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Barton Levi St. Armand

Emily Dickinson as a Regionalist: New England and Other Angles of Vision

I wish to dedicate this essay to my friend and colleague Professor Agnieszka Salska of the University of Łódź, in honor of her outstanding contributions to American Studies in general and to Emily Dickinson scholarship in particular. With great intelligence, energy, and good humor, she has preserved, presented, promoted, and tested critically the best my nation and my region have to offer. Long may she persevere.

Certainly by the start of this new millennium, Emily Dickinson has become recognized as a world-class poet. To borrow one of her own enigmatic terms, the "Circumference" of her fame is well established and still growing, But in spite of her present globalism, she is also a presence rooted in her time and place: specifically, the time and place of nineteenth-century New England. As a native New Englander myself, I would like to make an attempt at both understanding and following Dickinson in a contrarian way that is special to my own home region. In opposition to her Emersonian idea of ever-expanding circles of growth and development, I want to pursue what we still in New England news stories call "the local angle": that quirky regionalism that is perhaps best exemplified by simple, unadulterated Puritan stubbornness. Although Emily Dickinson confessed to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, her most revered literary friend, that "My Business is Circumference" (*Letters*, 2: 412) she also forthrightly told him that she "could not drop the Bells whose jingling cooled my Tramp –" (*Letters*, 2: 408) when he suggested that she try prose rather than poetry. In her next letter to him she admitted that "I marked a line in One Verse – because I met it after I made it – and never consciously touch a paint, mixed by another person." Yet she also stubbornly informed him, outdoing even Emerson in her fearsome self-reliance and sense of originality, that "I do not let it go, because it is mine" (*Letters*, 2: 415).

It is some of Dickinson's angles of vision that I want very briefly to explore now – angles of vision that counter the oft-discussed and still enigmatic idea of "Circumference" in her poetry. These angles, like the ones we study in high school Geometry classes, can be of many kinds, but I am particularly interested in what could be called her obtuse, oblique, and acute ones. The reality of a prickly, hedgehog-like Emily in some sense repels or mars the Emersonian cocoon of softening and spiraling rondure that has long

been spun around her work. What better way to puncture such critical balloons than with sharply angled arrows? In the following angular poem, Dickinson at first seems to be writing a regional manifesto, which on the surface may be taken as a little obtuse and chauvinistic – rather like Oliver Wendell Holmes's "Autocrat of the Breakfast Table" declaring that "Boston State-House is the hub of the solar system" (110). But here she does not employ Holmes's wheel-based metaphor any more than she diagrams Emerson's ever-evolving circles. As we shall see, there are some acute and even characteristically oblique angles hidden in this particular demonstration of her her Local Color theorem. Sometime "About late 1861," as her most recent editor Ralph Franklin dates it, Emily Dickinson wrote:

The Robin's my Criterion for Tune –
Because I grow – where Robins do –
But, were I Cuckoo born –
I'd swear by him –
The ode familiar – rules the Noon –
The Buttercup's, my whim for Bloom –
Because, we're Orchard sprung –
But, were I Britain born,
I'd Daisies spurn –

None but the Nut – October fit –
Because – through dropping it,
The Seasons flit – I'm taught –
Without the Snow's Tableau
Winter, were lie to me –
Because I see – New Englandly –
The Queen, discerns like me –
Provincially –
(Fr256)[1]

Like Emerson's famous essay "The American Scholar," which Holmes elsewhere likened to a declaration of American literary independence, at a first reading this poem strikes one as a bumptious and even narrow piece of New England Puritan stubbornness, an exercise in petty provincial dissent. But from another angle, Dickinson's target is not so much the great physical and intellectual circumference of the British empire in her

[1] Dickinson's poems are referred to by number according to Franklin's edition.

own day and its world-wide dominance – an empire on which supposedly the sun never set – but the goal of demonstrating that context on all occasions matters, whether in terms of huge congeries, large countries, or small counties. In short, she raises the lococentric and the bioregional to the level of the archetypal. If all politics is local, so is all culture. She is passionately loyal to her own sense of place because this sense of place has shaped her, and she would even spurn her own verse – in the form of "Daisies" – had she been "Britain born," since in her private mythology she often took on the role of an innocent and modest Daisy (St. Armand 81-82). One might also say that Dickinson assumes a kind of climatic determinism that is leveling as well as liberating. While she is fully at home with natively-grown buttercups and daisies, she is also queen of all she surveys, and so on a par with Queen Victoria, reminding us of New England Local Colorist Sarah Orne Jewett's poignant tale of a reclusive, backcountry woman who identifies with as well as acts like Victoria in a story entitled "The Queen's Twin." Dickinson, too, is the Queen's Twin, and just as the Queen's English sets the standard for her royal nation, so does Dickinson signal her imperturbable linguistic freedom of the will by creating the adjective "New Englandly" in order to describe her special angle of vision. Even to a native New Englander like me, this adverb is well-nigh impossible to pronounce correctly at a first looking or first reading. It always makes me pause, stop, and stumble at its obtuse construction; grammatically it literally sticks out like the proverbial sore thumb. I trip over it, and yet I think that Dickinson deliberately invents it exactly in order to assert the stubborn, hardscrabble character of New England itself, which will not yield to any English but its own. "New Englandly" is an indigestible and defiant word, somehow teetering on the brink of the too fey and attenuated modern adjective "New Englandy," which today is used often to describe something quaint, folksy and boutiquish having to do with the region. The fact is, however, that it is much easier to pronounce "New Englandy" than "New Englandly," because there is a natural tendency to experience the two *l*'s in the latter adverb as hurdles that have been placed too closely together for an easy and liquid jump of the tongue. Like the Puritan poet Edward Taylor, who in his famous Sacramental and Preparatory Meditations twisted and tormented language in order to convey his passionate adherence to doctrine, Dickinson presents us with a suddenly obtuse angle that disrupts and even stops dead the previous tuneful flow of *o* sounds she has built up at the beginning of the poem. There is an uncompromising New England fierceness, too, in her declaration that "Without the Snow's Tableau / Winter were lie to me –." The word "lie" fairly hisses out a scornful and Puritanical contempt for anything less than the absolute truth, while the final twice-told repetition of the pronoun "me," added to the "I" that sees, creates a kind of unholy trinity of imperial selfhood that demonstrates the final dominance of the poet and her New England way of

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looking at things. Her angle here is both leveling and elevating, reminding us of the perfect probity of another prickly New Englander, Henry David Thoreau, when he declares that "my spirit looks upward habitually at an elevated angle –" (6). By this linguistic strategy, Dickinson becomes a Queen and the Queen becomes a provincial, meekly following Dickinson's line of sight. Ironically, Victoria also becomes "subject" as well to a point of view that is part of what Allen Ginsberg called a submerged but potent "visionary awkward tradition in the U.S. Provinces (that extends up thru Sherwood Anderson and Bob Dylan)" (40). That is, Dickinson's idiosyncratic New England English prevails on her own home grounds, grounds that challenge conventional ways of looking as well as idiomatic ways of speaking. "And yet is the God the native of these bleak rocks" (490), Emerson writes in his essay "Experience," and it is to this native deity and its native speakers that Dickinson draws attention by making us actually experience a stubbornly rocky road of deliberately leveling and paradoxically elevating linguistic difficulty.

"Tell all the truth but tell it slant –" (Fr1263), Dickinson says in another justly famous poem, written on an angular fragment of stationery, and again it is my contention that her habit of peering at things from a startlingly different viewpoint can be attributed not only to the "given" of her natural eccentricity of genius but to her indigenous prickliness, conditioned by her economy of scarcity of expression as a native New Englander. If early reviewers of her poetry saw her as a so-called "New England Nun," appropriating the title of another famous Local Color tale of "sumptuous Destitution" (Fr1404) by Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, the premier New England regionalist of her time, it is because her tradition of dwelling in both an internal and an external wilderness links her not only with the American Puritans but with even more contemporary American explorers of desert places like Edward Abbey, Barry Lopez, and Gretel Erlich. Since I think the New England aspect of Dickinson's consciousness can be taken for granted, I would now like to focus more directly on her other angles of vision beyond the obtuse – that is, those angles that are oblique and acute. I use the idea of a deliberately "obtuse" angle, as in "The Robin's my Criterion for Tune," in a metaphorical rather than strictly geometrical sense, one defined by the *American Heritage Dictionary* as "slow to apprehend or perceive." From the same source I take "oblique angles" as being "indirect or evasive," and "acute angles" as "pointed," "critical," or "sharp."

Emily Dickinson has often been called a "sceneless" or "abstract" poet, but in my experience of her poetry there is a density to the lone landscapes of the soul that she depicts. Her psychic space, while it may be stretched or bent or deliberately roughened – as in the example of the adverb "New Englandly" again – still results in a remarkably fresh and luminous sense of vision, because the often harrowing angularity of the road she

takes both fortifies her and prods her on. As she declares in another poem, "Experience" itself is an "Angled Road" (Fr899). Dickinson skews her angle of vision a few more degrees from the perpendicular in the following poem, which I take to be an outstanding example of what I have called her "oblique" style:

The Angle of a Landscape –
That every time I wake –
Between my Curtain and the Wall
Opon an ample Crack –

Like a Venetian – waiting –
Accosts my open eye –
Is just a Bough of Apples –
Held Slanting, in the Sky –

The Pattern of a Chimney –
The Forehead of a Hill –
Sometimes – a Vane's Forefinger –
But that's – Occasional –

The Seasons – shift – my Picture –
Opon my Emerald Bough,
I wake – to find no – Emeralds –
Then – Diamonds – which the Snow

From Polar Caskets – fetched me –
The Chimney – and the Hill –
And just the Steeple's finger –
These – never stir at all –
(Fr578)

An initial puzzle a contemporary reader encounters in this hermetically secretive poem is surely the word "Opon," which Dickinson's latest editor Ralph Franklin claims was the poet's "form" of spelling "upon" in her manuscripts "until 1880" ("Introduction" 3). It takes a steadier and much sharper (if not more "angular") eye than mine to support this claim, for I see Dickinson closing the script of her *o*'s slightly more than her *u*'s, and so the "opon" hybrid that Franklin constructs appears to me to be an uneasy, unstable and

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unwarranted combination of "upon" and "open." Indeed, there is even more confusion possible in reading this poem if Dickinson intended her initial use of "opon" to in fact stand for "Open" rather than "Upon," since such a word use would tend to expand the oxymoronic idea of an "ample Crack" even more. But I think that all the tropes of the poem indicate a calculated narrowing down of vision rather than an expansive and circumferential opening up of it, so I will go with "Upon" rather than "Open" as the ultimate meaning of Franklin's ambiguous "Opon," especially since the word is repeated in line fourteen and so seems to be a firm part of the internal syntactical structure of the poem. Still, the strange emotional edge that the hybrid "Opon" connotes – that of leaning or relying partly on something and that of the something itself being partly open – conveys psychically the very obliqueness of Dickinson's angular point of view throughout. There is a dissonant, dreamlike, and surreal quality to her perception – a passivity but also a predatory feeling of lying in wait as well as of being stalked. This dreamlike or oneiric aspect occurs in the fact that Dickinson "wakes" to view the landscape when aroused from sleep, and that the landscape she beholds is repeated time after time, like a recurring vision or nightmare. Moreover, it exists only within the frame of an "ample Crack," where the adjective "ample" suggests an opening up or widening of something while the noun "Crack" implies a narrowing or restricting view of it.

Dickinson, who was fond of thinking of herself as nearly always diminutive in stature, telling Higginson that she was "small, like the wren" (*Letters*, 2: 411) for example, may simply mean that no matter how small this crack is, it is still big enough for her. But when we examine this image of the crack more minutely, we realize that it exists only "Between my Curtain and the Wall," not between her curtain and the window, to which it presumably allows very limited access. Therefore Dickinson's line of sight is doubly or even triply oblique, since before her line of sight even reaches the outside splinter of a landscape, it first has to pass through the crack and then through the window. She sees only in the most off-centered, astigmatic and liminal of ways, negotiating with great difficulty this severely constricted, and perhaps prison-like space. There is also the final and typical ambiguity that according to the deliberately equivocal syntax of the poem, she herself "wakes" between wall and curtain, certainly an uncomfortable and, I would suggest, potentially life-threatening position. So this "ample Crack" is resonantly sinister in a number of ways, not the least of which is because its intrinsic sharpness connects to the initial scalpel-like "Angle" that "accosts" the vulnerability of her "open eye." Angles and cracks become animate in the poem and take on a life of their own; Dickinson even compares the Angle to "A Venetian – waiting," ostensibly conjuring up the image of a "Venetian blind," which the *American Heritage Dictionary* defines as "A window screen consisting of a number of thin horizontal slats that may be raised and lowered with one

cord and all set at a desired angle with another cord, thus regulating the amount of light admitted." Surely Dickinson is not in control of her poetic perspective here, for it is other forces that pull and regulate in an almost theatrical manner the cords of the changing features of the landscape, while the the rigidity of the curtain and the wall actually set the viewing angle, which is not necessarily a "desired" one. In some respects, the poet is again largely an immobile prisoner of this preset and permanent obliqueness. It is no wonder that the manipulative character of venetian blinds, and the resulting slanted pattern of slats of light and shadow they projected on interior walls, like prison bars, became in the twentieth century a near visual archetype of that form of American cinema known as film noir.

Certainly Dickinson conveys some of the same anxiety and existential sense of aloneness, anxiety, and danger that plagues the private-eye anti-heroes of these mordant motion pictures, in which espionage, violence, and voyeurism are so often compacted. In addition, the waiting Venetian conjures up an exotic city of intrigue as well as one of watery beauty, where assassination was a frequent method of dealing with political enemies, and the traditional practice of anonymous denunciation was often used to betray one to the authorities, as Casanova's famous chapters in his autobiography on his sudden arrest and imprisonment by agents of the Venetian Inquisition prove. As Jan Morris reminds us, "To the early Victorians Venice was synonymous with tyranny and terror. The hushed and sudden methods of the Venetian security agencies, controlled by the Council of Ten and the Council of Three, cast a chill across all Europe, and have left behind them (now that we are quite safe from the strangler's cord) an enjoyable aftermath of shudder" (168-69). While Dickinson is not strangled or arrested, she is "accosted," though the result is ultimately more theater or opera than it is personal inhumation or premature burial.

But this favorite theme of authors like Edgar Allan Poe causes me to venture that there may be more than a hint of madness to her opening anxiety attack of being assaulted by a strangely animate New England landscape, especially if we consider how Gothic authors like Poe used the idea of a "crack" to symbolize an irreparable split in the psyche. As Poe's narrator writes of this kind of disjunction in the fabric of the doleful mansion in "The Fall of the House of Usher": "Perhaps the eye of a scrutinising observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a zigzag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn" (117). It is through this angular crack, becoming in the development of the tale more and more what Dickinson called "Ample," that the narrator actually views the apocalyptic fall of the house itself. "The radiance was that of the full, setting and blood-red moon," Poe writes at the end of his masterpiece,

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> which now shone vividly through that once barely-discernible fissure of which I have before spoken as extending from the roof of the building, in a zigzag direction, to the base. While I gazed, this fissure rapidly widened – there came a fierce breath of the whirlwind – the entire orb of the satellite burst at once upon my sight – my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder – there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters – and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the *"House of Usher*." (131)

No such cataclysmic scene ensues after Dickinson's waking, for the elemental hullabaloo in Poe is replaced by a much more sedate, metonymic composition, made up of apples, chimney, hill, and weather vane. One might assign each of these fragments a symbolic meaning, depending on the rubric chosen, so that the apples could be sin or temptation, or fulfillment and consummation, and so on down the emblematic line. But that would be to allegorize and so to control and to order these miscellaneous puzzle-pieces, for each one of these props, I think, stubbornly resists interpretation and is also surreally animate in its own way, just as Poe's House of Usher had its own agency and aura of living sentience. Thomas Wentworth Higginson once referred to Emily Dickinson as "my partially cracked poetess at Amherst" (*Letters*, 2: 570), meaning that he thought her slightly lunatic, and so we return to the question of whether the crack in this poem is in the observer or the observed. Everything is seen from an eccentric angular obliqueness, for rather than utilizing the horizontality of a venetian blind, Dickinson peers through the verticality of an off-centered fissure that is located between wall and curtain. She does not pull the cords to manipulate this slice of landscape, even though she calls it "my Curtain," for the curtain is more like that of a theater where a tableau is performed in front of a passive audience, reminding us once more of her "Venetian" situation, since Venice was also know as the prime city for the performance of European "Pageantries" (Morris 71-81). What remains active are the props themselves, and even the "Bough of Apples" is held "slanting," implying that someone or something poses this slice of nature in a certain way. Similarly, it is the pattern of the chimney and not the chimney itself that catches her eye, as did the arrangement of the stones for the last inhabitant of the House of Usher, since Poe writes that Roderick Usher's belief in "the sentience of all vegetable things" culminates in his customizing it to the building pattern of his own dwelling. "The conditions of the sentience," Poe's narrator tells us, "had been here, he imagined, fulfilled in the method of collocation of these stones – in the order of their arrangement, as well as in that of the many fungi which overspread them, and of the decayed trees which stood around – above all, in the long undisturbed endurance of this arrangement, and in its reduplication in the still waters of the tarn" (124).

Surely Dickinson's passive encounter with the sentient aspects of her slantwise landscape is not as darkly Gothic as Poe's, where the House of Usher is also "The Haunted Palace" of a head and brain actively disturbed by madness and monomania. But in Dickinson's armchair or rather bedridden poetic journey we do confront an anthropomorphic territory that includes the "forehead" of a hill, and the pointing of a Vane's "forefinger." Only later do we realize that the vane is attached to a steeple, which in Dickinson's Local Color New England landscape must be a church steeple pointing heavenward – toward God, if one believes, or toward an empty sky, if one doesn't (St. Armand 224). In Emily Dickinson's nineteenth century, the new science of Phrenology was a means of reading human character based on the physical features of the head – especially the brow or forehead, which was taken to be a prime indicator of intelligence. All of these landscape elements are therefore also hieroglyphics that have something to do with the very concept of reading itself. Once again, I would suggest that Dickinson is going back to the Puritan tradition of trying to read nature and history as a book filled with what Jonathan Edwards called "Images and Shadows of Divine Things." However, reading depends upon perspective, a fact that is attested to by the circumstance that seeing the Vane's "Forefinger" or horizontality only happens on "occasion," since the vane can disappear from her view almost entirely, depending on which way the wind blows.

In the last two stanzas of the poem, Dickinson becomes less the tentative observer than a sovereign Yankee princess who is dowered with the Emeralds of new Spring leaves and the winter Diamonds of ice by the ever-changing Seasons. She still remains passive, but now the scenery which she sees has become "My picture," and in spite of the fact that it is often shifted, she still retains ownership of a royal gallery of still-life masterpieces. Although her emeralds are snatched away, only to be replaced by possibly more precious (and pure) diamonds (while the vanished apples can perhaps be compared to rubies) the chill breath of Gothicism returns in the form of the "Polar Caskets" that are the receptacles of these dazzling gems. There is as well a final ambiguity in the placement of the phrase "fetched me," for while ostensibly it denotes the fact that the jewels are brought forward for Dickinson's inspection and enjoyment, one must also wonder if it is Dickinson herself who is being "fetched" by the Snow to lie in "Polar caskets." It is significant that the term "casket" became a preferred euphemism for the new, precious, and extravagant burial coffers – replacing the severe and serviceable Puritan wooden coffins – that were part of the panoply of the new Victorian Way of Death (St. Armand 66). Therefore, although it appears to be a nature poem, Dickinson's oblique lyric may deal, as in poems like "Safe in their alabaster chambers" (Fr124) and "Because I could not stop for Death" (Fr479) with the surreal landscape of mortality and what in another poem about dying she called "the Crystal Angle" of death itself (Fr759). Rather than

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waking between wall and curtain, she herself may be the object of a death ritual or "wake," defined by the *American Heritage Dictionary* as "A watch over the body of a deceased person before burial, sometimes accompanied by a festivity." Nothing at all stirs at the end of "The Angle of a Landscape," for what we see is literally a wintry freeze-frame of benumbed landscape components – a film noir study in black and white. The revelation that the vane's finger belongs to a steeple makes for a final conjunction of angles that point in two directions at the same time – both vertical and horizontal. The result is absolute stasis, and Dickinson's oblique point of view here may be that of so many of her deathbed poems, which result only in dull fade-outs and unresolved vectors.

Whereas Dickinson is in some sense stalked by the landscape and caught in the trap of her own angular point of view in this poem, in lyrics where she employs what I have called an acute or critically sharp angle, it is she who does the stalking. In *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, the contemporary American nature writer Annie Dillard has declared that "Stalking is a pure form of skill, like pitching or playing chess. Rarely is luck involved. I do it right or I do it wrong" (200). But Dillard's form of stalking is not Dickinson's, since for her it is more of religious exercise or form of emptying of the self through a Zen-like concentration. "Instead of going rigid, I go calm," she writes. "I center down wherever I am; I find a balance and repose. I retreat – not inside myself, but outside myself, so that I am a tissue of senses. Whatever I see is plenty, abundance. I am the skin of water the wind plays over; I am petal, feather, stone" (201). When Dickinson stalks, on the contrary, she practices a determined attentiveness and obedience beginning with a sharp separatism of distance, as in the following poem:

A Bird, came down the Walk –
He did not know I saw –
He bit an Angleworm in halves
And ate the fellow, raw,

And then he drank a Dew
From a Convenient Grass –
And then hopped sideways to the Wall
To let a Beetle pass –

He glanced with rapid eyes
That hurried all around –
They looked like frightened Beads, I thought –
He stirred his Velvet Head

Like one in danger, Cautious,
I offered him a Crumb
And he unrolled his feathers
And rowed him softer home –

Than Oars divide the Ocean,
Too silver for a seam –
Or Butterflies, off Banks of Noon
Leap, plashless as they swim.
(Fr359B)

I have chosen the second extant version of this poem, the first version of which was originally published by Thomas Wentworth Higginson from a lost manuscript in his possession, and exists in two slightly differing other copies in Dickinson's hand. The reason for my choice is that in this version, the somewhat old-fashioned and even ancient noun "Angleworm" is written as one word, while in the other manuscript copy it appears as two words. It is this peculiar term that I think is the key to the acuteness of Dickinson's special form of stalking, which involves a romantic sympathy for the subject, and not Dillard's modern totalizing self-abnegation. The simplest definition of the term "Angleworm" is "A worm, such as an earthworm, used as bait in fish" (*American Heritage Dictionary*) but the etymology of this word leads me to believe that what Dickinson is practicing here is a very genteel and meditative form of fishing, both physical and metaphysical, in the tradition of Izaac Walton's famous *The Compleat Angler* of 1653. Her stalking consists of what I have termed an acute attentiveness and obedience to the ways of her prey, but it also involves a genuine respect for that prey's integrity as a distinct individual. The "angle" which is part of "angleworm" is actually used in the primary sense of the word, not as a geometric term, but as a verb which which means "to fish with a hook and line," and which has the further connotation of trying "to get something by using schemes, tricks, or other artful means." Interestingly enough, here the word "angle" derives from the Old English angul, or fishhook, and gave its name to the Engles or Angles of "Anglo-Saxon," because of the fishhook shape of their original homeland, the Angul district of Schleswig. Beyond this, the piscatory angle of "angle" can be traced back to Greek, Latin and Sanskrit roots meaning "crooked" or "bent."

