the nightingale from its natural surroundings. Poets like John Clare easily forsake the literary convention; others, like Coleridge or Smith, try to disentangle the nightingale from the traditional associations by first responding to and then rejecting the Miltonic tradition. In turn, Keats embraces the nightingale as a literary artifact and although he overtly echoes Milton, still he manages to transform the nightingale of his literary forefather into another symbol: not of a blind poet, who sings “darkling,” and whose poetic vision is a recompense for the loss of the sensory one, but of the permanent existence in the ideal world which can be glimpsed through art and poetry, but which cannot be sustained.

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FROM MASQUE TO MASQUERADE: MONARCHY AND ART IN ANDREW MARVELL'S POEMS

Abstract

A considerable number of Andrew Marvell's poems contain reference to various forms of visual arts. Marvell's use of this type of imagery frequently leads to some type of transformation of a psychological, spiritual, political or social reality, with more or less overt allusions to the Neoplatonic notions of sublimation. However, this predominantly Neoplatonic notion of art, characteristic of Marvell's earlier lyrics, disappears from his Restoration poems. In the satires, art, instead of idealising and elevating the corporeal, is rather dragged into the sphere of matter, where, together with the objects of the poet's mockery, it undergoes a carnivalesque deformation. Such a degradation or carnivalisation of art imagery in Marvell's Restoration satires is not only generically conditioned, but has its roots in the political, social and philosophical legacy of the Republic.

In the third part of *Eupheme*, a eulogy on the late wife of Sir Kenelm Digby, Ben Jonson invites a painter to render the radiant beauty of Lady Digby's body in the form of a painting. Pleased with the result, the poet declares: "Next sitting we will draw her mind." On his return, however, the painter is promptly dismissed:

Painter yo' re come but may be gone,
Now I have better thought thereon;
This work I can perform alone; (VIII. 277)

"Not that your art I do refuse," the poet reassuringly adds. We are given to understand that the dismissal has nothing to do with the quality of the painter's skill, and everything to do with the nature of his subject. The mind is a flame-like thing, too fleet and mercurial to be represented in a painting ("your hand will never hit / to draw a thing that cannot sit").

Some thirty years later, another seventeenth century poet teamed up with a painter to meet the challenge of depicting a subject possibly even more fiery and dynamic than the mind of Dame Venetia Digby, when Andrew Marvell tackled the topic of the political turmoil of the 1660s. Although he may have been familiar with, and possibly even echoed, Jonson's doubts as voiced in *Eupheme*, in his *The Last Instructions to a Painter* Andrew Marvell does not query the ability of the artist. Instead, his suggestion is framed in the spirit of friendly co-operation:

Dear painter, draw this Speaker to the foot;
Where pencil cannot, there my pen shall do't
That may his body, this his mind explain. (ll. 863–865)¹

The result of their collaboration is a Horatian ideal of *ut pictura poesis*, a perfect union of the sister arts:

Painter, adieu! How well our arts agree!
Poetic picture, painted poetry! (ll. 943–944)

The Horatian and Jonsonian tones with which Marvell closes his otherwise excoriating satire are misleading; more than anything, they emphasise Marvell's ideological distance both from the Roman poet and from his English devotee. Horace believed in the corrective effect of indulgent laughter, and Jonson assumed that praise, even where not entirely merited, inspired men to virtue. By contrast, the laughter in Marvell's satires seems mostly derisive; the poet is palpably sceptical about the Sidneyan ethos of poetry. The apparent enthusiasm with which he views the friendly collaboration between the poet and the painter is not so much an exercise in striving for the Horatian ideal as a typical Marvellian distraction diverting the reader from a more substantive issue explored in the satire – the poet's implicit comments about the status of art. *The Last Instructions to a Painter* can be interpreted as a categorical dismissal of art's power to glorify and sublimate the material reality. Although my paper focuses on this general deprecation of art present in Marvell's Restoration satires, rather than on the relationship between poet and painter itself, it is worth pointing out how the innocuous echo of the Jonsonian debate between the poet and the painter reverberates in his poem with derisive voices which bring into question some of the general beliefs about art which we tend to associate with the father of the Cavalier poets.

The professed harmonious cooperation between the poet and the painter in Marvell's Advice-to-a-Painter satires promises success, in contrast to the implicit failure of Jonson's competing artists who vie to best each other; a situation which probably carried more than a passing resemblance to the personal antagonisms between Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones. However,

the comparison implied by Marvell is misleading. Notwithstanding their stormy professional relationship, the magnificent spectacles created jointly by Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones worked some truly magical transformations at the Stuart court. Tapping the reservoirs of Greek mythology or Arthurian legend the two masters of poetry and stage design were building up the myth of Stuart monarchy by turning weak and corrupt courtiers into gods and heroes. Jonson and Jones may have competed with each other, but the question at stake was which of the arts, poetry or painting, glorified its subjects more effectively. Paradoxically, the friendly cooperation between poet and painter in Marvell's *Advice-to-a-Painter* poems produces the reverse effect: the reader is confronted with a grotesque and shameful picture of the monarch and his court. The poet uses the painter as an accomplice in the act of subverting the myth-making function traditionally assigned to courtly art. What seems particularly ironic is that in order to demythologise the ruler Marvell employs precisely these forms of art which were usually associated with the glorification of monarchy. I will argue that Marvell's scepticism about the sublimating power of art was not a sudden development triggered by the poet's disgust of the restored king and his degenerate court. The reason was rather a gradually mounting disbelief which can already be traced in Marvell's earlier lyrics, where the poet seems to be gingerly testing the waters of the Neoplatonic concept of art before ultimately relegating art to the sphere of the corporeal and corrupt.