Dickinson in this sense angles or fishes for her prey, which does not know she she sees it, in a silent, hidden, and secretive manner. She watches its actions in her own frontward of "Nature's half-Acre," as the wild (the Bird) meets the tamed and domesticated (the man-made walkway to her house). Yet even this pacified environment is still

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the domain of wilderness, since the Bird's actions are superficially jerky, hesitant, and very ungenteel, witnessed by its graceless devouring of the Angleworm. Dickinson's use of this term emphasizes not only the acute angle of observation which is her initial poetic stance, but also her distance from the subject of her "angling," since the worm itself is called a "fellow" and takes on something of the aura of the human. Beginning with a lady-like and very Victorian distaste for the vulgar, however, Dickinson progresses to a comic appreciation of the bird's nervous actions, combined with a growing understanding that on the ground it exists in a predatory yet self-sustaining environment, where drinks of dew are conveniently provided by nature and a certain etiquette – which today we might also term "ecology" – rules. Still, the bird is alert, aware, nervous and apprehensive; its movements themselves are crooked and angular, as it hops sideways to avoid the passing beetle. Interestingly, Dickinson mimics this move in the staccato sound and length of her line. Everything is quick, uncertain, and accelerated, while the dominant metaphors are of a glittering hardness, as in the shell of the beetle, the "frightened Beads" of the Bird's eyes, and even the angle of "Angleworm," which converts a normally soft and pulpy creature into something which is artificially stiff and bent. Yet as Dickinson peers more intently at this automaton of a bird, she domesticates it by a growing sympathy. Subtly she inserts her own interiority into her bird note with the aside "I thought," and suddenly the hardness begins to melt and metamorphose into something else. For the "Beads" of its eyes which before were merely "rapid" now look "frightened" to Dickinson, who is not emptying herself out in Dillard's kind of stalking but rather entering into the drama as an active player and participant. She realizes the bird's "danger" in a world red in tooth and claw, and moreover in a world which is not the Bird's proper element. Beginning with the line "He stirred his Velvet Head," we get a softer, more measured and murmurous description of of the bird, not as a vulgar alien but as another "fellow" – in this case, a "fellow creature." After Dickinson's crumb of sympathy is offered, the poem dissolves in an oceanic melding of *b*, *o*, and *s* sounds that signal the bird's translation to its proper sphere – that of the air and of a heavenly poise and playful gracefulness of unfettered motion and being.

One might deepen Dickinson's meaning to say that the poet began by angling in a Darwinian landscape and finished by hooking into a sublime one, and that the bird itself becomes her emblem for artists who, while earthbound, are impossibly awkward, frightened and misunderstood, but in their proper airy sphere of music or art or poetry are free and potently untrammeled. Once more, there is an ambiguity in the syntax of her poem which makes it seem that she may be as cautious and as in danger as the bird himself. Compare her experience to that of Annie Dillard stalking a green heron, a much bigger bird, when she writes:

> Mostly it just watched me warily, as if I might shoot it, or steal its minnows for my own supper, if it did not stare me down. But my only weapon was stillness, and my only wish its continued presence before my eyes. I knew it would fly away if I made the least false move. In half an hour it got used to me – as though I were a bicycle somebody had abandoned on the bridge, or a branch left by high water. It even suffered me to turn my head slowly, and to stretch my aching legs very slowly. But finally, at the end, some least motion or thought set if off, and it rose, glancing at me with a cry, and winged slowly away upstream, around a bend and out of sight. (187-88)

In contrast to Dillard, who is stalked by the green heron as much as she is stalking it, Dickinson is not shy about revealing herself and making a sympathetic move. Whether this move is a false one or not depends on one's environmental stance. On the one hand in Dillard we see that radical noninterference with nature which Emerson long ago called "Forbearance" (1117) and that is today advocated by many followers of a so-called Deep Ecology. On the other hand, in Dickinson we see a stress on the fellowship of nature and an attempt to reach out and befriend the environment by giving it a helping human hand. From the diversity of their experiences with stalking, or angling, Dickinson goes away with an apprehension not only of the otherness of nature but also its togetherness, while Dillard just goes away.

I have tried to use my perception of the angles of Dickinson's poetic experience – obtuse, oblique, and acute – as levers to pry open a little her deliberately difficult landscapes of life, death, and immortality. In another sense of "angle" I have tried to "scheme" or "plot" to understand her own unique otherness as a New England voice, as an American artist, and as a global poet. Whether such critical angling has been "artful" or not is up to others to judge. I only hope that I leave you, my reader, not only with a feeling for her fundamentally angular strangeness but with some sense that stalking the elusive Dickinson in this way will lead to her stalking your own consciousness once you, too, have been hooked by her subtle and amazing art.

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Sabine Sielke

West of Everything? The Frontiers and Borderlands of Critical Discourse

Part One. Where Boundaries Collapse, New Ones Are Likely to Form

For all of us who are professionally preoccupied with North America and North American studies, the terms West, frontier and more recently, the concept of borderline delineate both geo-political and imaginary spaces – spaces from which have evolved both historical and fictional narratives of expansion, migration, immigration, colonization, and exclusion, as well as of freedom, liminality, and transgression. These narratives have followed their own historical trajectory. After the closing of the historical frontier, new frontiers opened up, extending the American cultural territory and imaginary way beyond the geo-political borders of the United States into global, outer, and in fact various and vast utopian spaces. What comes to mind at this particular time, 40 years after John F. Kennedy's visit to Berlin and his assassination, is the address of Senator Kennedy accepting the Democratic Party Nomination for the presidency of the United States, presented at the Memorial Colosseum in Los Angeles on July 15 in 1960. Kennedy invoked the "last frontier" to project a new one: "For I stand tonight," he famously phrased,

> facing west on what was once the last frontier. From the lands that stretch three thousand miles behind me, the pioneers of old gave up their safety, their comfort and sometimes their lives to build a new world here in the West. They were not the captives of their own doubts, the prisoners of their own price tags. Their motto was not "every man for himself" – but "all for the common cause." They were determined to make that new world strong and free, to overcome its hazards and its hardships, to conquer the enemies that threatened from within and without.
>
> Today some would say that those struggles are all over – that all the horizons have been explored – that the battles have been won – that there is no longer an American frontier.
>
> But I trust that no one in this vast assemblage will agree with those sentiments. For the problems are not all solved, the battles are not all won – and we stand today on the edge of a New Frontier – the frontier of the 1960s – a frontier of unknown opportunities and perils – a frontier of unfulfilled hopes and threads.

> […] the New Frontier of which I speak is not a set of promises – it is a set of challenges. It sums up not what I intend to offer the American people but what I intend to ask of them. It appeals to their pride, not to their pocketbook – it holds the promise of more sacrifice instead of more security.
>
> But I tell you the New Frontier is here, whether we seek it or not. Beyond that frontier are the uncharted areas of science and space, unresolved problems of peace and war, unconquered pockets of ignorance and prejudice, unanswered questions of poverty and surplus. It would be easier to shrink back from that frontier, to look to the safe mediocrity of the past, to be lulled by good intentions and high rhetoric – and those who prefer that course should not cast their votes for me, regardless of party.
>
> But I believe the times demand new invention, innovation, imagination, decision. I am asking each of you to be pioneers of that New Frontier. My call is to the young in heart, regardless of age – to all who respond to the Scriptural call: "Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed."[1]

I am quoting Kennedy at length here not only because his address gains an entirely new resonance in our post-9/11 and post-Second-Gulf-War world; and not only because his ingenious "high rhetoric" underlines how far the American conception of the frontier can be stretched. While Kennedy extends the notion of the frontier to include a "technological revolution" as well as "[a] peaceful revolution for human rights – demanding the end to racial discrimination," he also makes all too evident that the opening of new frontiers correlates with the closing of novel borderlines, such as the so-called Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall which in turn transformed Berlin into a kind of frontline, if not frontier city. "Are we up to the task – are we equal to the challenge?" Kennedy asks in the final part of his address. "Are we willing to match the Russian sacrifice of the present for the future – or must we sacrifice our future in order to enjoy the present? That," he claims, "is the question of the New Frontier." Accordingly as these Cold War borderlines were eventually transgressed and finally – figuratively as well as literally – deconstructed, Kennedy's new frontier politics had long vanished from the American agenda. Even before the Berlin Wall came down the United States had already erected their own version of such dividing line, protecting themselves against illegal immigration across the border in the Southwest.

This essay is the slightly revised version of a paper presented at the conference "The Many American Wests," Lodz University, 21-25 September 2003, and part of an ongoing project on the cultural and political function of spatial tropes in current critical discourse.

1 Http://www.kennedylibrary.org/j071560.htm, visited on 15 April 2003.

What I mean to suggest here is that, first, narratives of frontiers and borderlines are inextricably intertwined, and that, secondly, the closing of one frontier tends to open up new "virgin lands." Or to put it differently: wherever boundaries collapse, new ones are likely to form, demarcating spatial, political, religious and ethnic territories which both in- and exclude individual and collective bodies. Of course the latter claim is a highly general and generalizing one. However, I do believe that we indeed *have to* take the synchronicity of transgressions and demarcations of boundaries into a broader perspective. I do believe that the interdependent tendencies of inclusion and exclusion which dominate our current geo-politics as well as certain scholarly and scientific pursuits ultimately join in a common, globalizing effect: the cementation of economic or class differences which thus also reinscribe a borderline that has slipped our post-1989 "end-of-history" perspective. And when I talk of tendencies of "scholarly and scientific pursuit" here I include both the developments within American and cultural studies (and it is those developments that I will be talking about primarily) and the New Frontiers currently opened up by the so-called hard sciences (and the ongoing "technological revolution" that Kennedy invoked): As the developments in the new sciences unfold, so cultural critics Steven Best and Douglass Kellner observe, "boundaries are collapsing everywhere, in both the natural and the social worlds, collapsing differences among the species (bacteria, plant, insect, animal, and human) and between biology and technology, transgressing the limits of what previously was declared improbable or impossible" (134).[2]

Many of us would probably agree that, at this point in the history of the sciences, we fare best if we meet such views with scepticism. For – to repeat my punching line – wherever boundaries and borders collapse, new ones are likely to form. In our post 9/11 world with its renewed efforts of nation-building I would also suggest, however, that a similar scepticism should guide our perspectives on the dominant trends within our own field, a field which stretches across the human and social sciences and which has more recently displayed a comparable enthusiasm with regard to transgressions of boundaries, transnationality, and spaces of liminality.

It is from this vantage point that I would like to revisit the frontiers and borderlands of our critical discourse. For the terms frontier and borderline not only delineate geo-political and imaginary spaces, they also figure prominently in our theoretical perspectives. In fact criticism and theory of the last thirty years or so have assigned a privileged

[2] Best and Kellner discuss this development in terms of Bruce Mazlish's work on the four discontinuities (1993) which human beings have been subjected during modernity – the Copernican (between earth and universe), the Darwinian (between human and animal), the Freudian (between conscious and unconscious), and the current technological one (between man and machine). The authors add a fifth discontinuity that "opens with the *possibility* of discovering other forms of life in the cosmos, and the *actuality* of species mixing, the creation of new life forms through genetic engineering, and widespread cloning" (130).

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position to anything in “transition,” to realms located in an “inbetween,” “beyond,” or “elsewhere,” to a space that, as I will argue, has meanwhile turned into methodological trap. Thus in the second and main part of my paper I want to invite you to take a walk on the wild side, to revisit with me the borderlines and zones of critical discourse and explore the cultural desire and significance that fed into the many „beyonds,“ „betweens,“ and „elsewheres“ that have populated critical space in the final decades of the twentieth century. The final destination of this inquiry into the spatial dimensions of contemporary critical discourse, however, is aimed beyond an understanding of their cultural and political functions and effects. I rather wonder meanwhile what novel sense of space, of frontiers and borderlines the new millennium holds in store, and I will speculate about this question in the third and final part of my paper.

Part Two. Between, Beyond, Elsewhere: Privileged Spaces in Late Twentieth-Century Critical Discourse

It has long been a commonplace observation that the insights of deconstructivist and poststructuralist thought have tended to limit and minimize the arenas of effective individual and collective agency, thus to disempower, at least to a certain degree, the historical subject and to capitalize on spatiality instead. The present epoch, Foucault famously wrote in his essay "Of Other Spaces,” is "above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity; we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed."[3] At the same time, however, theories that have evolved on the margins, at the dawn and in the aftermath of poststructuralism – and I am thinking in particular of various modes of feminist inquiry, cultural anthropology, and post-colonial criticism – have also effected a shift within our modern sense of space, a shift more specifically from modernist notions of "text as space" to post-modernist conceptions of "space as text," a shift in the process of which the term space itself has been repoliticized.

[3] In fact, as Foucault underlines, "space has a history in Western experience" (22). Foucault traces the history of space from medieval space or the space of emplacement consisting of a hierarchic ensemble of (sacred, profane, protected, exposed) places to a sense of space as extension where (beginning in the 17th century) "a thing's place was no longer anything but a point in its movement." Meanwhile the site, defined by relations of proximity between points or elements, has been substituted with extension. "Our epoch," according to Foucault, "is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites" (23). Both post-modernist architecture which echoes multiple styles and the fact that we were able to share the images of the events of 11 September, collectively and globally are manifestations of this “epoch of space.” (“Des espaces autres” was originally published in 1984).

More precisely, as theories of the post-modern, the post-colonial and, most particular, of performativity conceive of the political in terms of discursive space, they have frequently projected spaces of political momentum located in an indistinct, if not nebulous "inbetweenness," "beyond," or "elsewhere." These and related spatial terms like liminality and borderland have been incessantly deployed by late twentieth-century critical discourse, my own work being no exception. In my first book *Fashioning the Female Subject* (1997), for instance, I argue – as I would still hold: convincingly – that the poetics of Emily Dickinson and Marianne Moore work in a rhetorical and philosophical „in-between," a term that I borrow from the French poststructuralist Hélène Cixous. And this tendency to privilege the in-between, the liminal, the spaces beyond dominant discourse is by no means restricted to the last millennium. In June 2002, the 26th Annual Conference of the International Association for Philosophy and Literature, for instance, set out to explore „Intermedialities" and featured workshops entitled „In the Between," „Liminal Spaces," „Inter-Esse: Beyond Borderlines," „The Third," „Hermes — The Intermediary," „Inter-Writing/Imaging," „Between the Cultures of Multiculturalism," and even one session called „In-Between Jacques Derrida."

Significantly enough, this continued faith in the liminal, in a discursive space of inbetweeness involves a return rather than the loss of subject and history Fredric Jameson has mourned. It is the return, however, of an 'other' subject and history, one that had long been buried under the debris of Western cultural dominance. So as we moved from New Critical conceptions of a closural spatial aesthetics (as explored, for instance, by Joseph Frank) to a post-modernist sense of space as an open intertextuality, critical discourse has evolved a previously marginal subject, an 'other' voice that is oftentimes resituated quite literally center stage. The projection of those betweens and elsewheres thus has been, to use the words of Héctor Calderon and José Saldivar, „a highly conscious, imaginative act of resistance" (5). At the same time, though, the space that was granted for this previously peripheral – female, African American, or Third World subject – his or her speaking position and agency, has been highly limited and contested by pretexts and discursive conventions from the start. In the works of theorists as diverse as Victor Turner, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Derrida, Judith Butler, Linda Hutcheon, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Hector Calderon, and Homi Bhabha, to mention but a few prominent names, the inbetweens, beyonds, and elsewheres correspond to realms of subtle discursive liminality, parody, and subversion, realms whose actual political impact is rather minute. Accordingly, critical discourse aggrandized this very limitation into a politically effective potential. In fact, from Kristeva who developed the concept of intertextuality from Bakhtinian dialogism across Turner's work that thrives on liminality

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to Gates's position on signifyin(g) and Bhabha's notion of mimicry we find plenty of faith in the powers of repetition, parody, and pastiche, of the subtle spaces of ironical distance.[4]

In this context I cannot explore these subtle spaces of subversion at length.[5] What is significant for my argument here is to underline that those theories which invest liminal spaces and realms of intertextuality and ironic distance with subversive power tend to revitalize modernist utopias in post-utopian times. By proposing a borderland or elsewhere located "between" or "beyond" the modes of dominant discourse, a significant part of this critical discourse to my mind remembers and salvages the central utopias of modernism – and most particularly the desire for difference without hierarchy, utopias which are prominently projected by Kennedy's conception of a "New Frontier," and which seem to have had their final heyday in the early to mid-70s.

Since the effect of parody and pastiche is significant, yet hard to measure, they have easily opened up toward utopian spaces, into "borderland[s] between art and the world," as Hutcheon puts it, a realm within what others dismiss as the aestheticized post-modern condition or a body politic turned theater. And whereas the heterotopias envisioned by post-modernist fiction are mostly disturbing, this utopian realm of cultural criticism is soothing, even if it does not open up into the easily accessible lands that have dominated the more traditional utopian imaginary. Thus rather than facing "the end of utopia" (Jacoby) post-modern culture and its critique have attempted to salvage the utopias of aesthetic modernism for the new millennium.

Part Three. Beyond Ground Zero? The Frontiers and Borderlines of a New Era

To my mind the literal deconstruction of two symbols of US economic and military power – the World Trade Center and the Pentagon – made the futility of the attempt, on the part of recent critical discourse, to salvage a modernist utopia for the new millennium blatantly obvious. (Interestingly enough, the Trade Towers – "minimalist monoliths"

[4] Jameson conceptualizes the difference between modernism and post-modernism as parody versus pastiche, reading post-modernism as a culture of citation that has done away with the quotation marks and in the process creates a kind of "blank parody" (114). I myself would object, however, that post-modernist citation as deployed by contemporary popular culture, for instance, frequently historicizes and even authorizes itself in modernist cultural practices, thereby engaging in the significant work of memory and subject formation. Jameson's distinction between parody and pastiche therefore cannot be drawn all that clearly.

[5] The interested reader may be referred to my essay on "Spacial Aesthetics, Ironic Distances, and Realms of Liminality: Measuring Theories of (Post) Modernism."

of an "obsolete modernism" [Steinberg], as some would have it, built by Minoru Yamasaki in the years 1969 to 1973, were erected at the very time when social utopias thrived, the very time also when the United States were at war in Vietnam – another instance of Foucault's "epoch of simultaneity.") No marginal voice or group came playfully into power on September 11 or after. Quite the opposite: There has been utter silence or even denial on the part of those who were deemed responsible. And as the architectural site turned into a sight, a signpost, a tourist attraction, a kind of mecca, those who are marginal to dominant American culture joined in the procession. Islamic cultures in the United States and elsewhere, by contrast, became the central target of political scapegoating, positioned in an intolerable realm outside, "beyond" civilization, in need to be bombed into line. Thus while critical discourse – like post-modernist novels that explore the "between-worlds space" of zones (McHale 58) – meant to rediscover and open up intertextual spaces, realms of historical difference and ironic distance where multiple texts and voices join in polyphony with each other;[6] while ethnic criticisms located themselves in borderlands and proposed to „travel between first and third worlds, between cores and peripheries, centers and margins," post-9/11 developments have redrawn the boundaries and reaffirmed the (Western) nation, leaving little space for intricate differences, fine discriminations, and, least of all, ironic distance. In fact, whereas Turner defines liminality as "a betwixt-and-between condition often involving seclusion from the everyday scene" and a shift to what he calls the "subjunctive mood," the "as-if" mode that characterizes rituals as well as theatrical performances,[7] 9/11, by contrast, involved a shift from the „as if" to the everyday.[8] And as we opt for literal readings the space previously populated by marginal voices is emptied out, the mobility and processural dynamic critical discourse privileged has come to a halt.

While post-9/11 US culture has redrawn its cultural and political borderlines it has also ventured into new frontiers, first and foremost into wars on terrorism along axes of evil. The New Frontier of which George W. Bush speaks is a set of promises more than a set of challenges. It sums up not what he intends to ask of the American people but what he intends to offer them. It appeals to their pride as much as to their pocketbook – it holds the promise of more homeland security instead of more sacrifice. And on the home front, Ground Zero, the 16-acre void or "wound" in downtown Manhattan, has become a significant and highly symbolic part of that new frontier. In fact I would claim that the

[6] McHale, for instance, finds most effective the borrowing of a character from another text, the transmigration of characters from one to another fictional universe that overruns world boundaries (58).
[7] Both, according to Turner, function as metacommentaries on human relatedness (22).
[8] On this issue see Sielke, . "Das Ende der Ironie? Zum Verhältnis von Realem und Repräsentation zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts."

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most famous construction site after Potsdamer Platz constitutes a new virgin land, a liminal space that leaves little room for ambiguity, ambivalence, and irony, yet salvages a utopia called America. By way of conclusion I would like to suggest that we briefly visit that space – a space that is truly transitional.

In the summer of 2002 the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation "initiated a world wide search for design and planning professionals to propose visionary designs" for the area. It called for "an appropriate setting for a memorial, a bold new skyline to rise in Lower Manhattan, a better-connected downtown and a range of uses on the site." From all in all 400 submissions the concept design by the Studio Daniel Libeskind was selected in February 2003 to take on this architectural project of immense scope.[9] Since then this project was subjected to a political struggle that, given the scope of its context, does not come as a surprise: Victims' organizations, insurers, city and state officials as well as the owner of the World Trade Center lease Larry Silverstein continue to debate Libeskind's design and Silverstein, who prefers more office space than Libeskind's work provides, appointed David Shields as the chief architect of the "most dramatic part of the design," the so-called "Freedom Tower," turning Libeskind from chief to collaborating artist.[10] However, despite these developments the fact that Libeskind's design made the initial competition and set the scene for the reconstruction of Ground Zero remains most significant as it underlines the politics of symbolism that is at work here – a politics that keeps doing its cultural work despite the fact that the design has given way to economic and ethical pressures.

Without even considering his actual design, I would claim that Libeskind succeeded in part not only because he is considered *the* authority for so-called spaces of memory. He also presents his designs by way of a rhetoric that rehearses narratives and terms central to America's modern self-conception. Whereas his strongest competitors THINK Design proposed that "Ground Zero should emerge from this tragedy as the first truly Global Center, a place where people can gather to celebrate cultural diversity in peaceful and productive coexistence," thus phrasing their agenda in transnational multiculturalist terms and envisioning a "World Cultural Center"; whereas the design by the Richard Meier, Peter Eisenman, Gwathmey Siegel, Steven Holl and their partners reject the "contained spaces" of 19th- and 20th-century precedents for urban spaces and privilege by their "21st century Memorial Square" which is "both contained and extended, symboliz-

[9] All above and following quotations from the project descriptions are taken from the official website of the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation www.renewnyc.com/plan_des_dev/wtc_site/new_design_plans/firm_d/default.asp, visited on 17 March 2003.

[10] "Libeskind's WTC Design Still on Drawing Board", http://www.dwworld.de/dwelle/cda/detail/dwelle.cda.detail.artikel_drucken/0,3820,14, visited on 24 February 2004.

ing the connections of this place to the city and the world;" whereas other proposals keep "the future of the global city" in mind, Studio Libeskind found its solutions along well-travelled roads.

The very first sentence of his design concept echoes America's cherished immigration narrative: "I arrived by ship to New York as a teenager, an immigrant, and like millions of others before me, my first sight was the Statue of Liberty and the amazing skyline of Manhattan" (1). In his proposal Libeskind also tells the story about how the architect, set on integrating the contradictory public impulses "to acknowledge the terrible deaths … while looking to the future with hope," visited the site "to feel its power and to listen to its voices. And this," Libeskind – like a shaman – claims, "is what I heard, felt and saw." He goes on to privilege the so-called "great slurry walls" which survived the attack as "the most dramatic element" of his narrative, as "an engineering wonder constructed on bedrock foundations and designed to hold back the Hudson River," constituting the borderline that accompanies this new kind of cultural frontier. "The foundations," he writes, "[…] stand as eloquent as the Constitution itself asserting the durability of Democracy and the value of individual life." To Libeskind this foundation "is not only the story of tragedy, but also reveals the dimensions of life." In fact the terms life, hope, and future constantly recur throughout his description which closes with the following paragraph:

> The sky will be home again to a towering spire of 1776 feet high, the "Gardens of the World." Why gardens? Because gardens are a constant affirmation of life. A skyscraper rises above its predecessors, reasserting the pre-eminence of freedom and beauty, restoring the spiritual peak to the city, creating an icon that speaks to our vitality in the face of danger and our optimism in the aftermath of tragedy. Life victorious.

Like the height of this skyscraper, the degree to which Libeskind, by way of metaphor, invests his design with transcendent and yet political meaning can hardly be topped. The phrase "[v]itality in the face of danger" rephrases both a central meaning inherent in the concept of the frontier and Kennedy's sense of "grace under pressure," a term which he adapted from Hemingway as a motto for his first book-length publication *Profiles in Courage* (1956). Using figures of drama and performance as its privileged tropes, Libeskind's rhetoric takes up Turner's "as-if" mode and reminds us that, as Barry Vacker underlines, "[i]f there is the possibility for serious dissent" or transgression, "it lies in the realm of art and architecture, theory and media technology" (6).[11] At the same

[11] The page numbers refer to the printed version of Vacker's digital text *Ground Zero in the Global Village*, http://www.barryvacker.net.groundzero.html, visited on 17 March 2003.

time Libeskind reproduces the utopian project called America as perpetual past, "a nostalgic trajectory passing through the promised land, the garden of Eden," and a kind of frontier territory (Vacker 3). Libeskind's rhetoric thus performs a mimicry of America's master narrative that leaves little room, though, for ironic distance. Projecting spaces "within which no shadow will fall," his project instead bespeaks a desire for new beginnings, for a tabula rasa space of signification, for a "ground zero" indeed.

This longing persists even though Libeskind's "master plan" is being subjected to adjustments and alterations; in fact the more monolithic and symmetrical structure by which Childs intends to displace Libeskind's asymmetrical Freedom Tower may, on the level of aesthetics, turn back time in more obvious manner. "[W]e are confident," so the comment of Matthew Higgins, chief operating officer of the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, "that Libeskind and Childs will design a Freedom Tower that will make the entire nation proud."[12] To my mind the very discourse in which the reconstruction of Ground Zero is couched underlines the thesis, put forth by Vacker in his study *Ground Zero in the Global Village*, that the "time-space coordinates for entrance into the new millennium" are being annihilated, that culture "is being reprogrammed *not* to enter the new millennium" (2, my emphasis). "There has been a systematic effort," Vacker argues, "to warp the modern utopia backward, in a staggering reversal, an effort to 'correct' the utopian code precisely as culture accelerates ever faster into the spectral landscapes of the Global Village" (2). As a spatial performance amidst America's "war on terrorism," the reconstruction of Ground Zero thus becomes part of what Slavoj Zizek calls the "shadow of a new world order:" a war against American culture itself which – after 30 to 40 years of "emancipatory excesses," including the excesses of Kennedy's new frontier and of cultural theory and practice – is now being disciplined and contained within a soothing and solitary closure, among "great slurry walls" or new borderlines.

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[12] Quoted in David W. Dunlap, „Visions for Tower Clash at Trade Center Site," *New York Times*, 23 October 2003, http://www.nytimes.com/2003/10/23/nyregion/23REBU.html?ei5070&en=ebc087fe, visited on 24 February 2004.

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Tadeusz Rachwał

Van Cow: Nature, Horticulture, and the American Apples

For I have had too much
Of apple-picking: I am overtired
Of the great harvest I myself desired.

Robert Frost, "After Apple-Picking"

Culture is an orchard apple; Nature is a crab.

John Muir, *Wild Wool*

"The apple," a Virginia pomologist James Fitz proclaimed in 1872, "is our democratic fruit" (Hatch 1). Perhaps nowadays the most well-known apples of the American democracy are the "Big Apple" and the "Apple Computer," the city and the technological product whose trademark is still reminiscent of its British origin in the "Apple Records." The biblical fruit of seduction has been flourishing in America from its, say, beginnings though in ways slightly different than in Paradise, its seductive force being kept in check by the hands of American Adams whose horticultural efforts were aimed at constructing a new space west of the alleged Eden of Europe. Before growing its "Big Apple," and becoming as American as apple pie, America saw its "national birth" as "the beginning of a new history… which separates us from the past and connects us with the future only" – the *Democratic Review* declaimed in 1839 (Lewis 5). This New World's desire to forget the past was a desire for a prelapsarian Adam who would not allow for the fall, an Adamic man whose convoluted ways of preserving the primal perfection have been traced by R. W. B. Lewis in his reading of nineteenth-century American mythologies. "It was not surprising," he writes,

> in a Bible-reading generation, that the new hero (in praise or disapproval) was most easily identified with Adam before the Fall…. His moral position was prior to experience, and in his very newness he was fundamentally innocent. The world and history lay all before him. And he was the type of creator, the poet par excellence, creating language itself by naming the elements of the scene about him. (Lewis 5)

Though Lewis is silent about apples in his book, the American Adam he envisages is a figure which can handle apples, first of all name them, but also produce and consume them in the manner granting the preservation of innocence. Perhaps an important aspect of Baudrillard's vision of America as simulacrum, as a fake copy without an original, is that it desires to somehow go beyond the original sin, construct itself upon a sinless foundation from before the consumption of the forbidden fruit by Eve.

In her *Faces of Eve,* Judith Fryer does not write about apples either, though she argues for the minimization of the "role" of woman in the New World: "If Eve was the cause of the original Adam's downfall, the role of the New World Eve must be minimized. This time she must be kept in her place so that in the American version of the myth there will be no Fall" (Fryer 6). The apples Eve eats must thus be delivered by Adam, the role of Eve being played from the position of the one who does not choose, who does not make choices by herself. As regards apples, one preferable space for women in the early nineteenth-century America was at the "apple bees," gatherings of women during which they occupied themselves talking and preserving apples for winter. "They pared, quartered, cored, and strung apples to dry, while catching up on all the news. These activities declined after labor saving machines emerged during the mid 19th century" (Hooker 43).

A reconstruction of the garden of Eden also seems to be at stake in the eighteenth-century practice of planting orchards before the construction of the house. Though dictated to the settlers by the land companies as land claim, the connotative field of this activity is quite telling. It authoritatively inscribes the biblical beginning of humanity into the sphere of human activity which now may perfect it in accordance with the demands of the desired state of affairs. In a mostly unspoken way, the place of Eve in the American paradise is taken by the figure of Pomona who gave her name to what is now a part of Los Angeles County, which itself carries her image in its seal. Interestingly, the meaning of the rare adjective *pomonal* is exemplified in *Oxford English Dictionary* by a sentence taken from the 1859 issue of *Transactions of the Illinois Agricultural Society*: "We may proudly claim this land as the favorite seat of horticultural and pomonal progress."

The story of Pomona might be helpful in reading the "pomonal progress" as a category which could be useful in American Studies. According to Ovid, Pomona was exclusively devoted to the cultivation of fruit trees, "did not care for woods or rivers, but loved the countryside, and branches, loaded with luscious apples" (328). Sometimes also called "Apple Mother," Pomona stands between the wild and the domestic, outside the edifice of the home whose establishment is impatiently awaited by the unstable figure of Vertumnus, who will seduce her not to sin, but to marriage.

Vertumnus was a god who mastered change and transformation, and who was also the god of the seasons, of harvest, and of trade. His name is sometimes derived from *vertere* (to turn), but, as Carlos Parada notices, "this 'turning' refers to the river Tiber, the course of which the god changed, making marshes and pools recede, but also to the turning year when the first fruits of the season were, apparently, offered to him" (2). Though Pomona loved only her orchard and resisted the temptations of Silvanus or Priapus, she, in some hidden way, desired to marry Vertumnus, who, though himself the master of change, and disguised as an old woman, presented his image to her as that of absolute stability and reliability:

> I know him as well as he knows himself. He does not go roaming about, all over the world, but cultivates these wild acres here. He does not fall in love with a girl he has only just seen, as the majority of your lovers do: you are his first and last love, and to you alone he will dedicate his life. (Ovid 329)

This image of marital stability is paralleled by the natural pattern of Pomona's garden in which vine was curling around an elm tree, which relationship Vertumnus compared to marriage: "the vine is supported by the elm to which it has been united, whereas if it had not been so married, it would be trailing on the ground. And yet you are unmoved by the example of that tree! You shun marriage and do not care to wed" (Ovid 329).

Pomona's love of apples can hardly be a way to any pomonal progress. Only married to a somehow more stable figure which harvests and trades her beloved fruit can she become useful in making the apple a democratic fruit serving the good of the nation. What is thus established is a familial model of a democracy which cannot really exist without the "care to wed," without a marriage in which the pomonal space of pleasure gets support from an economy, from a secure space of the home to which Pomona gets accommodated. Judith Fryer's reading of the New World as minimizing the role of woman in the construction of the cultural space also receives some support from this marital transformation in which woman loses the position of the caretaker of the fruit and fruit trees and offers it to Johnny Appleseed, who becomes the figure dominating the scene of American apples. Johnny Appleseed's

> dream was for a land where blossoming apple trees were everywhere and no one was hungry. A gentle and kind man, he slept outdoors and walked barefoot around the country planting apple seeds everywhere he went. It is even told that he made his drinking water from snow by melting it with his feet. ("Johnny Appleseed Story" 1)

This figure of adventurous, masculine apple bringer is yet another transformation of the biblical Adam, equipped with the strength of Hercules and the mobility of Hermes. The pomonal progress of apples in the Midwest has become a legend of the masculine dissemination of the fruit, the only giver of the seed, the fruit, and the trees being John Chapman, the heroic Johnny who is also, as it were, snake-proof. It is said that once Johnny fell asleep and a rattlesnake tried to bite him, but the fangs would not go into his foot because his skin was as tough as an elephant's hide. The spreading of the seed is also a democratic gesture. On one of the Johnny Appleseed web pages we can read that "Johnny was a friend to everyone he met. Indians and settlers – even the animals – liked Johnny Appleseed. His clothes were made from sacks and his hat was a tin pot. He also used his hat for cooking. His favorite book was the Bible." This conflation of the unity with nature, horticulture, and religion (Chapman also left sections of the works of Swedenborg with the frontier people) translates the apple into a socially unifying fruit, a democratic fruit which now, with America looking forward to the future and trying not to look back at the Old World, will also try to see it as its native product.

Though the origin of the apple is, like any origin, hard to define, the pomological histories usually spot it either in Europe or in Asia. From the English perspective apples are English, and, as Sir Daniel Hall and M. B. Craine claimed in 1933, all apple trees "may be only parts of the original Devonshire Quarrenden or English Codlin which originated two or more centuries ago, and from that point of view are two hundred years old. Yet for all we can see they are just as fresh and vigorous as any newly bred seedling, and they retain all the characters and vigour of the particular variety as it was described in the past" (Crane and Hall 85). Apples do not change, and their transplantation to America could not have made them American apples, the latter being in fact as English as the English Codlin (*OED* traces the presence of the word 'codlin' in English – *querdlynges* – already in the fifteenth century). Though the origin of Johnny Appleseed's Midwest apples is rarely thought about, their arrival to the Pacific Northwest is openly connected with England. According to Richard James Hooker, the Northwest apples

> sprang from a seed brought from London in 1824 by Captain Aemilius Simpson. The story goes that at a farewell banquet held in his honor, a young lady – as a joke – gave him the core of the apple she had eaten and asked him to plant the seeds in the American wilderness. When Captain Simpson arrived at Fort Vancouver in what is now Washington state, he gave the seeds to Dr. John McLoughlin, then Chief Agent for Hudson's Bay Company in the Pacific Northwest. Delighted by the gift,

> Dr. McLoughlin entrusted the seeds to his gardener, who planted and nurtured them in a glass house. A single tree grew from McLoughlin's seeds and was carefully protected: the first year it bore one fruit, but the second year the apples flourished. (Hooker 77)

Perhaps it is this joke of a woman that is responsible for the desired transformation of the American wilderness into an orchard. Johnny Appleseed's activities were largely aimed at the same task:

> His manner of operation was simple. He went into the wilderness with a bag of apple seeds on his back until he found a likely spot for planting. There he would clear the land by chopping out weeds and brush by hand. Then he planted his apple seeds in neat rows and built a brush fence around the area to keep out straying animals. His nurseries varied in size. Some were only an acre or so, others covered many acres. ("Story of Johnny Appleseed" 1)

What makes the story of the American apples slightly more complicated is the fact that the historians of pomology trace the presence of apple-trees before the Pilgrims arrived there: "The Pilgrims discovered crabapples had preceded them to America, but the fruit was not very edible." It was for that reason that the Massachusetts Bay Colony, at least according to "A Brief Apple History" webpage, "requested seeds and cuttings from England, which were brought over on later voyages of the Mayflower" (1). How this could have happened is quite mysterious, as there seems to have been only one Mayflower voyage. Moreover, from another apple history we learn that "the Crab-tree or Wild Apple (*Pyrus malus*), is native to Britain and is the wild ancestor of all the cultivated varieties of apple trees" ("Modern Herbal" 2). In Bartholomeus Anglicus's *Encyclopedia* (1470), which contains a chapter on *The Apple*, the wild apple does not figure as distasteful at all:

> Malus the Appyll tree is a tree yt bereth apples and is a grete tree in itself… it is more short than other trees of the wood wyth knottes and rinelyd Rynde. And makyth shadowe wythe thicke bowes and branches: and fayr with dyurs blossomes, and floures of swetnesse and Iykynge: with goode fruyte and noble. *And is gracious in syght and in taste and vertuous in medecyne*… some beryth sourysh fruyte and harde, and some ryght soure and some ryght swete, with a good savoure and mery. ("Modern Herbal" 2)

Some solution to this puzzle, though not a very conclusive one, comes from Henry David Thoreau, whose interest in botany is well known. In a letter to Sophia Thoreau, at the time when his interest in botany began to grow, he declared that "I have become sadly scientific" (July 13, 1852). Perhaps it is due to this "sadness" that, as Ray Angelo notices, "Thoreau's studies in botany did not result in significant contributions to the science of botany" (Angelo 12). Clearly realizing that botany epistemologically cultivates wilderness, Thoreau, in his posthumously published *Wild Apples* (1862), compares himself to an apple saying that "*our* wild apple is wild only like myself, perchance, who belong not to the aboriginal race here, but have strayed to the wood from the cultivated stock" (149).

Thoreau's predicament is that his nostalgia for the uncultivated is inevitably filtered through his cultivated mind, through his penchant for giving names which he simultaneously finds fruitless. Having classified himself as a "botanophile" rather than a botanist, Thoreau, as Tadeusz Sławek notices, moves "from the clear positions of science to the ever unclear ground of friendship" (221). The objectivism of scientific botany entails indifference towards nature, an indifference which deprives it of its auratic fragrance and fluorescence which are ungraspapble by language and thus make a large part of nature available only to subjective experience. About all natural products, writes Thoreau commenting on his walks in orchards and gardens, there is "a certain volatile and ethereal quality which represents their highest value, and which cannot be vulgarized, or bought, or sold" (144). The objective position vulgarizes and commodifies, compartmentalizes nature both epistemologically and economically. A Linnean position is not a friendly one, but one which indifferently catalogues nature's products and makes them available to trade's unfeeling train. Thoreau's friendly standpoint, or perhaps a walking point, is that of a reader of nature, a Barthesian reader of a writerly (*scriptible*) text which always fluctuates and changes. What posits him as a reader is his irrevocable cultural cultivation. What he reads in nature is more than the cultivated can embrace. Hence the reading can never be completed. As if following Georg Lichtenberg's formula according to which we cannot perceive the words of nature, but only the first letters of those words, and when we start reading we discover that the so-called words are only the initial letters of other words (Lichtenberg 152), Thoreau reads nature only in order to rewrite it in other words, in other letters.

As regards the naming of apples, for Thoreau the Linnean endeavor is fruitless as in order to fully name them we should

> have to call in the sunrise and the sunset, the rainbow and the autumn woods and the wild-flowers, and the woodpecker and the purple finch and the squirrel and the jay and the butterfly, the November traveler and the truant boy, to our aid. (160)

Then he offers a few samples of names he could possibly give to wild apples: "the Saunterer's Apple, – you must love yourself before you can find the way to that; the Beauty of the Air (*decus aeris*)… the Railroad-Apple, which perhaps came from a core thrown out of the cars; the Apple whose Fruit we tasted in our Youth; our Particular Apple, not to be found in any catalogue" – and ends with a fragment adapted from Bodaeus:

> Not if I had a hundred tongues, a hundred mouths,
> An iron voice, could I describe all the forms
> And recon up all the names of these *wild apples*. (161)

This inability to name the apples is embraced by Thoreau as passage to somewhere away from cultivation. One important theme of the essay on wild apples is how to un-cultivate those who, like Thoreau himself, come from the cultivated stock. Regardless of whether indigenous American apples exist or not, Thoreau's interest lies in uncultivated, or de-cultivated European apples which, left to themselves, grow into most delicious and diversified kind of fruit. Having drafted a brief history of the cultivated apple, Thoreau thus begins to present the wild apple:

> So much for the more civilized apple-trees (*urbaniores*, as Pliny calls them). I love better to go through the old orchards of ungrafted apple-trees, at whatever season of the year, – so irregularly planted: sometimes two trees standing close together; and the rows so devious that you would think that they not only had grown while the owner was sleeping, but had been set out by him in a somnambulic state. (147)

Thoreau would clearly like Johnny Appleseed to forget about his orchards planted in the wilderness and to leave them there for an independent, self-reliant, autonomous growth. Though he manages to find some indigenous crab-apples in May 1861 in Minnesota, he only briefly mentions this fact and goes on to tell us, perhaps autobigraphically, about those which "though descended from cultivated stock, plant themselves in distant fields and forests, where the soil is favorable to them. I know of no trees which have more difficulties to contend with, and which more sturdily resist their foes" (150).

The foes are numerous: drought, encroaching grass, but the springing up little thickets are also exposed to the activities of the ox and the cow, the domestic creatures which take care of them from the very beginning. When an ox notices a little apple-tree, "he"

first recognizes it "for a fellow emigrant from the old country" (Thoreau 151), which recognition does not stop "him" from browsing it. Cows also regularly clip it all around each year, the clipping being compared by Thoreau to shearing a hedge by a gardener. Thus, perhaps unconsciously, oxen and cows become the cultivators of crab trees. What makes this cultivation into a de-cultivation is that the result of this long-lasting process is unpredictable, though eventually favorable to the cows which "create their own shade and food" (Thoreau 152) by simply following their natural passion for browsing. Unlike the most of America, which is the country of the future, cows live in what Nietzsche called a state of "blissful blindness between the hedges of past and future," which state he ascribed to women, especially women in love (§67). Thoreau's cows are blissfully blind to the effect of their labor which is simultaneously a product to be consumed.

There is a surplus production within this new system of economy, but this surplus is of no interest to the producers, to the cows which leave it, as it were, beyond their reach, "beyond the bushy and horny edge" (Thoreau 153) which they had so patiently produced. The apples themselves remain, as we have seen, unnameable and even their taste depends on who eats them and where:

> To appreciate the wild and sharp flavors of these October fruits, it is necessary that you be breathing the sharp October or November air. The outdoor air and exercise which the walker gets give a different tone to his palate…. They must be eaten in the fields, when your system is all aglow with exercise…. What is sour in the house a bracing walk makes sweet. Some of these apples might be labeled, "To be eaten in the wind." (Thoreau 157)

Thoreau's uncultivated apples cannot thus be a marketable species with all the qualities of the fruit absorbed within the proper name it bears. Of the marketable ones, such as Van Mons and Knight, "we have all heard," writes Thoreau, and explains that "this is the system of Van Cow, and she has invented far more memorable varieties that both of them" (Thoreau 153). Productive of memorable rather than nameable or marketable species, Thoreau's Van Cow's economy is exactly that of de-cultivation, an economy which seems to be prefiguring the recently cropping up economies of de-appropriation like those of Luce Irigaray or Michel Serres, however different they may be. The Van Cow system is also at work within the sphere of writing and politics, and creates new "philosophers and statesmen who thus spring up in the country pastures and outlast the hosts of unoriginal men" (Thoreau 154). Perhaps Thoreau also envisions a paradise and

an original man within it, a man who, unlike Adam, should allow his singular identity to be browsed upon by cows, for example.