The way Marvell employs art in his Restoration satires undermines its service in creating a royal myth. This may be considered a radical change of the status that the *topos* of art enjoyed in the poet's earlier lyrics. *The Gallery*, for instance, is frequently quoted as evidence of Marvell's interest in art and his expertise in the contemporary trends in painting.² The poem's dominant conceit rests on a conventional poetic theme of a lover carrying a picture of his beloved in his heart. In Marvell's lyric there is actually an impressive collection of such pictures (one "choicer far" than the royal collection at Whitehall, as the lover boasts). Although it is set firmly within the tradition of amatory verse, the poem nonetheless displays some original qualities in the way it arranges and describes the collection of paintings. Marvell's departures from traditional iconography have already been noted (Hinnant 30–32); I would like to focus instead on the particular arrangement of the paintings. Out of about a thousand pictures apparently on exhibition in the gallery of the lover's heart, the poem presents only five. The first four paintings constitute two contrary pairs, which may suggest, as Nigel Smith claims, that they are two double-sided portraits (93). In the context of the Renaissance tradition of double-sided portraiture, this is a valuable technical observation which sheds new light on Marvell's poem. If we consider such examples of the genre as Da Vinci's portrait of Ginevra de' Benci's or

Memlin's *Portrait of a Young Man at Prayer*, it becomes apparent that the obverse and the reverse of those double-sided paintings have different functions; the former is simply a straightforward portrait of the sitter, while the latter is usually an allegorical painting, an emblem or an *impresa* supposed to represent the sitter's virtues, interests or social status. Thus, the reverse painting is an allegorical complement to the portrait, and frequently also a compliment on the sitter's character.

In the absence of a proper consideration of the tradition of double-sided portraiture, Charles H. Hinnant's interesting interpretation of the poem seems incomplete. Hinnant rightly notes that the first and the third paintings in *The Gallery* contain no obvious reference to a particular mythological character (like a mythological name or some characteristic quality or attribute), as opposed to the second and the fourth, which describe Aurora and Venus, albeit in a way that departs from traditional iconography (Hinnant 32). In the light of the tradition of double-sided portraiture, however, this arrangement finds a logical explanation. Within this frame of reference, the reverse portraits in *The Gallery* (Venus and Aurora) should simply be treated as a myth-making glorification of the person portrayed on the obverse – and yet the mythological representations in Marvell's poem are not in fact complementary. On the contrary, each presents a startling contrast to its counterpart on the obverse. A merciless, torturing murderess can hardly be glorified as the mild rosy-fingered Aurora. A ruthless and horrid enchantress makes an odd match with the peace-loving goddess of love. Naturally, Marvell's play with the double-sided portrait tradition in *The Gallery* may be interpreted as misogynistic comment on female moodiness and inconstancy. On the other hand, it can also point to the poet's ironic distance towards the belief in the myth-making power of art.

We should also bear in mind the last painting described in the poem, which is actually the first portrait displayed in the lover's gallery. A single portrait not paired with any other in the collection, it promises to provide a way out of the dialectical impasse produced by the two double-sided portraits. The painting seems to deny any stylisation. True to the pastoral overtones of her name, Clora is a simple shepherdess "whose hair / Hangs loosely playing with the air." This is the speaker's beloved – the 'real' Clora, as he claims, one not dressed in any mythological or allegorical costume. However, in case of pastoral painting it would be naive to accept such premises as natural simplicity, strictly life-like representation or unstudied postures. Pastoral painting was by definition a highly stylised genre; and one that was very popular at the court of Charles I. Hinnant notes:

The shepherdess in art was obviously affiliated with the literary vogue for pastoral drama and poetry. Not accidentally, pastoral flourished in Stuart England where

it was given special impetus by Charles I's consort Henrietta Maria, who in her enthusiasm for Platonic love inspired her courtiers to create plays and masques peopled with ideal shepherds and shepherdesses. (35)

Consequently, Clora is only 'real' and authentic within the fictional world of the poem; in the broader context, her picture might represent a courtly lady striking an affected pastoral pose. Again Marvell appears to be teasing his readers when insisting that the fashionable courtly stylisation is a genuine representation of his lover. This ironic attitude in *The Gallery* suggests both a mild critique of courtly fashions and a scepticism about the power of art to sublimate material reality, to change a 'tyrant' and an 'inhuman murderess' into Aurora.

The poet's mounting doubts about the sublimating power of art are apparent not only in *The Gallery*. Although no other lyric by Marvell refers to the visual arts as openly as *The Gallery* does, there are several early poems where art at least amounts to an important element of the imagery. This is the case in *The Unfortunate Lover*, one of the most puzzling poems by Marvell which, probably for this very reason, has inspired a great variety of interpretations. Although the poem may be legitimately and plausibly interpreted in amatory, Christian or political terms, it can also be treated as a Neoplatonic allegory of the soul, which – imprisoned in the material world of passion and strife but aware of its higher origin – heroically aspires to break free of its corporeal prison and transcend material reality. The lover's suffering and his heroic death become metamorphosed into a spectacle or another form of visual art. Interestingly, the genres present in *The Unfortunate Lover* were usually associated with myth-making courtly iconography. Masques, tournaments (usually preceded by an allegorical spectacle), heraldic devices or *impresas*, all of which appear in the poem, were not traditionally representations of the imperfect material reality, but aimed to transform or transcend it.

The lover's heroic suffering is not merely a conventional courtly stylisation; it seems literally to transform him into a form of art. He may sacrifice his life,

Yet dying leaves a perfume here,
And music within every ear:
And he in story only rules,
In a field sable a lover gules.(ll. 61–64)

Although it is too violent to be properly defined as a courtly masque, the poem's masque-like 'spectacle of blood' does share with its courtly model a ritualistic and metamorphosing quality rooted in the Neoplatonic philosophy and the hermetic tradition.³ This tradition is present in the poem in the form of echoes of Giordano Bruno's *De Gli Eroici Furori*

(Smith 85), but Marvell's enigmatic lyric also arguably contains allusions to another Christian-Platonic-hermetic text, another eclectic piece which to my knowledge has not yet been identified as a potential source, namely Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici*. There are at least two 'echoes' of Browne's text which seem to be reverberating in Marvell's poem. The first is the striking analogy between the image of the rock in Stanza VII and the frontispiece of the early editions of Browne's work, which depicts a figure falling from a rock into a rough sea, caught (and saved) by a hand reaching down from the clouds. The second, which I would like to concentrate on, occurs in the fifth stanza of Marvell's poem and relates to Browne's vision of man. A longer passage from *Religio Medici* is worth quoting here. After enthusing at some length about the perfection of Angels, Browne compares their existence with that of man, reflecting on people's 'in-between' status in the scheme of creation:

These [the Angels] are certainly the Magisterial and master pieces of the Creator, ... the best part of nothing, actually existing, what we are but in *hopes* and probabilitie, we are only that amphibious piece betweene corporall and spirituall essence, that middle form that linkes those two together, and makes good the method of God and nature, that jumps not from extreames, but unites the incompatible distances by some middle and participating natures; that we are *the breath* and similitude of God, it is indisputable, and upon record of holy Scripture, ... thus is man that great and true *Amphibium*, whose nature is disposed to live not onely like other creatures in divers elements, but in divided and distinguished worlds. (103, emphasis mine).