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Jacek Gutorow

Wallace Stevens's *Harmonium*: Songs of Fancy and Imagination

I

In February 1942 Stevens wrote to Hi Simons:

> When a poet makes his imagination the imagination of other people, he does so by making them see the world through his eyes. Most modern activity is the undoing of that very job. The world has been painted; most modern activity is getting rid of the paint to get at the world itself. Powerful integrations of the imagination are difficult to get away from. (*Letters* 402)

The focus on imagination as a highly abstract notion is conspicuous in the essays Stevens wrote in the 1940s. The lecture entitled "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" (read at Princeton in 1942) is a powerful critique of the Platonic and post-Platonic vision of imagination as spiritual and ethereal. In "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet" (1943) imagination is given a privileged status, and it embraces both the aesthetic and the ethical: "It is the *mundo* of the imagination in which the imaginative man delights and not the gaunt world of the reason" (*NA* 57-58).[1] In "Imagination as Value" (1948) Stevens speaks of "imagination as metaphysics" (*NA* 140), and this seems to be his final verdict on what he saw as a major factor determining one's existence. In the three essays mentioned Stevens is preoccupied with a theory of the imagination as something absolutely central to the human condition. His late poetry cannot be understood without reflecting on the poet's growing fascination with how the everyday world and the imaginative moment overlap.

The same may be said about Stevens's first book of poetry. In a way, his poetic and critical texts of the 1940s provide an interesting supplement to the poems included in *Harmonium* just as they mark the passage from the early descriptive lyrics to such elaborate and glaringly imaginative meditations as "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle" or "The Comedian as the Letter C." If the *Harmonium* poems are fragmentary and tentative, both in

[1] The following abbreviations of titles of Stevens's works are used throughout the essay: *CP – Collected Poems*; *NA – The Necessary Angel*.

poetic register and topical references, then the essays constitute a relatively consistent and coherent examination of the basic critical and aesthetic notions and offer multiple perspectives from which to evaluate his early poems. This applies also to his later poetry, especially *Owl's Clover* and *The Man with the Blue Guitar*, both of which explore the space outlined by the poet's sustained meditations on imagination and reality. No longer allusive and cryptic, the Stevens of the 1940s lectures helps us see his transition from Imagist impulses to the poetics drawing from British Romanticism in general, and Wordsworth and Coleridge in particular.

It was Coleridge's famous passages on primary/secondary imagination and fancy that drew Stevens's attention. What did the American poet find so fascinating about Coleridge's aesthetic? The context of *Harmonium* makes it clear that Stevens sought a kind of equilibrium between abstract imagination and chaotic reality. And this is what *Biographia Literaria* is about: for Coleridge both types or aspects of imagination point to the moment of unifying that which "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates," while fancy is a "mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space" (167) and seems to subvert the very coherency of the mind. In other words, imagination is governed by the principle of abstract unification, while fancy is a free ebbing and flowing of images and associations. As such, the opposition of imagination and fancy is also the opposition of order and disorder, whole and fragment, reality and appearance, and it may be easily inscribed into a discussion of the Romantic sublime. A constant oscillation between decreation and recreation is alluded to in many fragments of the *Biographia Literaria* (as in the vision of imagination as both passive and active), and it would be evoked by Stevens as well.

The Romantic sublime may in fact be approached as fundamentally of imaginative quality. Wimsatt and Brooks quote Wordsworth's Longinian credo,

> The Imagination also shapes and *Creates*… and in none does it more delight than in that of consolidating numbers into unity, and dissolving and separating unity into numbers, - alternations proceeding from, and governed by, a sublime consciousness of the soul in her own mighty and almost divine powers. (405-06)

As they add in their commentary, "In nothing did Wordsworth and Coleridge agree more wholeheartedly than in their association of the *imagination* with the vast, the infinite, the *shadowy ideal character*" (406). Thus, the sphere of imagination becomes sublime and infinite. This transition will appear and reappear in Stevens, culminating in Crispin the Comedian's voyage across the Atlantic.

II

Frank Kermode started his 1960 interpretation of *Harmonium* with a reference to the poet's distinction between the real world and the *mundo* of imagination (24). The critic mentioned Coleridge and at one moment quoted Marius Bewley's symptomatic words: "the Coleridgean imagination has become the theme of Stevens's poetry as a whole in a way it never became the theme of Coleridge's poetry as a whole" (37). Yet neither Bewley nor Kermode discussed in detail how Coleridge, and then Stevens, understood "imagination" and "fancy." Basically, Kermode approached the Stevensian imagination as a power transforming the otherwise dull reality: "*Harmonium*… is a volume of poems which live or die as physical objects radiating the freshness and pleasure of a transformed reality. They live; as one goes back to them again and again, having studied in Stevens' own school the physics of their world, the riches of *Harmonium* grow continually" (25-26). This is a rather vague description, although it does justice to the potential hidden in Stevens's early poetry.

In *The Clairvoyant Eye: The Poetry and Poetics of Wallace Stevens* (1965) Joseph N. Riddel has a similar thing to say about *Harmonium*. For him, however, "the world of *Harmonium* is pierced by a doubt, by shadows which lengthen over the imagination, accentuating the poet's isolation from things" (63). Riddel perceives the *mundo* of imagination as intricately tied up to, and even constrained by, the reality from which the poet wanted to escape. In this, it seems to me, he looks forward to the Stevens of "The Noble Rider" and "Imagination as Value," where imagination is always thought of in the context of reality and its irresistible pressures. Such a context, Riddel argues, is already present in *Harmonium*: "These poems almost shiver of their own frailty, but they leave no doubt that the slightest expenditure of imagination is a remaking of the world" (63). Or, in stronger terms, "major poems of *Harmonium* argue against the exclusiveness of the subjective life, and more than once evince uneasiness at withdrawal into a Hoon-like egocentrism" (65).

Kermode's and Riddel's pioneering interpretations passed over the nuanced Coleridgean distinctions. "Imagination" is a very general term which may imply anything, and thus serve any reading that we want to impose upon a poem. For many critics the imaginative quality of *Harmonium* has stood for the book's vagueness, haziness, and imprecision, which in turn have been associated with Stevens' debt to such poets as Poe, Verlaine or Laforgue. Thus, Albert Gelpi comprehends the Stevensian imagination as bound to the poet's aesthetic inclination which, as it were, turns out to be "an inclination toward *poesie pure*" that "expresses itself first in the sensuous colors of the imagination – those nightgowns of purple with green rings, those exotic shimmers on the sea surface

full of clouds – but its final tendency… is to merge those colors into the pure whiteness of the 'ultimate intellect' – if not Platonic mind, then at least the abstracted mind of the dreamer lost to the world" (63). The point about *poesie pure* is repeated many times, and it seems to constitute the gist of Gelpi's argument. The *mundo* of imagination takes on a somewhat ephemeral and spectral character, becoming the sphere of artifice and decadent detachment from the real world.

However, Stevens's first book cannot be reduced to "pure poetry" and aesthetic escapism. True, there are many poems which seem to focus upon themselves and engage in a kind of circular argument (a poem says something that is dictated by its own linguistic idiom). But the overall structure of *Harmonium* is not so easily done with. Individual poems refer to other poems and allude to the whole; images and quotations overlap; crucial tropes (wind, vortex, etc.) are approached from different perspectives and point to different ends. The linguistic dominant is ever changing; topical references and arguments contradict one another. If Stevens's earliest poems include "direct treatment of the thing" (to evoke the first principle of Imagist manifestos), *Harmonium* consists of poems in which reality is mediated by way of different idioms and perspectives, falling in and out of focus. It is difficult to agree with Harold Bloom, whose interpretation of *Harmonium* is based solely on the idea of the Peircean "reduction to the First Idea" and whose main reference is the Emerson of "The American Scholar." Emerson's "transparent eyeball" refers to the stable and static mind, while the sublime mode of *Harmonium* is ecstatic, dynamic, heterogeneous. Marianne Moore described the volume in terms of its "kaleidoscopically centrifugal circular motion" (Lee 28), and this reading seems to do justice to the lushness and extravagance of the book. Indeed, the title itself includes at least two contradictory moments – of harmony and of discordance – which do not annihilate but rather reinforce each other, producing the final effect of a spectrum of voices and colors.

Coleridge's distinctions are helpful here. If *Harmonium* is a book of Imagination, and I think the relevance of this term is unquestionable, then it is also a book of Fancy in its Coleridgean sense. For Stevens imagination was always connected with harmony and unification, whereas fancy concerned disintegration and dispersal. Adopting the Nietzschean terminology, one could say that imagination reflects the Apollonian spirit, while fancy is of a Dionysian character. "Peter Quince at the Clavier" contains both perspectives, and in this sense it may be considered the epitome of the book (all the more because "clavier" is a kind of "harmonium"). On the one hand, there is Peter Quince playing the clavier – and this image becomes symbolic when Quince says, "the selfsame sounds / On my spirit make a music" (*CP* 89), and "Music is feeling, then, not sound" (*CP* 90). On the other hand, Stevens introduces the biblical story of Susanna and the

elders, radically transforming the musical metaphor: "The red-eyed elders watching, felt // The basses of their beings throb / In witching chords" (*CP* 90). Thus, the clavier is a double-edged figure: it stands for the Apollonian balance and order, but at the same time it reproduces the Dionysian moments of desire, excitement, and ecstasy. The former preserves meaning and provides us with logical chains of images and arguments; the latter diffuses meanings and violently breaks with logic.

This dichotomy informs the bulk of *Harmonium*. Some poems question the very semantic principle upon which they are ostensibly based. First, there are poems which strike us as linguistically extravagant and exaggerated: "The Ordinary Women," "Ploughing on Sunday," "Depression before Spring," or the wildest fragments of "The Comedian." In those poems Stevens develops linguistic reveries that are apparently absurd, and truly "emancipated from the order of time and space" (Coleridge 167). It is significant, however, that even here one can sense a "rage for order" – the Stevensian fancy is never completely fanciful and meaningless (as it often is in Ashbery), but then Coleridge's notion of fancy also left room for some, however distorted and parodied, sense.

Second, there are poems in which Stevens seems to undertake a much more serious and persistent critique of the semantic principle as the poem's dominant. His usual poetic method consists in presenting different perspectives and then trying to show that all of them are equal and equally legitimate. This is excellently done in "Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Blackbird" and "Sea Surface Full of Clouds," where the same object is viewed from different points and at different times, and thus becomes spectral, its essence diffused and questioned. This strategy has been recognized by some critics. For example, in his *Early Stevens*, B. J. Leggett reads *Harmonium* in terms of what he calls "Nietzschean perspectivism," taking as his departure point the assumption that we "cannot get outside our own perspectives and thus can never escape interpretation" (214).

Visual metaphors are central to *Harmonium*, and there are at least two emblematic ways in which they manifest themselves. On the one hand, there are images of turning, shifting, circling or spinning, which convey a sense of repetition and fanciful workings of memory. In "Domination of Black" the turning of leaves, colors, flames, and planets is synonymous with memory and a specific recollection of the cry of the peacocks, and it indicates the poet's horror of reality. On the other hand, there are poems whose hallucinatory quality is stressed by the play of images and after-images. "Valley Candle" gives an accurate description of an after-image appearing after a candle has been blown out: "Then beams of the huge night / Converged upon its [the candle's] image" (*CP* 51). The late Stevens would most probably analyze the relation of the fake candlelight to the perceiving consciousness and reality; the Stevens of *Harmonium* stops short of such gestures, satisfying himself with a description.

All of these figures are epitomized in "Anecdote of the Jar," one of the most enigmatic pronouncements to be found in *Harmonium*. Apparently, this seems to be a poem of imagination. Howard Baker and J. B. Kirby, for example, interpreted the jar as, in Patricia Merivale's paraphrase, "a worthy symbol of creative imagination" (Merivale 527). Accordingly, the jar becomes a symbol or a metaphor and may be interpreted according to the traditional protocols of hermeneutics or New Criticism. The same protocols inform Yvor Winters's interesting point that the poem is basically about sterility and corruption (Merivale 527) – such a negative statement is embedded in the conventional New Critical matrix as it overlooks linguistic ambiguities and contradictions that subvert the poem's semantic coherence.

In the preface to his *Ariel and the Police*, Frank Lentricchia questions such interpretations. For him, "Anecdote" is a Poundian poem which eludes any formalist network and does not cohere into any stable message or argument (8). Lentricchia refers to the third section of "Like Decorations in a Nigger Cemetery":

> It was when the tress were leafless first in November
> And their blackness became apparent, that one first
> Knew the eccentric to be the base of design.
>
> (*CP* 151)

Having quoted this passage, he comments, "The 'eccentric,' or uncentered, as subversive foundation of 'design' understood as intention without prior conception, purpose, plan, project, scheme, plot: intention somehow unintended" (14). He also attracts our attention to the generic qualification as given by the poet: "if we learn anything from Plato about ideal things we learn that there is no time in them or for them: ideal entities are part of no story. In anecdote, however, we must have narrative and the temporal dimension" (8). That is to say, the anecdotal poem should be local, finite, stratified, and particular. It cannot be stripped of its contexts: "It took dominion everywhere" (*CP* 76), to quote the last line of "Anecdote of the Jar."

Patricia Merivale recognizes the Coleridgean strain of "Anecdote" and discusses the poem within this very framework. Interestingly, she points to the Canon Aspirin section of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," where she finds echoes of the Imagination/Fancy debates. For Merivale, Canon resembles Coleridge's Kubla Khan as he "imposes orders" that make up his own sonorous reality. The decisive line reads, "But to impose is not / To discover" (*CP* 403). An act of discovery, of attending to the order of the world, is of the Coleridgean mode: it epitomizes both primary and secondary imagination. To discover an order – to adjust to it, find it within oneself, identify it as an inherent part of

one's nature – can be compared this to primary imagination as "a repetition," and to secondary imagination as "an echo of the former." Now, the jar depicted by Stevens is evidently a figure of imposing rather than discovering the order of things:

> It made the slovenly wilderness
> Surround that hill.
>
> The wilderness rose up to it,
> And sprawled around, no longer wild.
> (*CP* 76)

This is how the jar invents its own world and its own mythology, finally closing in upon itself in a kind of claustrophobic nightmare (this effect is invigorated by the equally claustrophobic vocabulary which centers on its own circularity: "round," "surround," "around," "ground"). Merivale highlights her point by a reference to Stevens's postulate of a Supreme Fiction: "In short, to impose [order] is fanciful; to discover, imaginative. There is a Supreme Fiction, and it is the creative imagination doing its job of *discovering*…. But the Jar is rather evidently not such a Supreme Fiction; it is one of the many statue-like impositions of dead, rigid myth" (531).

III

According to Helen Vendler, *Harmonium* is "by no means a harmony: all of Stevens is in it, and not in embryo either; but although its tonal spectrum is as diverse as the one we find in *Decorations*, it is less shocking because the tones are presented in separate units, not heaped together ruthlessly in one poem" (65). This is a decent assessment as it leaves room, and accounts, for the variety of voices, registers and tones in *Harmonium*. Stevens's tonal spectrality manifests itself in the poet's openness to the ways in which the mind can either discover or impose the order(s) of reality. Like Coleridge, Stevens privileges neither imagination nor fancy; instead, he points to the dynamism of the thinking (and thus artistic) processes that are due at the same time to the active and passive aspects of the mind. This duality permeates the poems of *Harmonium*: some of them are fanciful and disintegrate themselves and their subjects from within; some are imaginative in the sense that they move toward a discovery of the principle of unity and coherence. It is the interaction – interplay, give-and-take – of the two movements that makes *Harmonium* so rich and evocative.

Both Helen Vendler and Harold Bloom draw attention to the homogeneity and totality of *Harmonium*. Thus, they see the volume as a work in which the fanciful is inferior to, or repressed by, the imaginative. This is particularly true of Bloom's reading, which is a part of his radical reinterpretation of British and American poetry from Milton to Ashbery and Ammons. Bloom describes *Harmonium* as a reduction to the First Idea and analyzes it in the context of the Emersonian "Sublime emptiness or great American repression" (61) which, in the act of self-negation, strips imagination of itself and becomes a "nothing that is not there and the nothing that is" (*CP* 10). It is indeed impossible to account for all of Bloom's formulas, yet it is obvious that the "First Idea" is the idea of imagination and that the stripping down of all redundant attributes and features implies the process of rejecting the fanciful and the casual. Appropriately, Bloom selects for interpretation the poems that carry within themselves the principle of their unity and are reducible to indivisible "first" elements: "The Snow Man," "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon," and "The Comedian as the Letter C." The first two texts are "counterpoems" (63), the former marking the process of reduction, and the latter pointing to the moment in which the self is re-imagined and re-born. "The Comedian" includes both moments and is the ultimate pronouncement of Stevens's American Sublime, "Sublime" being for Bloom synonymous with "Imagination."

Bloom's stress on the imaginative grandeur of *Harmonium*, and "The Comedian" in particular, seems justified. What is hardly acceptable, though, is his insistence on the teleological character of the volume – this also applies to his reading of "The Comedian" as a poetic *Bildungsroman* and expression of the American Romantic Selfhood in its steady, if outrageous, progress (74). Such a vision of Stevens's *oeuvre* results in a rather idiosyncratic definition of the American Sublime as a moment, however decisive, in the long and labored development of the self. For Bloom, imagination and sublimity are synonymous with repression and re-birth. Evidently, it is the fanciful – the casual, the supplementary, the redundant – which needs to be repressed as it does not contribute to the progress of the self. These imperatives can hardly be applied to the world of *Harmonium*. Not that the book does not promote imagination as an invigorating power which mediates between reality and the mind. Nevertheless, equally invigorating and important are the workings of fancy. "[O]ne first / Knew the eccentric to be the base of design" (*CP* 151), which is to say that the eccentric and the concentric (design) are never to be reconciled, and that the mind is "never-resting."

"The Comedian as the Letter C" is a poem in which Stevens not only revaluated and redefined the Coleridgean notions but also insisted on the Americanness of imagination and fancy as due to a new concept of the Sublime. This bizarre work has attracted much critical attention, which has largely been directed to explaining the poem's ambiguities

and obscurities. Its first readers – Hi Simons cites Blackmur and Moore – seemed perplexed and hardly knew what to do with Stevens's tormented diction (Simons 98). Frank Kermode and Roy Harvey Pearce were skeptical about the poem. For the former "The Comedian" was a "fantastic performance: it is a narrative of obscurely allegorical intent, harsh and dream-like; and its manner is a sustained nightmare of unexpected diction" (45); the latter approached the poem as "the most difficult, most ambitious and… most inadequate of the poems in *Harmonium*… its technique is of a kind which can only inhibit the emergence of [its] meaning" (387). What is common to both Kermode and Pearce is the assumption that it is Stevens's diction and imagery, and not subject, that makes the poem unreadable. What they did not try to see was that the atmosphere of obscurity was part of the poet's purpose.

It was Kermode who noticed, somewhat incidentally, Stevens's preoccupation with the imaginative and the imaginary as the background for an alternative reading of the poem: "This is not autobiography in fancy-dress, but steps toward the necessary relation with reality. The sea cures Crispin of his feebler imaginative habits" (47). Kermode's point is clear: "The Comedian" provides us with a poetic transition from the purely Coleridgean imagination, the imagination of High European Romanticism, to the American reality which asks for a re-imagining of the world and oneself. To put it in Bloom's terms, the poem is a record of Stevens's introspective journey toward his new self which in fact exceeds an ordinary self and moves against the self (74). What is important here is that the poet crosses both the ocean and the European tradition – Stevens was determined to show the farcical and the irrelevant inherent in poetic conventions. As his determination is clearly present in the other poems of *Harmonium*, "The Comedian" may be seen as an emblem or epitome of the volume, the archetypal crossing which gives momentum to the whole of *Harmonium*.

On the surface, "The Comedian" is a poetic travelogue which records impressions of a fantastic trip from "Bordeaux to Yucatan, Havana next / And then to Carolina" (*CP* 29). But already in the first part Stevens calls his Crispin "an introspective voyager" (*CP* 29). It should be noted, then, that the transition described in the poem takes place in consciousness, and that the space outlined is the space of the self. Also, it should be added that Crispin's journey is a search for a new identity – the Atlantic ocean "Severs not only lands but also selves" (*CP* 30). In this respect, Crispin resembles the quester of *The Waste Land*: both start in the world of conventions and move through echoes and reflections of received meanings and ideas. The starting point is Bordeaux in France (*crispin* is the French for *comedian*). Stevens entitled the first part "The World without Imagination" but his "without" is a synonym of "after" – Crispin turns to the sea because the world he has lived in is now stripped of imagination. Crispin's quest is a search for "a

new reality" and "a new intelligence," and he must reject "his manner to the turbulence" (*CP* 29) of the ocean. The latter is a scene of what Bloom calls "reduction to the first Idea," and what Stevens describes as a process of rebirth:

He was a man made vivid by the sea,
A man come out of luminous traversing,
Much trumpeted, made desperately clear,
Fresh from discoveries of tidal skies,
To whom oracular rockings gave no rest.
Into a savage color he went on.

(*CP* 30)

The last line contains a farewell: like Crispin, Stevens says goodbye to the European self which places itself at the centre of the world (this is clearly a Coleridgean moment), and becomes the Cartesian "intelligence" separated from the physical reality ("soil").

The Atlantic is a scene of the necessary self-annihilation: Crispin is "washed away" and "dissolved in shifting diaphanes / Of blue and green" (*CP* 28). In one of the most puzzling moments of "The Comedian," Stevens repeats the formulas used in "The Snow Man" and anticipates his late poems:

Crispin, merest minuscule in the gales,
Dejected his manner to the turbulence.
The salt hung on his spirit like a frost,
The dead brine melted in him like a dew
Of winter, until nothing of himself
Remained, except some starker, barer self
In a starker, barer world…

(*CP* 29)

After such repression, what knowledge? Having arrived at Yucatan, the "affectionate emigrant found / A new reality in parrot-squawks" (*CP* 32). The second part of the poem is an extended description of America as the land of savage colors where Crispin discovers his real self:

His mind was free
And more than free, elate, intent, profound
And studious of a self possessing him,

That was not in him in the crusty town
From which he sailed. (*CP* 33)

In Yucatan Crispin faces a new and savage sublimity, as well as a new imagination, "elemental potencies and pangs / And beautiful bareness as yet unseen / Making the most of savagery of palms" (*CP* 31). But the exotic beauty is not real – Stevens calls it "moonlight fiction" (*CP* 36) – and the quest continues. At this moment America appears, and the poet introduces the figure of oscillation: "An up and down between two elements / A fluctuating between sun and moon" (*CP* 35). I think it is possible to interpret the oscillation as a conflict of pure Coleridgean imagination and what Stevens would call "the pressure of reality"; this is also a conflict of the past and the present:

he tossed
Between a Carolina of old time,
A little juvenile, an ancient whim,
And the visible, circumspect presentment drawn
From what he saw across his vessel's prow.
(*CP* 35)

The last section of the third part is devoted to displaying Crispin's "rude aesthetic," and from now on Stevens uses such words as "vulgar," "rankest trivia," or "the essential prose":

He inhaled the rancid rosin, burly smells
Of dampened lumber, emanations blown
From warehouse doors, the gustiness of ropes,
Decays of sacks, and all the arrant stinks…
(*CP* 36)

In the last two parts, "A Nice Shady Home" and "And Daughters with Curls," Stevens seems to balance between consensus and derision, the idea of a colony and a parody of such ideas. Most critics are unanimous in dismissing the closing passages as poor and disappointing. But the poet's ostensible undecidability as to where the poem should finally lead may be treated as part of his project. After all – and this is another parallel with *The Waste Land* – the quest ends in a failure, or rather it does not end but begins as a new quest. What has been achieved is an awareness of the rift between the self and its other as well as between imagination and reality. But the main discovery is that of the

mind's endless journey as a process in which nothing is given, and anything is possible. What remains is a certain dynamism of the searching mind, the oscillation between "intelligence" and "soil." In *Wallace Stevens: Art of Uncertainty* Herbert J. Stern writes:

> The imagination, reacting against the inadequacies and negative pressures of reality, strives to create for itself a pleasure palace… Achievement of this goal, however, is equivalent to total detachment from things as they are…. If poetry is to be more than hallucination, it is necessary that the imagination be checked by reality…. Fluctuating, then, between the imagination's desire for the harmonious forms it envisages, and the reason's insistence that the poem must be a reflection of truth, the poetic process is a process of interminable conflict. (109-10)

As for "The Comedian," Stern adds: "the task before Crispin is to invent and perfect a truly native American poetry that can at once satisfy the imagination's craving for the fabulous and the reality-principle's incidence on an undistorted vision of things as they are" (153). Having this "at once" in mind, one can understand the logic and value of the last two parts. Crispin tries to achieve a kind of equilibrium between the pressure of imagination and the pressure of reality – significantly, the word "equilibrium" would appear in the 1942 essay "The Noble Rider" (*NA* 9) – and he seems to do so by yielding to the American reality and, at the same time, contesting the reality and showing its insufficiency. It is possible that Stevens was not ready to draw general conclusions from his poetic vision but he realized that the American Sublime was not a simple reversal of the Neoclassical model, and that the sublime mind – the mind in the process of re-imagining and re-creating the reality – was never satisfied. So even if the poem is, as Helen Vendler puts it, "a tale of false attempts and real regrets" (54), still it arrives at a knowledge that would encourage the poet and help him survive the long period of silence after the publication of *Harmonium*.

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Susana Vega-González

Metaphor and Symbolism in Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*

> Nation exists only where we create boundaries. My nation lives in the waters between spiritual and physical homes.
>
> Miriam Neptune, "In Search of a Name"

> For after every night must come the dawn, a dawn that will take us not only midstream but all the way to the other side, away from the fires and the coals and hopefully toward more solid ground.
>
> Edwidge Danticat, Foreword to *Walking on Fire*

In *The Farming of Bones* (*FB*), the Haitian-American writer Edwidge Danticat engages in a "psychohistorical re-membrance" (Holloway 101) of the infamous Haitian massacre of 1937, where the living became dead and the dead lost their names and faces. Danticat's narrative act is thus an attempt to honor the thousands of unburied victims by rescuing them from oblivion and providing them with lasting memory rendered through their literary inscription. As Karla Holloway aptly states,

> just talking (telling) seems to be the way for memory and time to work out some sort of textu[r]al truce. History is reconstructed within such a frame and the writer is able to write out of a matrix of memory that is both sensual and visceral, as well as to reconstruct a logic of repetitive, circular complexity rather than a binary and linear polarity. (108)

Metaphor proves to be not only a signifying element in *The Farming of Bones* but also the structural foundation of the whole novel. Taking the cue from the oral stories about the Massacre heard from her foremothers or "kitchen poets" in what Paule Marshall calls "the wordshop of the kitchen" (35), Danticat weaves her particular "textu[r]al truce" to preserve a part of history in the collective memory against the ravages of time. So pervasive is the use of metaphor in the narrative texture of this novel that it calls for a detailed critical study, which I attempt to undertake in the present essay.

From the very title of the novel, which alludes to the toughness of the cane workers' tasks, to its last pages, metaphor stands out as a literary device employed by the author "to yield some true insight about reality" (Ricoeur 141, qtd. in De Weever 61), a reality whose

overwhelming nature often surpasses the delimitations of the logically explicable. The Massacre River has acted as the dividing border between the Dominican Republic and Haiti within the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, a border which many Haitians crossed over the years in search of jobs and opportunities. The need to earn a living as sugar cane cutters, construction laborers, and workers on tobacco and coffee plantations forces many Haitians to keep crossing the infamous border even nowadays, despite the fact that "prejudice against Haitians among many lighter-skinned Dominicans has become commonplace" (Arthur 13). However, during the regime of Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo, Haitians were used as scapegoats and blamed for the precarious economic and employment situation. Obsessed with the Hitlerian idea of racial cleansing, Trujillo ordered the killing of Haitian cane laborers in the Dominican Republic in a massacre to be known as "The Cutting" ("El Corte"), which took place in October 1937.[1] The dead bodies of many of those slain near the border were thrown into the waters of the Massacre River, which from then on remained in Haitians' collective memory as a metaphor of both death and eternity, both pain and yearning to give proper burial to the beloved, as Danticat demonstrates in her novel with clear Morrisonian undertones.

Like Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Amabelle's story is one of grief and loss, it is the narrative of a continuous search for the victims of historical injustice and violence lost in the coldness of water, be it a river or an ocean. And, as in *Beloved*, those silenced long ago are now granted a redemptive voice in literary discourse, as Amabelle admits: "It is perhaps the great discomfort of those trying to silence the world to discover that we have voices sealed inside our heads, voices that with each passing day, grow even louder than the clamor of the world outside" (*FB* 266). Thus, the novel turns into a "safe nest" (*FB* 266) for those dispossessed because of their race, gender and/or class, a true haven where they can be paid homage and recovered from past oblivion into present remembrance.

In his introduction to Edouard Glissant's *Caribbean Discourse*, Michael Dash argues that

> Landscape in the imagination of New World writers… translates the intricate and polysemic nature of collective experience… New World landscape offers the creative imagination a kind of metalanguage in which a new grammar of feeling and sensation is externalized. The artist must translate this multilingualism into his work. (xxxv)

The land, nature and the natural elements of water, air, and earth are crucial forces in *The Farming of Bones*, which determine the state of mind and existence of the characters as much as they shape the way the characters express themselves. It is not by chance that the

[1] For an interesting analysis of the Massacre and the circumstances that surrounded it see Wucker.

metaphoric content of *The Farming of Bones* revolves around nature almost in its entirety. Likewise, comparisons with natural elements abound in the novel, whether to express the female protagonist's strong love for her lover or to refer to the missing graves from the Massacre:

> I am afraid I cease to exist when he's not there. I'm like one of those sea stones that sucks its colors inside and loses its translucence once it's taken out into the sun, out of the froth of the waves. (*FB* 2)

> I could no more find these graves than the exact star that exploded and fell from the sky the night each of them perished. (*FB* 265)

Nature is revered by the characters and it often turns into an ally, a protector and source of strength amidst their misfortune: "making of the earth a warm bed" (*FB* 257), "I'm one of those trees whose roots reach the bottom of the earth. They can cut down my branches, but they will never uproot the tree. The roots are too strong, and there are too many" (*FB* 212). Furthermore, trees are associated by Haitians with the spiritual concepts of immortality and perdurance, and they represent a source of spiritual empowerment and resilience, all of which stem from the realm of the ancestors (Thompson, "Kongo" 172). Like the roots of the tree, ancestral bonds and the collective memory of a people serve as foundations on which ethnic identity is built.

Water metaphors recur throughout *The Farming of Bones*. Their connotations can be traced, once again, to Haitian Africanisms perceiving water as a "gateway" separating the world of the living from that of the dead (Thompson, "Kongo" 173); hence water's close connection with the spirits and the ancestors. Amabelle's childhood is dramatically marked by the Massacre River since it was in its waters that her parents perished while the three of them were trying to cross over onto Dominican territory. The memory of their death and the destructive connotations of water will haunt Amabelle in the recurring nightmares and dreams interspersed in her narrative. The manifold associations that images of water conjure up in the text render a dualistic metaphor of both healing and destruction. While on the one hand they are constantly associated with drowning and death, they are also used as a metaphor of love, protection, and immortality. When she is by herself, Amabelle takes out a symbol of permanence, a conch shell her lover had given her "saying that in there flowed the sound fishes hear when they swim deep inside the ocean's caves" (*FB* 45).[2] The meta-

[2] Conch shells are commonly used in Haiti to ornate graves and are considered symbols of immortality. As Robert Farris Thompson is told in an interview with the Haitian priest and painter André Pierre, "shells symbolize the existence of spirit in the sea: the body is dead but the spirit continues on its way. The shell encloses

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phor of the sea cave with connotations of motherly protection reappears in subsequent episodes, like that narrated by one of the characters who flees for the Haitian border when he is being persecuted by Dominican soldiers and civilians. Forced to choose between being killed by them and jumping off a cliff, he flies into the air to become one with the water and finally take refuge in a sea cave, which protects him from peasants with machetes in their hands waiting for him and the others to come out of the water.

One victim of the massacre is Sebastien Onius, the narrator's lover, and it is upon him that she centers her story. Sebastien's disappearance in the turmoil that leads to the massacre leaves Amabelle in a state of despairing uncertainty and confusion about his whereabouts, her only hope being the embracing and healing nature of water:

> Perhaps there was water to greet his last fall, to fold around him and embrace him like a feather-filled mattress… His name is Sebastien Onius and his spirit must be inside the waterfall cave at the source of the stream where the cane workers bathe, the grotto of wet moss and chalk and luminous green fresco – the dark green of wet papaya leaves. (*FB* 282)

According to Mircea Eliade, caves are the settings of many initiation rites since they are symbols of the womb of Mother Earth, where the novice returns to the embryonic stage to be re-born (58). Likewise, water is used in many ritual practices to convey spiritual renewal. Even in the light of an almost secure death, Amabelle chooses to imagine and remember Sebastien in terms of a new life into which he must surely be born. The constant movement of water and its fluctuating consistency makes of it a metaphor of transition between worlds and it becomes the realm of ghosts and spirits, the final grave of the dead. Water turns out to be, therefore, a source of life out of death.

As a Haitian woman in the "Dyaspora," Edwidge Danticat is highly concerned with identity politics and the process of self-formation of those living in an ideological "floating homeland" which links all Haitians from the "dyaspora" (Danticat, *Butterfly's* xiv). This concern applies in *The Farming of Bones* to the dispossessed low-class Haitians who work on cane plantations in the neighboring Dominican Republic. The rejection and hostility they fall prey to because of their darker skin and their foreign condition give rise to a deep feeling of uprootedness, which Sebastien resents: "Sometimes the people in the fields, when they're tired and angry, they say we're an orphaned people… They say some people don't belong anywhere and that's us. I say we are a group of vwayajè, wayfarers" (*FB* 56). This

elements of wter, earth, and wind. It is a world in miniature. It symbolizes the animation of succeeding generations by the spirit of the ancestors. It indicates the island in the sea to which we all shall journey" ("Kongo" 173).

consciousness of belonging to different places and not belonging anywhere at all triggers the need to set out on a continuous journey in search of an identity and a place to belong. Once again, Danticat appropriates the symbolism of water as a metaphor of home to signify both the unstable condition of Haitians' vital experience and the identification with nature as a way to fill that identity gap. Amabelle's thoughts delve once more into the healing power of water as the spiritual ointment needed to heal the wounds of dispossession and oppression:

> I had never desired to run away. I knew what was happening but I did not want to flee. "Where to?", "Who to?", was always chiming in my head.
>
> Of all the people killed, I will wager that there were many asking like me "Who to?" Even when they were dying and the priests were standing over them reciting ceremonial farewells, they must have been asking themselves, "Go in peace. But where?"
>
> Heaven – my heaven – is the veil of water that stands between my parents and me. To step across it and then come out is what makes me alive. (*FB* 264-65)

From an early age Amabelle is attracted to streams, rivers, waterfalls, and it is in the mirror of water that she constantly looks for her face, an act which symbolizes her search for identity. Similarly, her motherlessness, a recurrent circumstance in many works by Black women writers, is somehow compensated by a close identification with mother nature and, especially, with water elements. Years after the massacre, around the time of the year when it took place, Amabelle goes back to the house where she used to work as a servant and on the way back decides to stop near the border, where the river is, for the sake of a commemorative encounter with the living spirits of the dead: "Every now and then, I'm told, a swimmer finds a set of white spongy bones, a skeleton, thinned by time and being buried too long in the riverbed" (*FB* 308). Her final re-union and fusion with the river points to an ambiguous open ending, where once again life and death coalesce and where we could read the protagonist's spiritual re-birth through her physical death which brings about the longed-for meeting with her parents and Sebastien, all resting in the river. As naked as a newborn baby, Amabelle slips into the embracing water, "cradled by the current, paddling like a newborn in a washbasin" (*FB* 310).

The whole metaphoric framework built around the image of water draws on West African cultures, which worship rivers and water spirits. Indeed, there is enough evidence in the novel to suggest that Amabelle represents the Yoruba orisha Oshun, the deity of love and rivers, deliverer of babies and guardian of twins (Neimark 140, 108). In her delivery, Señora Valencia is helped by Amabelle, who inherits from her parents the knowledge and practice of childbirth: "Births and deaths were my parents' work. I never thought I would help at a birth myself until the screams rang through the valley that morning" (*FB* 5). Significantly

enough, it is in the birth of twins that she assists, although one of them is doomed to die. The placement of this scene at the beginning of the novel anticipates the impending death of another twin, namely Haiti. This country and the Dominican Republic are the twins fighting for survival on the same island, even at the expense of the other's life. As the guardian of twins, Oshun, embodied in Amabelle, grants the dead twin the grace of memory and passes on the story of its suffering. From her union with Shango, the Yoruba god of thunder and lightning, Oshun herself gave birth to twins: "Oshun was once married to Ifá but fell into a more passionate involvement with the fiery thunder god… she bore him twins and accumulated… money and splendid things galore…. When she died, she took these things to the bottom of the river. There she reigns in glory" (Thompson, *Flash* 79). In her final visit to the Massacre River, Amabelle is accompanied by the insane professor who was the living example of the legacy of such a historical ordeal. His words, "Grass won't grow where I stand" (*FB* 285), imply that he is a river god or spirit, and it is he whom Amabelle asks for guidance when she goes into the river:

> A shadow slipped out of the stretch of water before me, a ghost with a smile on his face… It was the professor… I closed my eyes and tried to imagine the fog, the dense mist of sadness inside his head. Would the slaughter – the river – one day surrender to him his sanity the same way it had once snatched it away?
>
> I wanted to call him… I wanted to ask him, please, to gently raise my body and carry me into the river, into Sebastien's cave, my father's laughter, my mother's eternity. But he was gone now, disappeared into the night. (*FB* 309-10)

In her analysis of Toni Morrison's *Sula*, Vashti Crutcher Lewis points out that "in traditional West African culture… lunatics were treated with awful respect, since it was believed that they were nearest in contact with the unseen spiritual world, and that the ancestral spirits spoke through them" (318). Like *Sula*'s deranged Shadrack, the insane professor represents a spiritual figure that embodies the nurturing link with the spirits of the dead. Both characters are linked by the element of water; interestingly enough, the first of their two encounters is marked by an unexpected "damp kiss" on Amabelle's lips, which according to popular lore is a sign of good luck, as the onlooking women tell her: "Don't you know that if you are kissed by a crazy man, it brings you luck?" (*FB* 285). The two come together again in the closing scene fraught with spiritual meaning, where the final reunion with the ancestors and the beloved spirits heralds the dawn of eternity, the communal immortality of those who, like Sebastien, died in the Massacre and are commemorated in the novel: "He, like me, was looking for the dawn" (*FB* 310). The intertextual relation between *Sula* and *The Farming of Bones* centers upon the use of death/life metaphors: the description of Sula's and Amabelle's deaths surrounded by water images are remarkably similar. As

Shadrack had promised Sula "a sleep of water always" (Morrison, *Sula* 128), so the professor promises Amabelle a journey into a water eternity: "I'm walking to the dawn" (*FB* 285). She now forms part of the community of water spirits to which she is led by the mad professor: "The professor returned to look down at me lying there… He turned around and walked away, his sandals flapping like two large birds fluttering damp wings, not so much to fly as to preen themselves" (*FB* 310). Water and air coalesce in this final scene with the use of the bird and flight metaphors. The description of the professor walking away on the water confirms his identity as a water spirit or deity. The inevitable Christian overtones that bring back the image of Jesus walking on water point to the final spiritual salvation of the whole Haitian community.

Lastly, the focus on water metaphors makes Danticat's novel a clear example of what Ann-Janine Morey terms "watertime," a "crossing [of] the margin of normality," that is, "a confluence of time and space in which all normal boundaries are suspended" (248). Water represents ambiguity, fluidity, and instability, which are the defining traits of postmodernism and its views on representation. The watery fusion of natural and supernatural, corporeal and spiritual, reality and dream, human and divine, life and death, past and present fulfills Danticat's aim to "dissolve, escape, and rethink the imprisoning boundaries governing conventional wisdom" (Morey 248), and, we could add, "conventional" history.

The motif of flying has always been present in the literature of African-American writers. Bird and flight metaphors abound in their novels, and Danticat makes use of them, too. One connotation of flight is freedom from the fetters of oppression, as shown in a persecuted Haitian's jump into the freedom of air.[3] Likewise, recurring references to the smallest of birds, the hummingbird, add to the layered metaphoricity of Danticat's work and to its spiritual load. One of Oshun's birds (Brooks De Vita 41) and a symbol of rebirth and eternity, the hummingbird plays a crucial role in the novel. In Aztec mythology, the hummingbird was a sacred animal representing the sun and the idea of rebirth into eternity. It was a hummingbird that guided the Aztec people in their migration and the foundation of their new home Tenochtitlan, now Mexico City. The hummingbird was the Aztec god of war and fire, and dead warriors were supposed to take its shape to ascend to the sky near the sun. All these meanings can be traced in Danticat's novel. The bird embodies the treasure of eternal life in the scene when Señora Valencia paints "four small hummingbirds" on her son's coffin (*FB* 91). On the other hand, the return to the past, the traveling back into the interstices of history parallels the hummingbird's ability to fly backwards, the feature which differentiates it from the rest of birds. Through memory and dreams Amabelle revisits the past and its ghosts, whereas Danticat endows them with eternity through literary discourse.

[3] This flight is reminiscent of Milkman's flight at the end of Morrison's *Song of Solomon*.

Dreams and reality interweave in *The Farming of Bones* with a fluidity that threatens the stability of dividing boundaries. Dreams about her drowned parents fill Amabelle's nightly sleep, as do dreams about the shadows of unknown ancestors who suffered the ravages of slavery, like the sugar woman: "I dream of the sugar woman. Again… Around her face, she wears a shiny silver muzzle, and on her neck there is a collar with a clasped lock dangling from it… the chains on her ankles cymbal a rattled melody…" (*FB* 132). The protagonist's obsession with faces, which symbolizes her constant yearning and search for her parents, Sebastien, and, by extension, the victims of the Massacre, triggers a conversation with the sugar woman that starts with a question about her face: "'Is your face underneath this?' I ask. The voice that comes out of my mouth surprises me; it is the voice of the orphaned child at the stream, the child who from then on would talk only to strange faces… 'Why are you here?' I ask her. 'Told you before,' she says. 'I am the sugar woman. You, my eternity.'" (*FB* 132-33). Likewise, the ghost of Amabelle's mother appears to her in dreams, uttering the same final words: "In my sleep, I see my mother rising, like the mother spirit of the rivers, above the current that drowned her… 'You, my eternity'" (*FB* 207-08). These women's reassuring words signal the hope for spiritual immortality in the face of physical death and destruction. The passing on of the dead's forgotten stories, giving them a voice in the novel's discourse, is the only hope for eternity and remembrance they may have, as the sugar woman knows. Silence, on the contrary, would mean another kind of death, a second death, as Sebastien claims: "We must talk to remind each other that we are not yet in the slumbering dark, which is an endless death, like a darkened cave… Silence to him is like sleep, a close second to death" (*FB* 13).

Language, like nature, acquires a dual meaning in this novel. While it can be a healing tool against oppression and oblivion, it can also function as a destructive agent that strongly determines the immigrants' lives. In the novel which blurs the boundaries between life and death, dream and reality, the living and the dead, the duality of language reinforces the pervasive effect of indeterminacy. Language stands, once again, as an empowering token not only for the oppressed but also for the oppressors, as it is the case on the island of Hispaniola, divided between the Spanish of the Dominican Republic and the Creole of Haiti. The foreign accent of Haitian immigrants when they are made to pronounce the Spanish name of the familiar herb *perejil* gives them away and is thus used by Dominicans to identify and persecute them. Furthermore, language is manipulated by imbuing the prisoners' brains with the oppressors' ideas and words. Thus, physical torture gives way to psychological ordeal and personal humiliation. The cruelty of this process is explicitly portrayed through the case of Father Romain, who had helped Haitians and who now reels off the dictator's sentences in his deranged mind:

> 'On this island, walk too far in either direction and people speak a different language… Our motherland is Spain; theirs is darkest Africa, you understand? They once came here only to cut sugarcane, but now there are more of them than there will ever be cane to cut, you understand? Our problem is one of dominion… How can a country be ours if we are in smaller numbers than the outsiders? Those of us who love our country are taking measures to keep it our own… We, as Dominicans, must have our separate traditions and our own ways of living. If not, in less than three generations, we will all be Haitians… our children and grandchildren will have their blood tainted unless we defend ourselves now, you understand?' (*FB* 260-61)

Trujillo's discourse appears steeped in prejudice, discrimination and racism, all disguised under the luring idea of love of his nation. His monolithic binary distinction between "us" – the insiders, the Dominicans, the "whiter," and "them" – the outsiders, the Haitians, the dark Africa's descendants, lies at the basis of both colonialism and slavery. It is in such frame of mind that violence and dominion are legitimized by oppressors like Trujillo; indeed, as Amabelle points out, it is a cleansing – an ethnic one – that the Generalissimo tries to carry out in his country, a cleansing that she compares to what they Haitians do with parsley: "We use parsley for our food, our teas, our baths, to cleanse our insides as well as our outsides. Perhaps the Generalissimo in some larger order was trying to do the same for his country" (*FB* 203).