The words *hopes*, *breath* and *Amphibium* are also woven into the fifth stanza of *The Unfortunate Lover*; where they appear in the same order as in the passage cited above. The use of common words like *hope* or *breath* might be considered coincidental and unconnected to *Religio Medici*, but the unusual simile of the Amphibium suggests strongly that this stanza is indebted to Browne. Interestingly, the status of art is likewise examined by Browne, who argues that "Art is the perfection of Nature" and presents God as "an excellent Artist." But this is where the similarities between Browne's work and Marvell's puzzling lyric end. If Marvell's poem about the lover's struggle with fierce nature invokes Browne's serene vision of humanity, it only does so in order to challenge it; in a pattern similar to the way the Horatian ideal becomes subverted in *The Last Instructions*. Stanza V in Marvell's poem seems to be a pessimistic counterpart to Browne's text:

They fed him up with hopes and air,
Which soon digested to despair;
And as one corm'rant fed him, still
Another on his heart did bill.

Thus while they famish him, and feast,
he both consumed, and increased:
And languished with doubtful breath,
Th'amphibium of Life and Death. (ll. 33–40)

Here, the “hopes” are “digested” or transformed into despair, and God’s life-giving “breath” in man is “doubtful,” i.e. too faint. Whereas Browne is fairly placid about man’s amphibious condition, Marvell emphasises the suffering and strife brought about by man’s “in-betweenness.” The “poor lover” is not a link in the Great Chain of Being – he is tossed back and forth between the extremes of hope and despair or life and death. If anything, the end-stress patterns and the rhyming scheme of the poem give prominence to the second element in each pairing, i.e. to “despair” and “Death.”

Marvell’s more pessimistic concept of the human condition is connected with the way his poem reworks the Neoplatonic concept of art. In the poem’s allegorical spectacle, the lover is the addressee of the glorifying vision, and at the same time the lead actor in the performance, a structure which is also typical in Stuart masques. Given the similarities between the spectacle contained in Marvell’s lyric and the masque, we might expect the poem to exhibit a similar elevating or transforming power. In this case, however, the lover does not get to enjoy the harmony and splendour that properly characterises a masque. Instead, he is tossed, as if by mistake, into a topsy-turvy, out of control world of an anti-masque (this is a mistake, because a noble masquer would have been out of place in an anti-masque, which was the preserve of professional actors). In this spectacle the raging elements are not miraculously dispersed by a magical trick of stage machinery, and the lover is trapped in a series of scenes which involve conflicted opposites. This is where the universal, philosophical reading of the poem intersects with the political readings of those critics who see the suffering lover as an allegorical vision of Charles I, the martyr king: Marvell’s poem might be seen as an allegorical record of the king’s last ‘performance,’ the ‘last masque’ in which he was the main actor, and which actually happened to take place in front of the Banqueting House. However, Marvell’s ‘spectacle of blood’ differs from a typical Stuart masque. Unlike the flesh and blood kings or queens presiding over such spectacles, who were believed to be endowed with the magical or miraculous ability to restore order and peace, both Charles I and the lover-king of the poem prove conspicuously unable to muster comparable powers and quell the anti-masque of civil war. The only miraculous effect of Charles’s suffering is that it turns the king into an icon, removing him from the harsh reality of politics into the fiction of royal iconography. But in Marvell’s poem this iconography is unable to transform reality; the poem creates an ideal which is clearly identified as fictional – idealised monarchy of

a courtly masque, it seems to argue, properly belongs in the realm of fiction. If we can consider the lover's transformation into a heraldic device as an artistically induced transcendence of sorts, this is an act of sublimation where art is not so much a catalyst of the process as merely the locus where the metamorphosis takes place, while the world of warring elements remains unaffected by the magical transformation. The final couplet of the poem, which makes the lover-king 'rule' in nothing but the realm of heroic legend, may be nostalgic and ironic in equal measure. Irreversibly shattered on the scaffold raised in front of the Banqueting House, the belief in the traditional iconographic workings of royal masques found its paradoxical epilogue in Marvell's poem.

It would seem that the process of demythologising the monarchy which Paul Hammond identifies in Restoration discourse is already discernible in some of Marvell's earlier lyrics in the way they question courtly iconography. "The mythology of Stuart kingship," Hammond writes, "is revealed as a mythology, an ideological assertion which seeks to persuade rather than a declarative discourse which reveals what God has ordained" (16). A similar awareness of the purely fictional nature of the royal myth is present even in those of Marvell's lyrics which are on the face of it indebted to traditional courtly iconography. The ways in which those pre-Restoration poems demythologise the monarchy or expose the deterioration of art (especially courtly art) are still very subtle and equivocal, but unmistakable. In Marvell's Restoration satires, those early attempts at questioning monarchic myth-making turn into an open critique of the court and its king. Paradoxically, Marvell adopts traditional courtly art forms as one of his devices for exposing the vices of the main protagonists. The subversion works by replacing the process of sublimation and idealisation present in the Neoplatonic concept of art with the reverse process of materialisation which emphasises the coarseness of physical reality.

Anne Rosalind Jones has some interesting comments on the oscillation between those two opposite processes. In her analysis of a painting by Velázquez known as *The Spinners* or *The Fable of Arachne*, Jones points out how the two titles of the painting refer to the two separate spheres revealed in the picture:

The two titles (and subjects of the painting) name the process by which spun, woven, and stitched objects – objects belonging to material culture in its most literal sense – have been the site of an ideological division: on the one hand, "meaningless" manual labour; on the other, the elevated world ... of interpretation. The titles of the painting thus represent the process through which a physical substance – the wool yarn produced by women's labour – and the object made from it – a tapestry – can be dematerialised into transcendent symbols. (189)

Those of Marvell's satires which exploit the *topos* of visual art involve a reverse process: we are either dealing with a work of art which reveals the material reality without transforming it into a transcendent symbol, or a work of art itself is presented as nothing more than a physical object. The first type of materialisation can be found in *The Last Instructions to a Painter*, the second in the two satires inspired by the erection of two equestrian statues, one representing King Charles II, the other King Charles I.

The broad canvas designed by the poet in *The Last Instructions* is not meant to mythologise the court through any of the fashionable affected postures. Rather than elevating, the picture degrades its 'collective' sitter by paying indecorous attention to the carnal. Paul Hammond suggests that this breaking of decorum in the Restoration satires might have been prompted by the king himself:

[Charles II] preferred an informal style, and was often to be seen around Whitehall, in the royal parks and at the theatre. Subject to his subjects' gaze, Charles showed little interest in controlling public opinion through forms of spectacle which would display an iconic majesty (20).

Moreover, as Hammond goes on to add, "the openness with which Charles conducted his sexual affairs gave a new significance to the idea of the king's body as an object of public interest" (20–21). In Marvell's satire, however, the focus is not so much on the king as on the carnality and promiscuity of his courtiers. Marvell's use of what Barbara Riebling calls "a powerful rhetoric of sexual insult" (137) may have various functions in the poem. Firstly, it may be treated as a literal critique of the debauchery going on in the royal bed and at court generally. Secondly, when interpreted as a dominant metaphor, it may represent, as Riebling claims, "the country's domestic and international plight by linking abuses of sexual power with abuses of political power and a collapse of gender norms with a collapse of political norms" (138). Finally, if we focus on the aesthetics of the 'painting' created by the poet and the painter, the images of carnal corruption can be treated as one of Marvell's techniques aimed at deconstructing royal iconography.

The vulgar voyeuristic gaze is just one aspect of Marvell's unflattering focus on the carnal. The poem also uses another technique, which might be described as an empirical examination. The king and his court become the object of close, scientific scrutiny which reveals various diseases in the 'body politic' (as often as not venereal ones). This empirical technique is avowed in the final address to the king. The poet no longer claims to be an artist trying to paint a picture of the state (with the help of his partner the painter), but compares himself to an astronomer discovering spots on the sun, and to a physician who diagnoses a disease and hopes to cure his king:

So his bold tube man to the sun applied,
And spots unknown to the bright star described;
Showed they obscure him, while too near they please
And seem his courtiers, are but his disease.(ll. 949–952)

This passage, which toys with the unmistakable symbol of royal power, is typical of the way the poem oscillates between the iconic and the empirical. It seems to echo Milton's description of Satan landing on the sun:

There lands the fiend, a spot like which perhaps
Astronomer in the sun's lucent orb
Through his glazed optic tube yet never saw. (III. 588–590)

This literary analogy confirms that the sunspots in Marvell's poem can be legitimately interpreted as symptoms of sin and corruption. Moreover, the spots in Milton as well as in Marvell are not the intrinsic property of the Sun. What seems even more interesting is the fact that in Milton's text the astronomical simile does not destroy the mythical picture of the "golden sun," which is "in splendour likest heaven" and which "with gentle penetration, though unseen, / Shoots invisible virtue even to the deep." On the other hand, in Marvell's address to the king the sun is an object of astronomical examination first – it is only later that the poet invokes the more traditional image of the sun as a symbol of kingship. This juxtaposition of empirical examination and symbolic representation suggests a new analogy between the sun and the king: just as the sun can be subject to scrutiny from astronomers, so the king, the 'sun of our world,' may be carefully inspected by a daring poet and the public.⁴ Thus, the task of Marvell's Muse is to draw a picture of the court which brings its 'spots to light' rather than paint an idealised image of the world on its canvas.

Although material reality in *The Last Instructions to a Painter* is made out to be too gross to be sublimated by art, the poem does not deny that the picture has a corrective or reformatory role to play:

So thou and I, dear painter, represent
In quick effigy, others' faults, and feign
By making them ridiculous, to restrain. (ll. 390–392)

Such claims of the reforming effects of art are, nevertheless, rejected in two later satires by Marvell, *The Statue in Stocks-Market* and *The Statue at Charing Cross*, where art is denied any aesthetic value and becomes relegated to the status of a mere physical object. Such a reductive approach to art inevitably reduces to objects of public scorn the two monarchs depicted in the equestrian statues. The two satires are examples of Marvell's subversion of the traditional correspondence between the monarch and his iconic representation at his most sardonic. With a twist similar to that involved in

the distortion of the sun-king analogy, the poet tells us that the derision provoked by the king's likeness, must also be directed at his royal person. Erected in a marketplace, the statues of the ruling monarch and his father have been dragged into the sphere of mercantile exchange, vulgar taste and low-brow entertainment. Although the two satires relate to two different monarchs, both exploit similar clusters of images. The king becomes associated with a low-brow type of popular entertainment: an Italian puppet-play, *commedia dell'arte*, and a masquerade (rather than a masque). In fact, a number of images suggest that the statue and the king himself can be treated as vendible objects:

But a market, they say, does suit the king well,
Who the Parliament buys and revenues does sell,
And others to make the similitude hold
Say his majesty himself is bought too and sold.
(*The Statue in Stocks-Market*, ll. 21–24)

Both satires use words which involve monetary associations: *gold*, *spankers*, *guineas*, *token*, *price* etc. The image of King Charles I on a coin, supposedly a guarantee of its value, is invoked in Marvell's poem to cheapen the king ("the old king on horseback is but a half crown").

However, what seems most surprising about Marvell's use of the marketplace imagery in the two satires is the fact that it is applied both to King Charles II and to his father Charles I. The degrading associations, though arguably justified in the case of Charles II given his notoriously informal and indecorous conduct, become frankly puzzling in the satire on *The Statue at Charing Cross* – especially given the poem's allegation that Charles I was interested in low farce, which would properly have applied to Charles II. We can only understand why Marvell puts the two monarchs on an equal footing if we treat the two satires not so much as critiques of two distinct royal personages but as a more generalised attack on traditional royal iconography, an exposure of its inability to glorify the king and heighten the status of monarchy:

For the graver's at work to reform him thus long.
But alas! He will never arrive at his end,
For 'tis such a king as no chisel can mend
(*The Statue in Stocks-Market*, ll. 54–56)

Granted, the king is beyond remedy or improvement – but the chisel, too has lost its capacity to mend.