Within language, names represent life and permanence in memory as well as "a crucial act of claiming self and community" (Brooks De Vita 15). It is not by chance that the very first sentence of the novel refers to naming: "His name is Sebastien Onius" (*FB* 1). Of all things that could be said about the deceased Sebastien, it is precisely his name that is the most important, since through it he lives in the memory of the living, that is, in the "sasa" or present world inhabited by both the living and the dead whose names are still remembered, as believed by many African peoples (Mbiti 25). This is how bell hooks explains the importance of naming:

> Naming… has been of crucial concern for many individuals within oppressed groups who struggle for self-recovery, for self-determination…. Within many folk traditions globally… naming is a source of empowerment, an important gesture in the process of creation. A primacy is given to naming as a gesture that deeply shapes and influences the social construction of a self. As in southern African-American folk traditions, a name is perceived as a force that has the power to determine whether or not an individual will be fully self-realized, whether she or he will be able to fulfill their destiny, find their place in the world…. [Names] are a way to preserve and honor aspects of [the] past. (166)

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Through the evocation of a name, through the oral tradition that ensures the transmission across generations of the silenced side of history and through what Homi Bhabha terms "the uncanny voice of memory" (450), the boundary of physical death is crossed into spiritual life and permanence. A face and a name constitute the foundations of an identity and of the process of personal formation to the point that "Men with names never truly die. It is only those nameless and faceless who vanish like smoke into the early morning air" (*FB* 282). By conjuring up Sebastien's name and the tragic experience of the massacred Haitians through her character Amabelle, Edwidge Danticat honors the memory of the dead and builds a literary grave for those who even in death suffer the evils of invisibility: "There were no graves, no markers. If we tried to dance on graves, we would be dancing on air" (*FB* 270). There must be some kind of memory in nature, some sign of the thousands of bodies that vanished into the transparency of water for future generations to know the true history of their people. Like silence, the lack of memory is another kind of death; on the contrary, "(re)membrance is activation in the face of stasis, a restoration of fluidity, translucence, and movement" (Holloway 68). Danticat's novel epitomizes the fluidity of water by emphasizing the illusory nature of established borders between life and death, past and present, dream and reality. Through memory, metaphor, and the power of spirituality literary discourse calls into question the stasis of a received history to move backward into the past, like a hummingbird, calling for revision and renewal.

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Zuzanna Ładyga

The Dead Father, *As I Lay Dying*, and the Intertextual Dialogue between Modernism and Postmodernism

> Any work of art depends upon a complex series of interdependencies. If I wrench the rubber tire from the belly of Rauschenberg's famous goat to determine, in the interest of finer understanding of same, whether the tire is B. F. Goodrich or a Uniroyal, the work collapses, more or less behind my back.
>
> Donald Barthelme, "Not-Knowing"

Despite his hostility towards literary criticism, Donald Barthelme often proved himself to be one of literature's most insightful commentators. A case in point is his 1985 essay "Not-Knowing," in which, by alluding to Robert Rauschenberg's "Monogram," Barthelme offers a remarkably comprehensive illustration of the mechanism of intertextual collage. In contrast to his earlier appraisal of collage as the governing principle of literature conveyed by the metaphor of Michelangelo's knife,[1] the 1985 definition does not focus on the diachronic aspect of intertextual relationship but strongly emphasizes the latter's interactive dimension and recognizes the ironic potential of every intertextual reading. By invoking the image of the "attired" goat, Barthelme stresses that the meaning of an intertextual exchange depends not on "the signification of parts but [on] how the parts come together" (517) and insists that the process of tracing interdependencies between parts inevitably presupposes a degree of interpretative violence. Translated into critical discourse, the idea of brutally ripping the tire from the goat's belly refers to the synchronic aspect of intertextual reading, where possible textual links are defined by means of the available discourse and the dominant reading conventions within the ideologically determined, transitory space between texts, which Kristeva calls the dialogic space of the "double" (69).

In this context, it is hardly surprising that *The Dead Father* (*DF*), the second novel of the leading collage writer of American postmodernism, provoked multiple intertextual

[1] In an 1978 interview with Ziegler, Barthelme said, "instead of trying to do Blake, I might steal a little from Blake. As Michelangelo said so beautifully: 'Where I steal, I leave a knife.' He knew how to steal. My father, who was an architect, said: 'Get out there and steal, but improve what you steal…. Take the details and reduce them – Corbu or Mies or Neutra – and improve on these guys.' Or else your stealing has no meaning" (Ziegler and Bigsby 52-53). For Barthelme's comments on collage see Barthelme, Gass, Paley, and Percy 24.

readings which set it against modernist works, such as Joyce's *Finnegans Wake,* Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Kafka's *Letters to His Father*, Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, and Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*.[2] Associations with Faulkner are among the most frequent, presumably because of the two novels' apparent compositional and thematic parallelism.[3] Despite those obvious symmetries, however, the relationship between *As I Lay Dying* (*ALD*) and *The Dead Father* is rendered controversial by Barthelme's reticence about his indebtedness to Faulkner (*Essays and Interviews* 228, 294). The case invites further analysis, especially since it raises crucial questions about the nature of intertextuality in the context of the all-subsuming modernist/postmodernist debate. Therefore, the aim of this essay is to re-examine the possible existence of an intertextual relationship between *The Dead Father* and *As I Lay Dying* and to explore the ways in which the intertextual reading of the two novels is contingent upon the cultural and critical renditions of differences between modernist and postmodernist literature. Rather than embarking on a hopeless mission to legitimize the intertextual bond between *The Dead Father* and *As I Lay Dying*, I seek to present a reading which, by testing the two novels' preoccupation with the figures of the dead father and the dead mother, elucidates the central features of intertextual dialogicity between modernist and postmodernist texts.

There are multiple correspondences between *As I Lay Dying* and *The Dead Father*. As Janusz Semrau notes, they can be traced already on the level of composition and are further emphasized by the two novels' preoccupation with the theme of death (51). Each text consists of a series of episodes constituting the motif of a journey which begins with a funeral party and ends at a burial site. While in *As I Lay Dying* the destitute Bundrens transport the corpse of their dead mother, Addie, to its resting place in Jefferson, the characters in Barthelme's novel face a similar task of dragging their father's giant carcass to the excavation site where he is to be buried. Moreover, the parallels are amplified by the grotesque exploitation of mythical patterns in both narratives. *The Dead Father* parodies the motif of quest and the motif of regenerative journey by presenting the burial as a passage through an obstacle-filled way to find the Golden Fleece, whereas the ultimate goal of the questers is actually to bury the father and free themselves from his influence. *As I Lay Dying*, on the other hand, caricatures the apocalyptic motif of ordeal as the travelling Bundrens ride through flood and fire in order to transport Addie's coffin to her family grave (Semrau 52-53). Meanwhile, however, the Bundrens use the journey as a pretext to carry out their private plans: Jefferson is the place where Dewey Dell can have an abortion and Anse can buy himself new teeth and get a new wife. The journey

[2] For discussions of *The Dead Father* in those contexts, see Kopcewicz; Wilde 45-47; Schwenger; Semrau 50-61.
[3] For more discussion on this point, see Semrau 50-61. See also Barthelme's 1975 interview with Charles Ruas and his 1981 interview with Joe Brans's (*Essays and Interviews* 207-58, 293-308).

motif, despite its apparently symmetrical application in the two texts, provides a lens for observing significant differences between the patterns of each novel's teleological structuring. Not only does the narrative of *As I Lay Dying* consent entirely to the Aristotelian principle of the *telos* as its events stem from the initial fact of the Bundrens' promise to transport their deceased mother to Jefferson, but also the novel's *dianoia* remains unchallenged by such disrupting episodes as the collapse of the bridge or the barn fire. In contrast, *The Dead Father* does not imply any *telos* in the sense of either plot coherence or thought development (Leitch 136); most scenes, like the episode of the "halt," are assemblages of photographic images:

> Thomas decides that the Dead Father is not allowed to view the film, because of his age. Outrage of the Dead Father. Death of the guitar, whanged against the tree, in outrage. Guitar carcass added to the fire. Thomas adamant. The Dead Father raging. Emma regnant. Julie staring. (*DF* 21)

As Andrzej Kopcewicz suggests, *The Dead Father*'s narration can be grasped only in spatial terms; it is all about verbal collages "arrested in spatial surface" (174). Thomas Leitch makes a similar point by claiming that Barthelme's landscapes are "without shadows of narrative past… [the] story begins with a premise which like the rules of the game is simply given" (136). The "overbearing timelessness" of D.F.'s presence (Walsh 175) which informs the novel's static structure is forcefully stated at the onset of the journey: he is "dead, but still with us, still with us, but dead" (*DF* 3). His presence is always there to prevail in his children, so that "murderinging," the desired solution to the problem of fatherhood, becomes unattainable. As the Dead Father proclaims "all lines [are his] lines" (*DF* 19); his giant carcass is the body of the book. It is thus precisely the spatial elaboration of this unattainability rather than any teleological organization that binds together the narrative of *The Dead Father* and accentuates its contrast to *As I Lay Dying*.

The discussion of differences in the spatio-temporal rendition of the journey motif in the two novels leads directly to the comparison of their narrative techniques. This in turn exposes the dependence of that discussion on theoretical renditions of temporality and spatiality, especially those inherent in the modernist and postmodernist models of literary subjectivity. The typically modernist preoccupation of Faulkner's soliloquies with individual subjectivity and its temporal predicament stands in sharp contrast with the spatialized subjectivities in Barthelme's text. *As I Lay Dying* oscillates around Addie's agony and prolonged burial, reflecting the Heideggerian concept of death which is not a momentary event but a process imprinting on life the mark of its mute presence. Accordingly, just as Addie's deathly presence regulates the lives of her family, the theme of

dying serves to maintain the progression of the novel's monologues. On the other hand, *The Dead Father*'s fragmented narrative does not even begin to introduce characters in the usual sense of the word, thus signaling the deterioration, or rather detemporalization of the modernist subject. A case in point is the ambivalent status of the Dead Father, who, by being dead "only in a sense," exemplifies the postmodernist "waning of the modernist thematics of time and temporality [and] the elegiac mysteries of *durée*" (Jameson 72), which feature prominently in the interior monologues of *As I Lay Dying*. In fact, *The Dead Father*'s treatment of death, a notion crucially involved in the construction of subjectivity, announces its radical departure from Faulkner's progressive "dying" as early as in the title's past participle form of the verb. "Dead" means one to whom death has already happened, a state rather than a process, and a state in which any access to authentic knowledge is forever deferred. Thus, through his indeterminate status of being dead and not dead at the same time, the Dead Father seems to be a literal enactment of the paradoxical logic of death as the attainable possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all. Unlike *As I Lay Dying,* which struggles with the implications of this logic, *The Dead Father* points to the irresolvability of death's paradox, thus producing a commentary on the modernist text's nostalgia for the subject's ontological authenticity.

Yet, is it altogether justified to assume close thematic correspondences between Faulkner's and Barthelme's texts by tracing direct parallels between the novels' central figures, Addie Bundren and The Dead Father? Indeed, the characters do resemble one another in that they embody what Semrau calls parental authority (52). In addition, they are similar in being authoritarian as well as a burden to those around them, since both, to repeat after "A Manual for Sons," block their children's path (*DF* 129). This oppressiveness, explicitly commented upon in *The Dead Father*, is never openly voiced in *As I Lay Dying*. However, it can be inferred from the meaning of the word "trout" in Chapter Three of *The Dead Father*, which serves as Riffaterre's intertextual "connective" between the two novels. The name of the fish derives from the Greek *trogein*, meaning to gnaw, to cause wearying distress and anxiety, and thus, if we recall Vardaman's declaration "My mother is a fish" (*ALD* 76), it seems to retrospectively inform Vardaman's perception of his mother, depriving it of its original innocence. Still, whereas both Addie and the Dead Father cause distress and anxiety among their families, we cannot turn a blind eye on the crucial gender difference between them, a difference which problematizes their apparent similarities and hence challenges the idea of Addie serving as the prototype for the main character of Barthelme's novel. In order to address this issue, however, it seems vital to return to the ontologically ambiguous status of the Dead Father, whose intertextual context may prove helpful in explaining why Faulkner centers his novel on the character of a dead woman.

The Dead Father's ontological and linguistic instability is repeatedly evoked in the course of Barthelme's narrative: not only does the Dead Father say in the beginning that it's "[g]reat to be alive…. To breathe in and out. To feel one's muscles bite and snap" (*DF* 13), but he also remains at once the spectacle and the spectator of his own burial: "'You'll bury me alive?' You're not alive… remember?'" (*DF* 175). The Dead Father's double role seems to be a literal embodiment of Baudelaire's *dédoublement*, an instance of the subject realizing the elusiveness of the possibility of an authentic sense of being. This situation gives rise to "the absolute comic" ("On Laughter" 157), or, as de Man calls it after Schlegel, "irony," which "from the small and apparently innocuous exposure of small self-deception… soon reaches the dimension of the absolute" ("Rhetoric" 215). The Dead Father is an epitome of the asymptotic unmasking that occurs in language as an accelerating *parabasis*, which brings an end to a hierarchized subject/object relationship, destabilizes cognitive endeavors, and thus signals the breakdown of the syntactic and logical congruity of discourse. The culminating moment of this process is exemplified by the entropic, Becketty Chapter Twenty-Two of *The Dead Father*:

> AndI. EndI. Great endifarce teeterteeterteetertottering. Willit urt. I reiterate. Don't be cenacle. Conscienta mille testes. And having made them, where now? what now? Mens agitat molem and I wanted to doitwell, doitwell…. AndI most rightly and graciously and sweetly reiteratingandreiteratingandreiterating…. Don't understand! Don't want it! Fallo fallere fefelli falsum! (*DF* 171-73)

Here, as the Dead Father's utterances collapse onto one another, there follows a shattering of the illusion of narrative coherence, whereby, at the cost of any understanding ("Don't understand!"), the novel addresses the irrefutability of epistemological and ontological doubt, which, as I demonstrate later, *The Dead Father*'s modernist intertext aims to transgress by controlling the ironic threat.

The recognition of irony as the governing mode of the Dead Father's existence and, due to its capacity to challenge narrative continuity, the underlying strategy of the novel directs the search for D.F.'s prototypes in Faulkner's novel not to the dead Addie, but rather to the character of her most despised son, Darl Bundren. Darl is the madman who, repressed and eventually expelled from the narrative altogether, shares the Dead Father's ironic predicament, particularly if we recall de Man's definition of irony as madness, "the end or dissolution of all consciousness" ("Rhetoric" 216). Darl's abnormal behavior, such as his fits of mad laughter and the attempt to burn Addie's coffin, unsettles the course of events, while the alienating and visionary quality of his monologues disrupts the narrative's linear progression to the point of threatening its complete dissolution. No

fragment illustrates Darl's disposition towards irony better than his final monologue where *dédoublement* gains true momentum as Darl speaks of himself in the third person:

> Darl has gone to Jackson. They put him on the train, laughing, down the long car laughing, the heads turning like the heads of owls when he passed. "What are you laughing at?" I said.
>
> "Yes yes yes yes yes…."
>
> "Why do you laugh?" I said. "Is it because you hate the sound of laughing?…"
>
> "Yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes" (*ALD* 241-42)

Darl's maniacal repetitive affirmation of "an endless process [of psychic splitting] that leads to no synthesis" (de Man 220) exemplifies the moment of duplication the subject experiences in the act of irony, where the removal of the mask of identity does not reveal any truth about the self. Instead, it endlessly disrupts the process of inquiry into the subject's status, thus bringing about the laughter of madness. By being the locus of irony in *As I Lay Dying*, Darl's presence threatens the narrative and perhaps for this reason his position is constantly undermined and deprecated by others. The threat posed by his ironic consciousness is immediately counteracted – most notably when, in response to Darl's attempt to burn Addie's coffin and terminate the absurd pilgrimage, Jewel rescues the box from flames and secures the continuity of the journey – and in the end it is decisively removed as Darl is taken to a lunatic asylum. Without that episode, the narrative would not run a full circle because the Bundrens would not be able to complete the burial and fulfill their plans. Moreover, it is Darl's ironic sensibility that seems to be the reason for Addie's hatred:

> Then I found I had Darl. At first I would not believe it. Then I believed that I would kill Anse. It was as though he had tricked me, hidden in a word like within a paper screen and struck me in the back through it. (*ALD* 161)

This passage communicates not only Addie's recognition of the dangerous potential of irony "hidden" in every instance of language but also her violent urge to nip its power in the bud. Given that Darl's eventual removal from the narrative secures its completion, it seems that the attitude expressed by Addie informs the novel's tendency to repress the ironic threat it nevertheless hosts within itself in the character of Darl. In other words, the same ironic element that reigns in *The Dead Father* seems to be already present, in its nascent state, in *As I Lay Dying*, in the character of Darl Bundren.[4] Consequently, the fore-

[4] The idea of "nascent state" derives from Lyotard's seminal essay "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" (79). Lyotard's notion of postmodern elements as present in "nucleus" form (79) but repressed in modern(ist) works offers a way of accounting for correspondences between Darl and the Dead Father. It

grounding of the Dead Father may be understood as a celebratory de-marginalization of the silenced ironic doubt in *As I Lay Dying*.

Crucially, the assertion of irony's threat comes from Addie, the character not only central to the novel but also presumably endowed with the greatest insight into the truth of existence, as her knowledge, like that of a Socratean philosopher who seeks true wisdom in Hades, has been authenticated by death.[5] Here, however, we stumble upon a paradox: on the one hand, the authenticity of Addie's testimony, "I knew what he [father] meant and that he could not have known what he meant himself" (*ALD* 164), is confirmed by the emphatic positioning of her monologue in the narrative after the actual moment of her death, but on the other hand, it is undermined by her own distrust towards words that are "no good [and] never fit at what they are trying to say at" (*ALD* 159). Rather than fulfilling the promise of death to bring definite answers to one's ontological inquiry, Addie's monologue announces the recognition, however bitter, of linguistic constraints that frustrate every possibility of reaching a state of authentic self-knowledge. That the discovery of the allegorical quality of words comes from the deceased Addie is highly relevant, since death, as a marker of temporality, is very much a feature of allegory. This is reflected in the fact that the heroine's death serves to sustain narrative duration by providing the Bundrens with a reason for completing their journey. As Paul de Man notes, "allegory always corresponds to the unveiling of an authentically temporal destiny [which] takes place in a subject that has sought refuge against the impact of time" ("Rhetoric" 206). Therefore allegory is invariably marked by a certain nostalgia for words to coincide with their referents, an attitude which Addie demonstrates when she observes that the word fear "was invented by someone that had never had the fear" (*ALD* 160), or when she declares, "people to whom sin is just a matter of words, to them salvation is just words too" (*ALD* 165). Her disillusioned acknowledgement of the allegorical quality of language may be said to reflect the novel's paradoxical attempt to render language transparent in order to show its non-transparency. Correspondingly, in refusing to accept the unbreachability of allegory, Addie expresses the typically modernist search for *le mot juste,* which is emphasized by the circularity of her life story: the end of

also, of course, exposes the reliance of intertextual readings on the existing models of approaching the relationship between modernist and postmodernist works.

[5] Faulkner's title phrase is borrowed from Book IX of the *Odyssey*, "The Descent of the Dead," where Agamemnon's ghost says, "As I lay dying the woman with dog's eyes would not close my eyes as I descended into Hades" (Blotner 634-35). Given this context, the opening lines of Addie's monologue, "I could just remember how my father used to say that the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time" (*ALD* 157), seem to paraphrase the Socratic idea that the only aim of those who practice philosophy in a proper manner is to prepare for death (Plato sec. 64c). Just as death leaves Agamemnon open-eyed so that he can acquire knowledge of the underworld, it also seems to put Addie in possession of authentic existential knowledge inaccessible to the living.

Addie's "journey" is also its beginning since Jefferson, the site of her burial, is also the place of her birth.

This brings us back to the question why Faulkner centers his novel on the character of a dead woman. For one thing, it seems that the maneuver of authenticating Addie's words by making her talk from beyond the grave represents his essentialist trust in the expressive capacity of language. However, given the fact that Addie's presence is the constitutive element of the narrative's duration, the gesture seems to bespeak much more, namely, that her centrality is meant to mask the male author's usurpation of a woman's discursive position in order to disguise his dismissal of her point of view, presumably because a woman's point of view is one of the things that remain outside his control. In other words, Addie may very well be one of Faulkner's artist personae, one of his "male feminizations" (Hönnighausen 129) by means of which he indirectly proclaims his authorial (and male) control over language. The process of exerting that domination is symbolized in Addie's monologue by the image of the vessel, which serves as a sort of *mise en abime* for Faulkner's universalizing gesture:

> I would think about his [Anse's] name until after a while I could see the word as a shape, a vessel, and I would watch him liquefy and flow into it like cold molasses flowing out of darkness into the vessel, until the jar stood full and motionless: a significant shape *profoundly without life* like an empty door frame; and then I would find that I had forgotten the name of the jar. (*ALD* 161, emphasis added)

By picturing Addie as a "murderous transformer" (Hönnighausen 132), Faulkner exposes his own procedures of shaping the language of his novel, which consist in approaching words and characters as lifeless "shapes" capable of conveying definite and controllable meanings. From this perspective, Addie's mistrust of words that "trick" (*ALD* 161) provides additional safeguard against any potential failure of Faulkner's approach, thereby revealing his authorial urge to dominate the discourse of the novel, including that part of it which is uttered by a female character. This idea is closely linked with the previously discussed tendency of Faulkner's text to suppress the ironic element represented by Darl. The ironist position of the latter tests the limits of Addie's essentialist approach to language and in this way thwarts her centrality to the novel, putting at risk both the duration of the narrative and the author's assertion of control over the novel's discourse. In order to mitigate this risk, Faulkner not only removes Darl but also silences and portrays as grotesque other major male characters in the novel: Jewel is hostile to language, Vardaman can barely use it, while Cash and Anse are verbally retarded.