The examples discussed in this paper show that the disbelief in the myth-making power of art shown in Marvell's Restoration poems did not emerge suddenly. An ironic detachment from the Neoplatonic concept of art is

already present in Marvell's earlier lyrics. The gradual change in the way Marvell employed the *topos* may have been produced by both the political and the philosophical transformations of the second half of the seventeenth century. The way royal iconography is treated in Marvell's poetry may also have been influenced by the changing concept of sovereignty. Hammond points especially to what he calls the 'two scandals' that changed the notion of the king's two bodies: the first was the execution of King Charles I, the second was his son's promiscuity (13). Combined with the growing interest in experimental science replacing Renaissance Neoplatonic and hermetic discourses, this led Marvell to dispel the myth of sublimation in his satirical verse. In his Restoration satires, idealising art is shown as being locked in a losing struggle with the coarse canvas of political reality and the corrupt sphere of the corporeal.

NOTES

¹ All quotations from Marvell's poems are from *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Nigel Smith, Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2003.

² Charles H. Hinnant's classic analysis of the poem may serve as an example.

³ Vaughn Hart observes that "the magician, and alchemist in particular, was held in occult philosophy to possess the power to connect earthly things with their archetypal forms, within the realm of Ideas As an aspect of this, for the Platonist the artist's creation of architecture, painting, and music represented a parallel attempt to transform the lower, earthly world into this higher, angelic world of Platonic perfection" (12).

⁴ Again Marvell seems to introduce a literary allusion (this time to Milton) in order to challenge the assumptions and ideals of his literary predecessors, teasing the echoes that he has himself produced. Here he echoes Milton's voice in order to rework ironically the traditional analogy between the macrocosm and the body politic.

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THOMAS DEKKER AND THE SPECTRE OF UNDERWORLD JARGON

Abstract

My paper seeks to locate Thomas Dekker's handling of underworld jargon at the interface of oral and literary cultures. The paper briefly looks at a play co-authored by Dekker and then examines two "coney-catching pamphlets" by him to see how he tries to appropriate *cant* or criminal lingo (necessarily an oral system) as an aesthetic/commercial programme. In these two tracts (namely, *The Bellman of London*, 1608; *Lantern and Candlelight*, 1608) Dekker makes an exposé of the jargon used by criminals (with regard to their professional trappings, hierarchies, modus operandi, division of labour) and exploits it as a trope of radical alienation. The elusiveness and ephemerality of the spoken word here reinforce the mobility and deceit culturally associated with the thieves and vagabonds – so that the authorial function of *capturing cant* (whose revelatory status is insistently sensationalized) through the intrusive technologies of alphabet and print parallels the dominant culture's project of in-scribing and colonizing its non-conforming other. Using later theorization of orality, the paper will show how the media of writing and print distance the threat inherent in *cant* and enable its cultural surveillance and aesthetic appraisal.

In a memorable scene of Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker's play *The Roaring Girl; or, Moll Cutpurse* (1611), the eponymous protagonist talks in *cant* (the jargon of the underworld) with two low-life characters named Trapdoor and Tearcat. This is meant to amuse her new upper-class acquaintances – Jack Dapper, Sir Beauteous Ganymede, and Sir Thomas Noland. The character was based on the real-life, contemporary figure of Mary Frith (c. 1584–1659) who donned male garb and managed a racket of thieves and prostitutes in London. The play projects her as endorsing and safeguarding the hegemonic norms of class, gender, and sexuality in her own eccentric manner. In the same vein, her agency neutralizes the menace of

cant within the fictional economy of the play and converts it into a device for entertainment. Hence her rendition of a canting song (10.221–34) is one of the thematic high points of the play.¹

The play at this point registers the pull of two conflicting forces (both of which are symbolized by cant) – the deviousness of the criminal milieu on the one hand and the attractiveness of their way of life on the other. The same tension between moralistic distaste and aesthetic engagement informs Thomas Dekker’s own rogue tracts which he used for the play (Stafford 331). A song from Thomas Dekker’s *Lantern and Candlelight* may be quoted in full, along with the author’s own translation, to show its links with the one sung by Moll Cutpurse:

The ruffian cly the nab of the Harman beck,
If we maund pannam, lap or Ruf- peck
Or poplars of yarum. He cuts, “Bing to the Ruffmans!”
Or else he swears by the lightmans
To put our stamps in the harmans.
The Ruffian cly the ghost of the Harman beck!
If we heave a booth we cly the jerk!
If we Niggle, or mill a bousing Ken,
Or nip a bung that has but a win,
Or dup the gigger of a Country cofe’s Ken,
To the queer cuffin we bing
And then to the queer Ken to scour the Cramp-ring,
And then to be Trin’d on the Chats, in the lightmans,
The Bube and Ruffian cly the Harman beck and Harmans.

Thus Englished.

The Devil take the Constable’s head,
If we beg Bacon, Buttermilk or Bread,
Or Pottage, “To the hedge!” he bids us hie,
Or swears (by this light) [in] the Stocks we shall lie.
The Devil haunt the Constable’s ghost,
If we rob but a Booth, we are whipped at a post
If an Alehouse we rob, or be [taken] with a whore,
Or cut a purse that has just a penny and no more,
Or come but stealing in at a gentleman’s door,
To the Justice straight we go,
And then to the Jail to be shackled. And so
To be hang’d on the gallows [in] th’daytime: the pox
And the Devil take the Constable and his Stock. (*Lantern and Candlelight*, 220–221)

Theatre is situated at the intersection of oral and literary, immediate and distanced, embodied and disembodied performances. The boy-actress playing Moll would transmit cant orally to the playgoers, and it would perhaps capture traces of the original oral valences of canting – valences reinforced by

the liminality of the theatre and the dubious repute of the acting profession in early modern London. On one level, in Dekker's rogue tracts (namely, *The Bellman of London*, and *Lantern and Candlelight*, which I would like to look at in this essay), the cautionary and authoritarian programme of capturing cant seems to be symbolized by the distancing, de-personalizing medium of the printed word.² But such a project ultimately becomes an alibi for tapping the carnivalesque potentials of the canting crew.

In *The Bellman of London* the narrator (identifiable with Dekker himself) visits the countryside and bumps into a conclave of the rogues and beggars of the realm. He spies on the leader of the rogues as the latter instructs a novice. This is how the narrator comes to learn of the nineteen ranks for men among the regiments of criminals – beginning with *uprightmen* (truncheon-wielding sturdy beggars), *rufflers* (defecting soldiers and serving-men), and *anglers* (rod-wielding pilferers), and ending with *jackmen* (forgers of licences), *patricoes* (unauthorized priests) and *kinchin coes* (vagabond boy children). There are further seven ranks for women, from *autem morts* (married vagabond women), *bawdy-baskets* (false haberdashers) to *kinchin morts* (vagabond baby-girls) (*The Bellman of London*, 82–90; spelling for early modern texts standardized throughout). The hostess of the inn, where the conference takes place, betrays to the narrator greater details about the various rogues (*The Bellman of London*, 92–112). The narrator runs back to the city in a righteous rage and meets the Bellman, who is a minor keeper of the law guarding the streets at night with a lantern and a bell. The latter supplies more information about thieves and conmen. The Bellman groups the professional usages of ten different types of swindlers under fancy heads. For example, *Cheating Law* governs dicing, *Barnard's Law* governs cards, *Vincent's Law* governs bowling, the *Black Art* governs the picking of locks, and so on (*The Bellman of London*, 116–161). He further mentions five ingenious stratagems under the canting appellations of *horse-coursing*, *carrying of stones*, *fawning*, *foal-taking* and *spoon-meat* (*The Bellman of London*, 161–167). In each case, he provides the various code words connected with the ploy.

It becomes clear that Dekker's tract tries to interpellate the canting rogues only as the object of a knowledge system to which their own agency or volition is immaterial. Its intrusive gaze does not try to recuperate the oral practices/traditions in order to empower the marginalized and displaced (as is the central strategy of most post-Enlightenment or identitarian polemics in the present world). Rather, Dekker's tract seems to revel in the exercise of exposing the counter-culture, which in fact reinforces the stereotypes about it and transfixes it in a perpetual otherness. Cant, because of its purported unintelligibility, becomes a conspicuous marker of exoticism.

In Philip Massinger's *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* (first produced in 1625), Wellborn, a prodigal, accuses an alehouse keeper named Tapwell of

entertaining “whores and canters” (1.1.62). One editor of the play has glossed the word “canter” as signifying just “criminals.” Likewise, S. R. (probably Samuel Rid) in the pamphlet *Martin Markall, The Beadle of Bridewell* (1610) asserts, “If you can cant, you will never work” (394). The critic Bryan Reynolds seconds this sentiment as he opines, “Essentially, any proficient speaker of cant, regardless of whether he or she had ever perpetrated a crime, was a verifiable member of criminal culture” (89). This substantiates the criminal status of cant as entrenched in the popular imaginary. In the first pamphlet Dekker mentions cant only in passing and implies it to be the specialized jargon of the underworld, but in *Lantern and Candlelight* he gives it the status of a full-fledged language – thus identifying its speakers as a separate community or even *nation*. In the opening chapter, which is entirely about cant, he offers an etymology for the word (*Lantern and Candlelight*, 217), goes on to discuss how a few canting terms are formed (217–218) and then provides a canter’s dictionary (219–220).

In “O per se — O,” the author learns from a *clapperdudgeon* or “beggar born,” they are sworn never to disclose their skill in canting to any householder, for, if they do so, the other *maunderers* or “rogues” *mill* [i.e., “kill”] them (286). The pamphlets claim to do a great service by teaching the public to cant, and making sure that people are not duped by the canters. Thomas Harman, a wealthy Kentish esquire and civic official adopted the same policing regimen in his pioneering cony-catching pamphlet, *A Caveat or Warning for Common Cursitors Vulgarly Called Vagabonds* (1566). The persona of the bellman, a night-watchman, which is deployed in the two pamphlets by Dekker, emblemizes the policing gaze that the tracts profess to enact – even if the appeal to law is only meant to legitimate the choice of subject whose exoticism and carnivalesque potentials made it lucrative in the popular print market.

As is the case with oral traditions in general, meaning in cant may be seen as context-bound and restricted to the immediate instant of utterance.³ Dekker’s tracts defuse the original purpose of the *cryptolect* by trying to fix the enunciation independent of context and universalize it. The intervening technologies rob the argot of its indecipherability and secrecy, enable its cultural surveillance, and even exploit it as fodder for the burgeoning print market. The logic underlying the cony-catching pamphlets’ claim to communal service is that cant in its oral avatar is dangerous and avoidable, but through writing and print it can safely warn the public about the dangers embodied by the canting crew. The intervening media of writing and print in fact distance the threat inherent in cant by eliminating/disrupting the original context where it is meant to be embodied by criminals and deployed in criminal performance.

It is by now a post-colonial commonplace that Christian missionaries tried to establish the superiority of their religion to those of several indigenous oral cultures by emphasizing the permanence and tangibility of the printed Word. Comparably, the cony-catching pamphlets capitalize on the technologies of alphabet and print in order to justify their reliability, and, by contrast, mark the oral practice of canting as illegitimate. In the case of cant, the impermanence and elusiveness of the spoken word reinforce the sense of peripateticism and treachery traditionally associated with thieves and vagabonds. The material parameters of orality in point of fact conduce to the clandestine interests of a criminal milieu, because they ensure that for a particular message the originator and the recipient bodily share the same location in time as well as space, and that the message cannot be disclosed without the active volition or knowledge of its bearer. As against this, a written message can travel when its physical substrate (e.g. the MS scroll, the broadsheet, the book bearing the writing) is transmitted through space and time, and it does not require an embodied and conscious human bearer or preserver. As such, the function of recording cant, which is keenly advertised by these pamphlets, tends to allegorize the dominant culture's project of monitoring and *colonizing* its non-conforming other.⁴