In this context, Barthelme's recasting of Darl's ironic sensibility in the character of the Dead Father, and his use of the latter to deconstruct the notion of patriarchy by parodying psychoanalytic discourse, may be viewed as a recognition of Faulkner's manipulation. By rejecting the idea of gender binary in essentialist terms and introducing the absurd figure of D.F., the postmodern writer undermines male authority "both explicitly through his subject matter and implicitly through the strategies of his writing" (Schwenger 70) and thus comments on Faulkner's authorial dominance. His critique is additionally strengthened by the radical marginalization of the mother, who appears only once, as a lone horse-rider barely visible on the horizon. It also transpires from Julie's and Emma's fragmented and uncommunicative dialogic exchanges which, composed out of stock phrases, convey the sense of the imprisonment of female voice in the male-dominated discourse (McVicker 364-68):

> Thought I heard a dog barking.
> In wild places far from the heart.
> Tiny silvered hairs that I had thought mine alone.
> A lady always does.
> Told them how Lenin Had appeared to her in a dream.
> That's your opinion…
> Hoping this will reach you at a favorable moment.
> (*DF* 86)

As though to confirm *The Dead Father*'s ironic character, the novel's deconstructive maneuvers, however radical, are always prevented from merging into unequivocal statements by the presence of a self-reflexive textual element placed within the body of the text and called "A Manual for Sons." By creating a book-within-book structure, the "Manual" opens an interpretative abyss that not only disperses the conclusive commentaries of *As I Lay Dying* and prevents *The Dead Father*'s own narrative from impeding its ironic potential, but also secures the text against totalizing interpretations. In contrast to Addie's monologue, which to an extent also serves as a mirror to the surrounding text of Faulkner's novel, the "Manual" does not proclaim any authenticity that would hinder its self-reflexive potential but instead allows for free perpetuation of ironic doubt. This difference between *The Dead Father* and *As I Lay Dying* further elucidates the two novels' distinct approaches to the problem of authorial control. What it shows is that while Barthelme renounces authority over his text by introducing the "Manual," Faulkner seems to emphasize his control by usurping Addie's voice and authenticating it by creating the illusion that it comes from beyond the grave, that is, from beyond the limits of human understanding.

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Since the problem of authorial control involves the idea of diachronic intertextual influence, its discussion in terms of the relationship between *The Dead Father* and *As I Lay Dying* leads directly to the differences in the novels' thematization of the idea of ancestry. Even though, by revolving around the idea of parenthood, both *As I Lay Dying* and *The Dead Father* engage the issue of anxiety and indeterminacy that stems from the impossibility of creating new modes of cognition, they pursue it in radically different ways. Barthelme's novel delivers its commentary on intertextual influence in a provocatively straightforward manner through the figure of an ever-present authoritarian father (Wilde 45), suggesting that the dependence on ancestral texts is ingrained in literary creation. In contrast, *As I Lay Dying* bears no signs of such directness. With regard to the argument that Faulkner manipulates Addie Bundren's central position to assert his authorial domination over the novel's discourse, a comment on diachronic intertextual influence may be found in Addie's horror of pregnancy, which can be interpreted as the modernist novel's refusal to acknowledge the past and future intertexts it involuntarily carries within itself. From the psychoanalytic viewpoint, however, the association of textual influence with the figure of the mother implies not so much the anxiety of being influenced by existing discourse – unlike the father, the mother is not the giver of language and hence does not have to be conquered – as the reminder of pre-discursive freedom which characterizes pre-Symbolic stages of subject development. Thus, the modernist novel's implicit featuring of the intertextual relation in terms of the umbilical cord reveals its refusal to accept the inevitable indebtedness to its literary predecessors.

The context of *The Dead Father*, with its explicit identification of fatherhood with diachronic intertextual influence, urges us to re-examine Faulkner's rendition of father figures, especially the case of the marginalized Anse Bundren, who in many ways resembles the father in Barthelme's novel. Although Anse is portrayed as a remorseless, inert parasite, he is also "predatory" in the sense that he indulges in the immunity granted by his authority as a father. These qualities are shared by the Dead Father, who is like a "block placed squarely in [his children's] path" (*DF* 129), a burdensome but powerless corpse which on occasion turns into a ruthless slayer or authoritarian creator of everything that fills the universe of the novel. Accordingly, while in *As I Lay Dying* the general perception of Anse's relationship with his family, expressed most clearly by Dr. Peabody, is that they "could all have stuck his head in the saw and cured the whole family" (*ALD* 228), in *The Dead Father* the subjugation of patriarchal authority requires everyone's "combined efforts" (*DF* 145). In its more explicit version, the desire to dispose of the father is introduced in the word "murderinging," which is an answer to a riddle posed to Thomas by Father Serpent in *The Dead Father*. The portmanteau quality

of the word suggests that even though "murder" (in a Lacanian sense) is a constantly ringing idea, it is also, as the lingering "-ing" suggests, impossible to accomplish. *The Dead Father*'s "murderinging" perhaps links up with Dewey Dell's secretly sought abortion, in which case the girl's urge to dispose of the pregnancy and her eventual failure to do so may reflect the modernist novel's tendency to repress the idea of literary imitation, accompanied by the fear that the desired disposal of the carried-inside remainder of the past may never take place.

The intertextual perspective offered by *The Dead Father* sheds light not only on Anse's marginal position but also on the ambiguous duality of the father figure in Faulkner's text. On the one hand, he is the clumsy and ridiculous Anse, yet on the other hand he is the omnipresent patriarch that haunts Addie throughout her life, and whom she hates for having "planted" her (*ALD* 157). This duality marks the effort to diminish the impact of literary fatherhood represented by the turning of Addie's overwhelming father into the hopeless Anse Bundren, the effort which exemplifies the modernist struggle for literary uniqueness and reproduces the fear that the latter may not in the end be attainable. Such interpretation explains why Anse is "so loaded with faults and vices" as no other character in *As I Lay Dying* (Bleikasten 84). However, the final events of Anse's remarriage and acquisition of a new set of teeth imply the frustration of the novel's strategy to eliminate the father – he is bound to prevail due to his "ratlike talent for survival" (Bleikasten 85). In an intertextual reading of *As I Lay Dying* against *The Dead Father*, Faulkner's portrayal of the father figure appears to be the starting point for Barthelme's treatment of the anxiety of influence in his novel, where the father is de-marginalized and any distress deriving from his perseverance tolerated, or even embraced.

In conclusion of the analysis of the dialogic exchange between the two novels, let us return to Barthelme's "attired" goat metaphor, which implies that a relationship between texts cannot be anatomized and proven, since all we can do is observe how it unfolds in the transitory space opened by their interaction. The intertextual reading of *The Dead Father* and *As I Lay Dying* seems to confirm this principle, as the dialogue between the two novels reveals meanings that are not located exclusively in either of them, but in the "double" position which gives no primacy to either part of the intertextual exchange, and which is always pre-determined by the cultural and ideological context of the interpretation. With regard to such notions as linguistic limits of ontological inquiry, authorial control, and textual influence, all of which inevitably constitute the frame of reference applied to the study of differences between modernist and postmodernist literature, *The Dead Father* provides a revitalizing context for approaching *As I Lay Dying*, while Faulkner's text poses a challenge to the interpretative possibilities of its postmodernist

intertext. Once again, Donald Barthelme proves that by playing with existing texts and contexts he enters, in the words of Peter Schwenger, "delicately surreal battles between them." The effect is "to undermine the authority of all texts, including his own" (70).

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The Patterns of Self-Mirroring in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*

Self-referential, appealing to the reader's awareness and acceptance of a certain literary convention, Hawthorne's romance repeatedly invokes the imagery of the borderland between the factual and the fictitious and of the theatrical performance in which actors embody the ideas haunting the artist's mind and function within an actual temporal context in the presence of the receptive, responsive audience. Appearing in various places in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables*, theatrical imagery dominates *The Blithedale Romance* – "essentially a day-dream, and yet a fact" (Hawthorne 439) – where the narrator comes upon the stage under the disguise of one whom he chooses to call Miles Coverdale. He views his role in the drama in terms of progressive self-disclosure, the revelation of the dangers which the artist of the borderland is prone to.

Established by Hawthorne in the Preface to *The Blithedale Romance*, the metaphor of the theater opens Coverdale's narrative: he remembers the performance of the Veiled Lady under the exhibitor's "skillfully contrived circumstances of the stage effect" (441). It then assumes in the text a variety of forms – veils, masks, pastorals, masquerades, *tableaux vivants*, droppings and risings of the curtain – determining Coverdale's way of thinking about reality, becoming a sort of reality in itself, from which he finds himself incapable of escaping. "My wanderings," he says at a certain point, "were confined within a very limited sphere" (554). That sphere is Coverdale's "mental stage" with its "knot of characters" revolving around "a knot of affairs" which are "greatly assisted by my method of insulating them from other relations" (531). Readers of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables* are well familiar with the method. Were we "to put a friend under our microscope," Coverdale speculates on the unhealthy character of his "mental occupation," we would thereby "insulate him from many of his true relations, magnify his peculiarities, inevitably tear him in parts and, of course, patch him very clumsily together again" (479). As result of such an examination we would create a creature wearing the frightening "aspect of a monster." In effect, each of the actors in Coverdale's "private drama" – Zenobia, Hollingsworth, Priscilla, Westervelt, Moodie – reveal some monstrous features, isolated, deformed and exaggerated, expressive of the experimentor's dehumanizing tendency "to pry with a speculative interest into people's passions and impulses" (530) and, as he says of his examination of Hol-

lingsworth, "exemplifying the kind of error into which my mode of observation was calculated to lead me" (480). Coverdale's microscope, as it is not infrequent with the optical devices appearing in Hawthorne's works (e.g., the magnifying glasses of the diorama in "Ethan Brand") turns into an instrument of self-examination.

Unlike Holgrave, who amid "personal vicissitudes… had never lost his identity" (349), Coverdale is trying to establish his identity amid characters who stand forth in his imagination as "indices of a problem which it was [his] business to solve" (479). The problem is ultimately Miles Coverdale himself. His voyeurism is essentially narcissistic. His retirement into the imagined, ideal community of Blithedale and his imaginative separation of Hollingsworth, Zenobia and Priscilla from the rest of that community are progressive steps in what he calls in "The Wood-Path" "withdrawal towards the inner circle of self-communion" (491). Coverdale is the artist who seeks self-definition and some purpose for his life in defining characters of others (who thus become creations of his mind), the motives of their existence and mutual relationships. He views himself both as the master of the scene, and his performers' conscience ("I was irresistably moved to step over the intervening branches, lay my hand on his shoulder, put my mouth close to his ear, and address him in a sepulchral, melodramatic whisper: 'Hollingsworth! Where have you left Zenobia!'" (555)), one who, by anticipating or envisioning it, is responsible for the tragic finale of the drama ("I began to long for a catastrophy… Let it all come!" (532)) and, at the same time, as merely a medium without his own will, one who is doomed "to live in other lives," depend for his existence on the imaginative beings emerging from his experimental observations ("Hollingsworth, Zenobia, Priscilla! These three have absorbed my life into themselves." (533)).

Coverdale draws "a knot of characters" into his inner sphere, his dissecting and patching mind, and himself becomes entrapped within the sphere of their influence. His characters "encroach upon [his] dreams" (529). In a well-known scene when he returns to Blithedale from town, he encounters in the woods (the image of the self) a group of masqueraders who:

> joined hands in a circle whirling round so swiflty, so madly and so merrily, in time and tune with the Satanic music, that their separate incongruities were all blended together, and they became a kind of entanglement that went nigh to turn one's brain with merely looking at it… (563)

Recognizing Coverdale, who was looking from his "upper region," "the whole fantastic rabble forthwith streamed off in pursuit of me, so that I was like a mad poet hunted by chimaras" (563).

The reader is encouraged to think of the insulated characters of *The Blithedale Romance* as illustrative of ideas, views, attitudes and impulses of which the artist's "mental stage" is made up. Silas Foster represents the actual, the real, the substantial. While, leaning against the tree, he watches the group of masqueraders, he does "more to disenchant the scene with his look of shrewd, acrid Yankee observation, than twenty witches and necromancers could have done in the way of rendering it weird and fantastic" (563); he unmasks the artificiality, the impracticality, the lack of solid grounding in the Blithedale enterprise as well as the foolishness of Coverdale's customary position in his "hermitage." His common sense functions as a corrective to uncontrolled imaginative freedom. It exemplifies Coverdale's declared "tendency towards the actual," his rejection of the vision of the world as "an unsubstantial bubble" (522). Yet, a representation, an exemplification, Silas Foster is himself seen in the narrative wearing a grotesque mask; he is not so much a living character as a projection of a certain isolated, exaggerated attitude towards life. His behavior in the scene when the participants of the Blithedale masquerade are looking for the body of Zenobia, the self-appointed "tragedy-queen," is a monstrous display of unemotional common sense, matter-of-factness. It mirrors "terrible inflexibility," "rigidity," the lack of "lithe and graceful attitude" in Zenobia's deformed death-mask. Realism and the lack of imaginative playfulness are associated in Hawthorne's romance, the realm of moonlight giving the familiar scene the quality of the spiritual, with the physical corpse. Significantly, when Silas Foster's boat floats with Coverdale as a helmsman, "not a ray [of the moonlight] appeared to fall on the river itself" (576).

With his "cold and dead materialism," Professor Westervelt inhabits a still deeper and darker layer of Coverdale's mind (the two converse in the forest and Westervelt addresses his interlocutor as "friend"). Coverdale detests the sinister mesmerist "all the more because a part of my own nature showed itself resposive to him" (499). The reader recalls the comment on Coverdale's character made by the fiendish fiddler, one of the masqueraders: "He is always ready to dance to the Devil's tune" (563). Both Coverdale and Westervelt are "exhibitors." Bearing affinity with demonic figures appearing throughout Hawthorne's works, Westervelt embodies the threat of the artist's potential doom as result of the unpardonable sin of violating and annihilating the individual soul, enslaving it on his "mental stage," gaining not only insight but also absolute possession over the will and passions of the victim of his exploitative power. Coverdale recognizes the effect of Westervelt's sceptical and sneering view upon his "mental vision." He looks through Westervelt's eyes at Hollingsworth, Zenobia and Priscilla and discovers that contact with the extreme coldness, cynical materialism, robs each of them of "the essential charm," degrades, debases and deforms, "smothers what it can of our spiritual aspirations and makes the rest ridiculous"

(499). Zenobia attacks the Westervelt sphere in Coverdale's mental vision when she speaks of his dangerous interference with "earnest human passions," his cold-blooded criticism and "monstrous scepticism." Theodore, from Zenobia's legend, is closely affiliated with Coverdale-Westervelt. He is seen gaining admittance into the Veiled Lady's "private withdrawing room" – the sanctity of one's inner being – led not by "holy faith" but "scornful scepticism and idle curiosity" (505). Like Coverdale and Westervelt in the woods, Theodore shows a propensity to burst into laughter.

Hollingsworth wears the fiendish mask of Hawthorne's man of a single idea and man of iron. Monomaniacal preoccupation with the project of reforming criminals makes him incapable of perceiving evil and destruction in his own ruthless, tyrannical manipulation of others. His isolation at Blithedale is comparable to that of Ethan Brand, Rappaccini, or Chillingworth. In Zenobia's passionate denunciation of his character, Hollingsworth is a "monster," "a cold, heartless, self-beginning and self-ending piece of mechanism" (567). Coverdale views his friend as a "dragon," an incarnation of "all-devouring egotism" and of the will to dominate. Although he detests and finally withstands the influence, a part of his nature shows itself responsible to the "irresistible force" of Hollingsworth's "magnetism." But one gesture of his hand would have drawn him into the sphere of Hollingsworth's overwhelming energy. Coverdale himself is accused of a sceptical attitude "in regard to any conscience or any wisdom, except one's own: a most irreverent propensity to thrust Providence aside and substitute one's own self in its awful place" (539-40). Hollingsworth's depreciation of the Blithedale ideals ("I grasp it in my hand, and find no substance whatever"; 517) confirms Coverdale's doubts concerning his own position in the community. Most importantly, in destroying the dream-like texture of the artist's existence, submission to Hollingsworth's scheme would fill out the moral void of Coverdale's life by giving it a new sense of definite purpose. Nothing could seem more attractive and tempting for the poet who wakes up each morning to "feel the langour and vague wretchedness of an indolent and half-occupied man" than the promise of "strength, courage, immitigable will, – everything that a manly and generous nature should desire!" (518). In "A Crisis," the artist's soul is at stake. As Nina Baym wrote of Hollingsworth's role in relation to Coverdale: "he is an alter ego, an admired version of the self, energetic, forceful, attractive and purpuseful to an extreme" (Baym 547). He reveals the artist's lack of and desire for authority. Ironically, because Hollingsworth represents the power of the self *in extremis*, he becomes, as it were, his own victim, a self-devouring monster. The intensity of his existence brings about its own undoing. Coverdale wonders whether the strength of Hollingsworth's purpose is not "too gigantic for his integrity" (Pearson 518) and towards the end of his narrative vision he observes the "dragon" seeking support and protection from the "maiden" Priscilla.

Like Hollingsworth, Zenobia is a challenge to Coverdale's neutrality. She seems to demand absolute acceptance or rejection. Mysterious, darkly beautiful, sensual, proud, self-confident, restless, radiant with energy, she stands for individualism and freedom. Her role at Blithedale is a display of the romantic self – extreme and, therefore, again monstrous and marked for tragic ends. Theater is Zenobia's "proper sphere" and the Blithedale experiment sets the stage for her greatest, most spectacular role (the manner of her suicide is meant to provide the final episode for that role). In the convention of the theater, Zenobia is seen as an epitome of the unrestricted, the unconventional, the intensely sexual. The theatrical "entrance of Zenobia" on the first night which the "knot of dreamers" spends at Blithedale "caused our heroic enterprise to show like an illusion, a masquerade, a pastoral, a counter-feit Arcadia, in which we grown-up men and women were making a play-day of the years that were given us to live in" (451). Upon the stage comes an actress who "has lived and loved," "womanliness incarnated" (466). Putting on her romantic, tragic mask, she reveals the significance of emotion, passion. Cut off from these, imagination remains idle and stagnant, lacks energy and truth, exhibits none of the natural vigor or the joy of commitment which should characterize creative activity. Zenobia's presence is an attack upon Coverdale's aloofness, inability to acknowledge sensuality, impulse and longing as the essential substance of mature human life and mature artistic creation. Her exotic flowers may be viewed as a symbol of the synthesis of the natural, the sexual, and the artistic. Zenobia's coming to Blithedale is a return to deeper, more vital forces than those determined by the constraints of the ordinary world and institutionalized life of society (in the town, the brilliance of the flower fades and it begins to look like an imitation). In her craving for a romantically conceived intensification of the sensuous and the emotional, for intellectual freedom and the right for full self-expression, Zenobia becomes anti-cultural. Coverdale notices that "her poor little stories and tracts never did half justice to her intellect… I recognized no severe culture in Zenobia; her mind was full of weeds" (464). In Coverdale's estimate, she turns against the accepted norms and conventions and cannot find adequate form to express the richness of her individuality. Herself a muse of true, original, creative energy, Zenobia in the gaze of her male observers is incapable of creating literature.

Finally, there is Priscilla, Zenobia's opposite – passive, non-competitive, shadowy, visionary. She is an embodiment of the ideal generated within man's imagination, the product "man has spent centuries in making." Coverdale compares Priscilla to "a leaf floating by her own choice or plan" (538). And Priscilla, as if to demonstrate that she is unable to speak of herself in her own words, repeats after him: "I am blown like a leaf… I never have any free will" (540). Characterized by the Protean quality of "sudden transformations" and "ever-shifting variety," possessing no identity of her own, Priscilla

becomes a medium for the designs of others. Thus her role mirrors, in a way, the position of Coverdale in relation to the actors of the Blithedale drama – representations of ideas from the polarization of which he takes on his own identity. Coverdale – the artist regards himself as "something like a mesmerical clairvoyant," dimly aware of the future events and responsive to the influence of the conflicting forces which operate within his mind, assuming shapes of the characters of *The Blithedale Romance*. His declaration of love for Priscilla in the sentence which ends his narrative is not so much an expression of a definite attitude towards life as an identification with a certain fluid form which makes such an expression of attitudes possible. "I – I myself – was in love – with – PRISCILLA" (585), is the statement of the end of Coverdale's narcissistic exploration in which between the emphatic "I" and the capitalized "PRISCILLA" Coverdale seems to put an equation sign.

Seeing his function in the book as a plastic form, a "carrier" of many ideas rather than an incarnation of a single one, Coverdale has earlier made a comparison between himself and the chorus in a classical drama:

> My own part in these transactions was singularly subordinate. It resembled that of the Chorus in a classic play, which seems to be set aloof from the possibility of personal concernment, and bestows the whole measure of its hope and fear, its exultation or sorrow, on the fortunes of others, between whom and itself this sympathy is the only bond. Destiny, it may be, – the most skillful of stage-managers, – seldom chooses to arrange its scenes, and carry forward its drama, without securing the presence of at least one calm observer. It is his office to applause when due, and sometimes an inevitable tear, to detect the final fitness of incident to character and distill in his long-brooding thought the whole morality of the performance. (496)

For the artist to be a "calm observer" and a commentator is to suffer his "colorless life to take its hue from other lives." In the last chapter of the book, when the drama is done, Coverdale steps forward, like Ishmael in the Epilogue of *Moby-Dick*, to begin his "confession": "It remains only to say a few words about myself" (583). It seems as if at that moment we could hear, for the last time his (or Westervelt's) scornful laughter. For, if we are truly willing to spare Coverdale the trouble, it is because so far we have never been left with the characters of *The Blithedale Romance* without the painful presence of the intervening, observing "I" who in turning over their "riddles" in his mind has been trying to comprehend himself and in exaggerating their features, exaggerating also his own "defects." Coverdale indulges in his characteristic, playful, bitterly self-ironic mood: "But what after all have I to tell! Nothing, nothing, nothing!" (583). After all he

had to tell the reader of Hollingsworth, of Zenobia, of Priscilla, there remains to say nothing, nothing, nothing. Possibly he might only say after Isabel from Herman Melville's *Pierre*: "of my own consciouness I cannot identify in myself". And, when towards the end of his confession he finds his life to be "all an emptiness," he is, in fact, defining himself as a potentiality of vision, the possibility of encompassing all views without taking any sides. Hence, his all-pervading irony which turns into self-irony, but also a suggestion of a chance for sympathy or even (narcissistic as it must remain) love.