However, the translational *noise* or error attendant upon the project of capturing cant cannot be measured with any degree of certainty. It is also a relevant question, how sincerely the pamphleteers themselves tried to record actual performances of cant. D. F. McKenzie illustrates a classic case of erroneous communication occasioned by the encounter between a literate culture and a non-literate one:

When one early [English] traveller [in New Zealand] recorded what he thought he heard as the Maori word for a paradise duck, he wrote *pooduggghiedigghie* (for *putangitangi*) and for the fantail *diggowaghwagh* (for *piwakawaka*), neither of which forms translates visually the aural beauty of the originals. The place-name *Hokianga* was rendered *Showkianga*, *Sukyanna*, *Jokeeangar*, *Chokahanga*. Another village, *Kerikeri*, was heard and rendered as *Kiddeekiddee*, *Muketu* as *Muckeytoo*. Those spellings are not only aurally inefficient, but to the English eye they appear crude and culturally primitive, thus reinforcing other such attitudes. (191)

The canting crew did not form as pristine and unadulterated an oral culture as the Maori before colonization. But canting in the original situation would seek to operate outside the bounds of literacy. It made good sense for the pamphleteers to sensationalize and demonize the canters, perhaps at the cost of authenticity, because it would make them more attractive for the voyeuristic reading public.

Error creeps into the recording of cant through other ways, too. Samuel Rid in *Martin Markall* directly finds faults with Dekker's Englishing of cant,

denounces his dictionary as outdated, and draws up a new, improved one with about 130 entries. Against the word *chates* found in Dekker's dictionary, he adds the following note:

Here he mistakes both the simple word, because he so found it printed, not knowing the true original thereof, and also in the compound. As for *chates* it should be *cheats*, which word is used generally for things, as, *Tip me that cheat*, give me that thing; so that if you will make a word for the gallows, you must put thereto this word, *trining*, which signifies hanging; and so *trining-cheat* is as much to say 'hanging things,' or the gallows, and not *chates*. (407)

Needless to say, the originality or authenticity of Dekker's material hardly bears close and sustained scrutiny. In fact, Bayman (1) holds the entire sub-genre of the cony-catching pamphlet as a fraud that cashed in upon a false alarm for petty mercenary gains.

Although Dekker's tracts position themselves as cautionary manuals devoted to national safety, it is not difficult to see through their patriotism and homiletic zeal. The dedication to the nation in *Lantern and Candlelight* has a peroration couched in a flamboyant military metaphor:

Howsoever it be struck, or whosoever gives the first blow, the victory depends upon the valor often that are the *Wings* to the Bel-man's army; for which conquest he is in hope you will valiantly fight, sithence the quarrel is against the head of Monstrous Abuses, and the blows which you must give are in defence of *Law, Justice, Order, Ceremony, Religion, Peace*, and that Honorable title of *Goodness*. (214)

The rhetorical copiousness and histrionic stance of the pronouncement give away the engrained commercial agenda. Furthermore, Dekker was dealing with a topic that was anything but novel among the hack-writers and had already engendered a thriving sub-genre named the "cony-catching pamphlet."⁵

As Aydelotte (130-31) observes, much of the description of the underworld hierarchy in *The Bellman of London* is lifted from Harman's *A Caveat* (1566), as is also the case with the canting dictionary of the second tract. Dekker cribs wholesale or paraphrases the accounts of Sacking Law and Barnard's Law from Robert Greene's *A Notable Discovery* (1591), and borrows several details of the underworld from Greene's *Second Part of Cony-Catching* (1592) and Samuel Rowlands's *Greene's Ghost Haunting Cony-Catchers* (1602). Thus canting was already embedded in, and mediated by, a literary tradition, and Dekker did not have to tap first-hand resources. The co-optation of cant by the official culture is further instantiated by its liberal use in several Jacobean and Caroline plays. Besides the case of *The Roaring Girl* that we have looked at, the canting life would be made much of in Richard Brome's *A Jovial Crew, or The Merry Beggars* (1641), Francis

Beaumont, John Fletcher, and Philip Massinger's *The Beggar's Bush* (published 1647), and more importantly, Ben Jonson's *A Masque of the Gypsies Metamorphosed*, which was performed thrice before King James I in 1621 (West).

More fascinating still, Dekker's chapter called "O per se — O" has a persona who persistently finds faults with the Bellman. Before adding four long canting songs at the end of the chapter, the persona asserts that they are "not feigned or composed as those of the Bellman's were out of his own brain, but by canters themselves and sung at their meetings" (300). After furnishing his dictionary, Dekker had actually commented, "And thus have I builded up a little mint where you may coin words for your pleasure" (*Lantern and Candlelight*, 220). The trope of minting betrays the author's own manufacturing potential. It also gestures towards the possibility that the song quoted above may be a recycled and identikit, if not entirely fictitious, construct — rather than an authentic testament of the canting sub-culture.

Thus Dekker seems to deal not only in cant, but in the same currency of dissimulation and double-dealing as the rogues and vagabonds whom he piously professes to unmask. Besides, it must needs be recalled that the cony-catcher and the hack-writer of the cony-catching pamphlet are by definition united by "an understanding of their own intense estatelessness" (Manley 417). More intriguingly, the prospective victim of the former most often doubled as the target audience of the latter. These facts would be turned into account by Robert Greene's contributions to the sub-genre, considered to be aesthetically the best of their kind.

Stallybrass and White spell out some of the carnivalesque associations of the rogues that would be especially important for the marketability of the rogue tracts: "[i]dleness, dissipation, disorder, debauchery: these are the demonized terms for the topology which Bakhtin celebrated, from the perspective of the low, as the grotesque" (34). One may add to the list looseness of the tongue on an orgiastic scale, and defiance of the standard, official language. Within such a frame of reference, orality, which implies an open mouth, also conjures up the openness of other bodily orifices together with sexual incontinence. However, it must be recollected that canting and the chicanery associated with it do not constitute a temporary, ritualistic performance as in carnival, but are a way of life for a group of people. Moreover, cant does not belong solely to a sybaritic excess of orality as recorded in Moll Cutpurse's song or those in Dekker's tracts. It served the practical, day-to-day necessities of thieves and cozeners. The canting life can appear to be enticingly topsy-turvy only for the distanced observers, just as orality appears as a welcome site for political/aesthetic re-negotiation and anamnesis for a culture satiated with the written and the printed word. Whether or not canting and the canters reinforce the exploitative,

inegalitarian status quo, their material reality and political valence (however diffuse and ambiguous) should not be ignored in favour of the aesthetic imperative of their representation.

Stephen Greenblatt has famously read Harman's tract as exemplifying the strategy of containment whereby agents of the political establishment "record" subversive voices only in order to achieve their co-optation within the hegemonic setup (37–39). This reading, however attractive, does not explain why Harman's tract engendered so many derivatives or emulations, and why the rogues (or their fictional simulacra) assume a life of their own undercutting the magisterial and moralizing idiom of the cony-catching pamphlets in which they are represented. If the spectre of cant is evoked only to be tamed and exorcized, the project is a fraught and incomplete one with ramifications far beyond a neat scheme of surveillance and control.

After surveying Renaissance literature's obsessive concern with the "sins the tongue," Carla Mazzio recognizes the phenomenon as symptomatic of early modern Europe's nostalgic attachment to orality. According to her,

The invocation of the mobile and independent tongue (the agent of speech) in written texts and contexts ... constitutes less what Walter Ong has termed "*residual* orality," the rhetorical traces and aftermaths of an oral culture, but an *aggressive* orality, an anxious response to the unsettling dispersion of languages and identities in an increasingly textual culture, a response to the movement of representation away from the body. Indeed, the circulation of multiple fabrications of tongue in fashion, on bodies, out of place, out of context, proliferate at a time when the tongue is in many senses "out of office." The tongue, paradoxically enough, seems to matter more and more when its relation to the making and destruction of culture seems to matter less and less. (74)

Similarly, the invocation of the canting menace in the rogue tracts is a means of according more power to an oral phenomenon than it actually commanded. In a culture that is yet to be reconciled with the onslaught of print, the jargon of the underworld assumes a new liberatory significance. The project of capturing cant in print is not just meant to be an extension of the policing power of technology; it is also a backhanded tribute to the vitality of an elusive oral culture. Cant emblemizes the resilience and inveterate attractiveness of the rogues' ways and projects the possibilities of a vibrant alterity (real or imaginary). Hence the enduring political and aesthetic appeal of the canting tracts. Whatever their motive, the tracts (including Dekker's) afford serviceable material for writing alternative, non-hegemonic histories since they introduce (at least attenuated) traces of contestatory voices into the public discourse, and point towards the contours of marginalized subjectivities. More importantly, they instantiate the multiple ways in which the dominant culture imagines and engages with its demonic other.

NOTES

¹ The translation of the song, as provided by Kahn in her edition of the play, goes as follows: “A quart pot of good wine in an ale-house of London is better than a cloak, meat, buttermilk (or whey) or porridge which we steal in the country. O I would lie all the day, I would lie all the night, by the mass, under the woods (or bushes), by the stocks, and wear bad bolts (or fetters), and lie till a rogue lay with my wench, so my drunken head might quaff wine well. Away to the highway, let us be off, etc.”

² The full title of the first tract reads: “The Bellman of London: Bringing to Light the Most Notorious Villainies that are Now Practised in the Kingdom.” Published anonymously in March 1608, it saw four impressions in the same year. By October Dekker had produced its sequel, namely, “Lantern and Candlelight. Or The Bellman’s Second Night’s Walk.” In 1612 a twenty-fourth chapter called “O per se — O,” which may or may not be by Dekker, was appended to *Lantern and Candlelight*. Henceforth, it gave its name to the entire pamphlet.

³ E. D. Pendry’s edition treats “O per se — O” only as a subsidiary chapter of the second tract.

⁴ Walter J. Ong observes that, “[o]ral cultures tend to use concepts in situational, operational frames of reference that are minimally abstract in the sense that they remain close to the living human lifeworld” (42). Notably, Edward W. Said insists on the *worldliness* of writing or text and warns against unproblematically associating speech with circumstantial reality (33–34). Besides, Adrian Johns issues a caveat against the tendency to equate print with the regularization of meaning when he firmly maintains, “A synthetic concept of print culture can do little to accommodate a multiplicity of readings.” But on a more pragmatic level, the dichotomy between orality and writing may be helpful in the study of cant and its printed avatar.

⁵ Bryan Reynolds suggests that the “[o]fficial culture sought to safeguard its power by recording, co-opting, and commodifying cant in legal documents and commercial culture” (68). This squares with Michel Foucault’s celebrated thesis that the institution of the author as the subject of discourse was invented in early modern Europe as a cultural defence against semantic proliferation. The anonymity/communality of cant as an oral system implies a status that is always already dispersed/dis-placed or place-less (hence ubiquitous), and therefore the localizing tendency of the individual author’s name seems to be an attractive aid to its (penal) control. But such simplifications may not neatly map onto the material conditions of the print market. Early modern English authorship might have been more a product of trade protectionism than of ideological control, prompted more by immediate mercenary impulses than by a deep-seated need for systemic surveillance (Loewenstein).

⁶ In early modern English slang, the “cony” (rabbit) is the dupe, and the “cony-catcher” is the swindler. Some writers of rogue tracts who “inspired” Dekker in his enterprise are Gilbert Walker (*A Manifest Detection of Diceplay*, 1552), John Awdeley (*The Fraternity of Vagabonds*, 1561), Thomas Harman (*A Caveat or Warning for Common Cursitors Vulgarly Called Vagabonds*, 1566), and above all, Robert Greene (*A Notable Discovery of Cozenage*, 1591; *The Second Part of Cony-catching*, 1592; *The Third and Last Part of Cony-catching*, 1592; *The Black Book’s Messenger*, 1592; *A Disputation Between a He Cony-catcher and a She Cony-catcher*, 1592). The pamphleteers often recycled the same material and amply plagiarized from each other (Kinney 54–55), so much so that an anonymous writer practically reprinted Harman’s tract in 1592 as his own *The Groundwork of Cony-catchers*.

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