Paradoxically, Coverdale, an extremely isolated figure, can hardly be seen otherwise than in relation to one of the "insulated" characters or, more precisely, in relation to that character's relationship to another character of the drama. Coverdale recognizes that the position of the artist as observer and commentator is invariably the position "between." The most striking example of an image referring to the narrator's condition can be found in the scene of the search for Zenobia's body when he says: "And there, perhaps, she lay, with her face upward, while the shadow of the boat, and my own pale face peering downward, passed slowly betwixt her and the sky" (577). Coverdale's "hermitage" and "observatory" on the pine tree ("about midway between the root and the topmost bough") is situated near the verge of the woodlands, that is between wilderness and cultivated fields, nature and civilization. It is a place, he observes humorously, both to meditate an essay for *The Dial* and to enjoy a cigar. In Boston, Coverdale stays at a hotel, which indicates his state of suspension between life at Blithedale and life in town, the "newness" and the "oldness." His room becomes again an observatory, like the arched window in *The House of the Seven Gables*, offering the possibility of "plunging into this muddy tide of human activities and pastime" (526). Coverdale resolves "to linger on the brink." He finds himself incapable of communing either with nature or with people. His failure corresponds to the failure of the Blithedale experiment as an attempt to create a land of harmony between material reality and spiritual aspirations, the world of nature in accord with the world of an ideal. There were moments, he says in "A Modern Arcadia" when he "used to discern a rich picturesqueness in the visible scene of earth and sky" and when Nature seemed to have been "taken by surprise and seen at unawares, with no opportunity to put off her real look." But "the clouds of earth, which we so constantly belabored and turned over and over, were never etherialized into thought… Our labor symbolized nothing" (477). *The Blithedale Romance* is an abortive romance. The balance between the familiar and the fairy-land proved to be an illusion unredeemed by the moonlight.

Unlike Ernest from "The Great Stone Face," Coverdale finds intellectual activity, poetic institutions, incompatible with the immediate, the physical, the external. To hover "between" does not mean to mediate. Through Westervelt's eyes he ironically sees him-

self as an "aesthetic laborer." But, as Hollingsworth says of him, he "is not in earnest, either as a poet or a laborer" (478). The position of suspension and neutrality involves "a charm" but when sustained for a long time, becoming a principle of one's existence, brings estrangement and frustration. It ultimately makes Coverdale, the object of Hawthorne's longest psychological experiment, a Wakefield of the "mental stage" – an artist and bachelor who by developing the habit of continually observing himself (through his "knot of characters") misses out on life and turns into another homeless outcast.

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Marek Paryż

Narrative Functions of Medical Discourse in Edgar Allan Poe's "Berenice"

This article explores the significance of the incorporation of elements of medical discourse in the narration of Edgar Allan Poe's tale "Berenice" (1835) for the ambivalent positioning of the narrator in the text. The function of the narrator and protagonist, named Egaeus, can be described in terms of several binary oppositions: the narrator versus the subject of narration, the doctor versus the patient, the torturer versus the sufferer. Narrative ambiguity in "Berenice" results from the fact that while each opposition constitutes its own signifying domain, these domains inevitably overlap. Accordingly, since it is often impossible to determine the position the narrator speaks from, the rules of signification in the text become increasingly vague. As one who embodies and articulates the aforementioned opposites, Egaeus undermines those guidelines for examining his utterances, character and deeds which are extrinsic to his self, and induces the reader to take for granted all the explanations that he himself conceives of.

"Berenice" foregrounds the problem of the arbitrariness and hence unreliability of discourse as a way of organizing and disseminating knowledge. This dubious status of discourse results directly from the arbitrariness of the authority that is the main factor behind its formation and circulation. Even though there exist discourses which try to eliminate linguistic ambivalence and impose on language users unequivocal rules of producing utterances and meanings, the authority of such discourses becomes dissolved due to intertextual exchanges occurring within a specific discourse or across different discourses. Literature, whose limits are set by the limits of imagination, highlights such discursive processes because it freely incorporates elements of other discourses without being subject to verifications the makers of authoritative discourses must reckon with. In her book *Theories of Discourse*, Diane Macdonell writes:

> A "discourse," as a particular area of language use, may be identified by the institutions to which it relates and by the position from which it comes and which it marks out for the speaker. That position does not exist by itself, however. Indeed, it may be understood as a standpoint taken up by the discourse through its relation to another,

> ultimately an opposing, discourse… a discourse takes effect indirectly and directly through its relation to, its address to, another discourse. (2-3)

In other words, no discourse remains impervious to the interference of alien discursive elements. In "Berenice," medical discourse is isolated from the context in which it acquires power and medical facts become components of literary discourse. Egaeus's manipulation of medical discourse offers insights into the processes of both dissolution and establishment of medical authority and its linguistic milieu.

Critics often comment on Edgar Allan Poe's interest in contemporary medicine and its interconnection with his fascination with science in general and with crime. For example, David Brion Davis presents Poe's literary preoccupation with monomania and moral insanity against the background of, on the one hand, early-nineteenth-century developments in the study of mental disorders and, on the other hand, literary reflections of the diseased mind on the other (108-10, 123-24). Robert Giddings describes "The Fall of the House of Usher," "Ligeia," and "Berenice" as tales dealing with "the catatonic condition of schizophrenia" and asserts that this was not an accidental theme in Poe's fiction, since the writer "was contemporary with the beginnings of modern psychiatric medicine" (53). Giddings also touches upon Poe's fascination with popular medical pseudo-sciences of the day, such as mesmerism (50-51). This latter issue is explored in a broad context of contemporary reform writings by David S. Reynolds in his book *Beneath the American Renaissance* (224-48). John Cleman puts forward a thesis that the legal and medical controversy over the theory of irresistible impulses, which were regarded by some medical specialists as symptoms of moral insanity and, accordingly, as a possible excuse for crime, directly influenced Poe's decision to write "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Black Cat," and "The Imp of the Perverse" (623-40).

In his article "The Psychological Context of Three Tales by Edgar Allan Poe," Allan Smith writes specifically about "Berenice" alongside "The Black Cat" and "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." In his opinion, Poe's description of Egaeus's state of mind "is almost clinical, or as much so as those in the psychological texts of his period" (282). He argues further that "Poe has constructed a careful scientific case history of a rather morbid phenomenon, in which every aspect, even Egaeus's half-memory of the scream, is consistent with medical science" (284). The critic supports his argument with references to contemporary treatises by medical specialists: Erasmus Darwin's *Zoonomia* (1796), John Abercrombie's *Inquiry into the Intellectual Powers* (1832), Thomas Upham's *Outlines of Imperfect and Disordered Mental Action* (1840). Smith points out that Egaeus's

obsession illustrates a certain variety of madness which was often analyzed in medical writings in the first half of the nineteenth century. Thus, on the basis of such writings, the critic identifies successive stages of Egaeus's disorder. The first phase is characterized by the hero's proclivity to ponder for hours on end on various insignificant objects; in the words of Thomas Upham, such a mental state resembles "the condition of a paralytic limb." The second phase is marked by Egaeus's "morbid obsession with the teeth of Berenice." Smith observes that obsession was constantly discussed by early-nineteenth-century medical specialists, and the astounding frequency with which the concept of obsession and other related notions appeared in scientific texts resulted in the theorization of monomania, the central medical concept in "Berenice." The final stage of Egaeus's malady "is what contemporary theorists called 'divided consciousness' and somnambulism." Smith concludes, "The progress of Egaeus's disease is from 'defective attention' through 'monomania' and into 'somnambulism' or 'divided consciousness,' with, finally, a return into horrified sanity. His symptoms are coherent with one another and with their treatment in contemporary works of psychology" (282-84).

In contrast to Smith, Elizabeth Phillips, who discusses "Berenice" in the light of the observations formulated by two of the most influential early-nineteenth-century American authorities on "mental medicine": Benjamin Rush and Isaac Ray, claims that "Egaeus seems, to a later student of mental illness, an improbable case" (118). Egaeus's illness resembles an amalgam of symptoms which medical and psychological specialists ascribed to different disorders. According to Phillips, the reason why Egaeus's case is scientifically dubious is that Poe used different sources of medical knowledge, sources with differing terminologies and perceptions of illness. This inconsistency can reflect the terminological confusion in mental medicine in the first half of the nineteenth century: "When the physicians themselves write about kinds of mania, terms vary, bases of signification are shifted, views are retracted or modified, meanings overlap or are vague and some cases do not fit categories" (118). Such discursive conditions serve to detract from the authority of the discipline and to re-establish this authority on new terms. In "Berenice," the narrator wants to establish such new terms.

In seeking either to corroborate or to undermine the scientific accuracy of Poe's depiction of the madman in "Berenice," both Smith and Phillips tend to subordinate the literary text to the scientific text by treating the former as a reflection of the latter. However, in the case of "Berenice," scientific accuracy is of secondary importance in comparison with the very fact of reformulating a scientific discourse on a literary basis. If "Berenice" is a thrilling and, at least to some readers, convincing tale, it is because the

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text derives its dynamics from being structured around the interplay of two divergent discursive spheres: medical science and literary aesthetics. The tale does not merely reflect particular medical discoveries; it creates an alternative context for the reconsideration of those discoveries and determines new rules of signification for the discourse which propounds scientific findings. Marie-Christine Leps describes the unique qualities of literature as contrasted with other discourses: "Deriving both from the imaginary, and from political, economic, and social structures of production and distribution, literature holds a para-doxical position within the discursive production of knowledge, which permits it to present several layers of contradictory or correlated meanings without having to provide a final resolution" (220).

In "Berenice," elements of medical discourse are woven into an impassioned rhetoric, brimming with exclamations and rhetorical questions. There is a certain stylistic excess in this tale, which perhaps is a recognizable feature of a number of Poe's stories, but which serves a particularly important purpose in "Berenice" as it enhances different kinds of excess in Egaeus's experience: excessive suffering, excessive beauty, excessive terror. In the opening paragraph, the narrator relies heavily on figurative language, which evokes in the reader certain expectations as to the quality of narrative discourse: "Misery is manifold. The wretchedness of earth is multiform. Overreaching the wide horizon as the rainbow, its hues are as various as the hues of that arch – as distinct too, yet as intimately blended" (186). Egaeus ponders on how to express the inexpressible, the unspeakable. The opening paragraph foregrounds the inadequacy of language which will never allow for the expression of the "measure" of the hero's tragedy. Such passages, characterized by a kind of linguistic despair, contrast visibly with Egaeus's matter-of-fact description of his disorder:

> In the one instance, the dreamer or enthusiast, being interested by an object usually *not* frivolous, imperceptibly loses sight of this object in a wilderness of deductions and suggestions issuing therefrom, until at the conclusion of a day-dream *often replete with luxury*, he finds the *incitamentum*, or first cause of his musings, entirely vanished and forgotten.… The meditations were *never* pleasurable; and at the termination of the revery, the first cause, so far from being out of sight, had attained that supernaturally exaggerated interest which was the prevailing feature of the disease. (188)

The reason why the two kinds of rhetoric to be found in "Berenice" stand in evident contrast is that while figurative language strips bare the arbitrariness of representation,

the language of science defends the unchanging rules of referentiality. The textual tension which characterizes Poe's tale can easily be described in Bakhtinian terms: Egaeus's narrative is a heteroglot utterance which causes a rupture in the unitary language of medicine, having, as it were, eroded it from within through imitation.

Initially, Egaeus talks about his overwhelming sense of suffering (without naming its causes) and his sophistication in order to arouse the reader's interest, which is subsequently stimulated by the narrator's discursive transformation into a student of medical science, albeit disguised as a patient. However, as the narrative unfolds it becomes increasingly difficult to decide from which position Egaeus speaks. The following description of the sick Berenice is probably the best illustration of this effect of narrative indeterminacy:

> The forehead was high, and very pale, and singularly placid; and the once jetty hair fell partially over it, and overshadowed the hollowed temples with innumerable ringlets, now of a vivid yellow, and jarring discordantly, in their fantastic character, with the reigning melancholy of the countenance. The eyes were lifeless, and lusterless, and seemingly pupilless, and I shrank involuntarily from their glassy stare to the contemplation of the thin and shrunken lips. They parted; and in a smile of peculiar meaning, the teeth of the changed Berenice disclosed themselves slowly to my view. (189-90)

Of crucial significance in this passage is the quality of Egaeus's observations and of the description which those observations enable him to formulate. On the one hand, the narrator could be an anatomist eyeing a corpse before conducting the post mortem and searching in the body's appearance for symptoms of what its interior, understood in purely anatomical terms, might reveal. Such a recognition would perhaps allow him to avoid an unpleasant surprise; Egaeus is a sensitive person and even has a moment of weakness when he "shr[inks] involuntarily" from Berenice's look. On the other hand, the narrator may be a masochistic esthete examining the object of his morbid fascination, although still afraid to admit to himself that it, or rather she, does fascinate him. Both the anatomist and the esthete would feel tempted to venture into an unexplored and dangerous realm; in other words, in both cases there is a hint of culpable curiosity. In such an interpretative context, the famous teeth of Berenice, which have puzzled critics for decades, serve to remind one of the thin red line that exists between what is permitted in a certain pursuit or preoccupation and what still remains forbidden.

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The collusion of perspectives and discourses is one of several strategies which the narrator of "Berenice" uses to undermine the authority of the medical specialist and of his language. Another such strategy is related to Egaeus's way of speaking about physicians. He refers to medical doctors twice in his narrative and, what is extremely symptomatic, each time in a reductive context. He first hints at his contacts with a doctor or doctors when stating the details of his monomania: "In the meantime, my own disease – for I have been told that I should call it by no other appellation – my own disease, then, grew rapidly upon me" (187). Egaeus acknowledges a fact of communication but, interestingly, names only one party involved, that is himself, and refrains from specifying the other, for example in terms of whether he has consulted with just one or with several medical specialists. Neither does the reader learn if Egaeus has received information about his condition from the family physician, who, however, might not be acquainted with recent developments in the study of mental diseases, or from an expert in mental medicine. In the context of "Berenice," where the narrator counters the hypothetical medical personage's authority over him with his own authority over the text, the omission of such information is crucial. Additionally, it should be stressed that the agency of the doctor is presented in a rather dubious light. There is not even a brief mention of a medical examination or observation of Egaeus. The contact between the narrator and the doctor is reduced to a mere act of telling. The marginalization of the medical specialist facilitates Egaeus's usurpation of the right and the privilege to speak about his malady in his own words, which deceptively echo professional medical discourse. In Egaeus's description of the nature and symptoms of monomania, the doctor, who is indeed useless as a source of knowledge, appears to be a minor linguistic trace.

The second situation in which the presence of a doctor is evoked in a reductive sense, occurs toward the end of the story. After Berenice has been entombed, Egaeus sits alone in the library: "It seemed to me that I had newly awakened from a confused and exciting dream." Apparently, he is unaware of what has happened between Berenice's interment and the present hour, but he anticipates the discovery of something horrible. While pondering over what he may have done, he spots a very particular object on the table: "On the table beside me burned a lamp, a near it lay a little box. It was of no remarkable character, and I had seen it frequently before, for it was the property of the family physician; but how came it *there*, upon my table, and why did I shudder in regarding it?" The horrifying contents of the box are "some instruments of dental surgery, intermingled with thirty-two small, white, and ivory-looking substances" (191-92). Here, the doctor is reduced metonymically to the role of an inadvertent accomplice in Egaeus's atrocity.

Quite evidently, the family physician has been helpless about finding a remedy for Berenice's malady; this helplessness corresponds to the physician's lack of proper attention and possibly, although this is sheer speculation, gullibility. Characteristically, Poe undermines the authority of the medical specialist by finding metonymic substitutes for this figure: in the first situation, discourse functioned as such a substitute, in the second, it was the medical instruments stolen from the family physician. Just as his description of the sick Berenice, Egaeus's final train of thoughts also enhances the eradication of the medical doctor's agency.

A more traditionally-minded reader or critic of Poe's fiction might object to the above observations, claiming that Poe does not consciously construct a narrative aiming at the questioning of a specific discursive authority but rather invents yet another way of achieving the narrative effect which is a hallmark of his fiction. This effect is related to Poe's construction of narrators, who usually have a severely limited awareness of and contact with the surrounding world. Assuredly, Egaeus is such a narrator, and David Halliburton is by all means right in stating that in "Berenice" "the external world… is a recognizable one, while the narrating consciousness through which it is experienced is grossly distorted" (339). However, in the light of such observations, is it possible to explain Egaeus's proficiency in medical science, or more specifically in the application of its discourse, and his simultaneous utter mindlessness of those who produce and use it? "Berenice" can definitely be regarded as an example of narrative interference with a rigid scientific discourse. This interference is conspicuous precisely thanks to the distortion of the external world, which is reduced to discourse and a handful of requisites.

Egaeus clearly indicates that his medical knowledge is not incidental. He constructs a narrative image of himself as a man who is as vulnerable as he is sophisticated. He is born "into a palace of imagination – into the wild dominions of monastic thought and erudition" (186). The connection between imagination and erudition is crucial as it may suggest that the latter without the former is worthless. Egaeus virtually turns medicine into an arcane knowledge, available exclusively to a narrow group of individuals like himself. The first thing the reader learns about Egaeus's ancestry is, "Our line has been called a race of visionaries" (186). Imagination is not bound up by all those experiential and discursive limitations which science should take into consideration. Somewhat perversely, Egaeus experiments upon himself, reading philosophical treatises which, as he suspects, can worsen his condition due to "their imaginative and inconsequential nature" (188). In his view, medical knowledge is not a matter of formal education and professional practice, but rather of predisposition, personal experience, and intellectual capaci-

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ty. All the same, one should not forget about linguistic skills, because it is language which ultimately sanctions medical authority.

Language underlies a variety of semiotic interdependences, which facilitate the establishment of medical authority. As Michel Foucault claims in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, discourse, and, in consequence, the authority it designates, is constantly in process, constantly getting re-oriented in its field and in relation to other fields (21-30). Nevertheless, the principal tendency in an authoritative discourse is centripetal, targeted at finding a stable position from which the speech of the authority will come. The establishment of such a position can be connected with the emergence of what Foucault elsewhere calls the *episteme*,

> in which knowledge, envisaged apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value or to its objective form, grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history which is not that of its growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility; in this account, what should appear are those configurations within the *space* of knowledge which have given rise to the diverse forms of empirical science. (*Order of Things* xxii)

Foucauldian scholars Charles C. Lement and Garth Gillan define the *episteme* far less enigmatically as a set of social conditions, which constitute particular historical forms of discourse and knowledge (163).

Egaeus's use of medical discourse is not a mere imitation; he modifies it in two ways: through emulation and reservation. Egaeus emulates medical specialists because, on the one hand, he is not limited by the state of research in the field, and, on the other, as a patient he possesses first-hand knowledge of his malady and therefore has the unique opportunity to verify scientific findings immediately. The consequence of this is a crucial repositioning of the patient in relation to the doctor, which consists in the eradication of discursive distance between the two parties. In turn, the narrator's reservations about medical discourse are evident in the following statement: "This monomania, if I must so term it, consisted in a morbid irritability of those properties of the mind in the metaphysical science termed the attentive" (187). This single sentence contains two indications of Egaeus's reservations about medical discourse and of his consciousness of its shortcomings. First, the locution "if I must so term it" is extremely significant insofar as it unequivocally points to the narrator's dissatisfaction with the rigid and inadequate language of medicine. Second, in referring to "metaphysical science," Egaeus resorts to an alterna-

tive discourse in order to make medical discourse more relevant for the description of his condition.

Characteristically, the authority of medical discourse, and consequently the power configuration involving the doctor and the patient, is simultaneously deconstructed and reconstructed on the narrative and metanarrative levels of "Berenice." The deconstructive effect is perhaps more evident, while the reconstitution of authority is purposefully subtle. The former consists in the reduction of the distance between the doctor and the patient in the figure of Egaeus. In usurping the right to speak from the position of scientific authority, Egaeus appropriates the discourse of the dangerous Other, the discourse which potentially foreshadows the use of some precautionary measures of physical enforcement against Egaeus. As Allan Ingram observes,

> This relation between doctor and patient, between authority and its object, finds its most potent symbolic expression not in any act of linguistic origin, but the strait-waistcoat. This device, which was in use early in the [eighteenth] century, renders complete the status of the madman as object, for it prevents all the functions by which an individual may express individuality with the single exception of language; but the peculiar irony of the strait-waistcoat is that its application transforms the individual into an object-person for whom language is absurdity. (94)

Thus, as long as Egaeus finds sense in language and convinces the reader about this sense, he safeguards himself from the objectification exercised by the powerful Other. Christopher Benfey makes an interesting point about a particular narrative aspect of Poe's tales-confessions, which include "Berenice"; namely, he observes that for Poe's narrators, the very fact of being able to speak, to make a confession, is the evidence of their sanity (30-31).

Whereas Egaeus's self-articulation deconstructs the power relation involving the medical authority and the patient, his descriptions of Berenice can be seen as an attempt at a reconstruction of this configuration on new terms, with the eponymous heroine as the object of Egaeus's examination and concomitantly his substitute in the function of the patient. It is worth noting that it is when he talks about Berenice's malady that the quality of his rhetoric changes markedly for the first time – from the loftiness of the opening paragraphs describing the family character, the predisposition of the narrator, and the charms of Berenice, to the precision characterizing his medical utterances:

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> Among the numerous train of maladies superinduced by that fatal and primary one which effected a revolution of so horrible a kind in the moral and physical being of my cousin, may be mentioned as the most distressing and obstinate in its nature, a species of epilepsy not infrequently terminating in *trance* itself – trance very nearly resembling positive dissolution, and from which her manner of recovery was, in most instances, startlingly abrupt. (187)

Significantly, Egaeus spares the reader further medical details of Berenice's malady; however, what he reveals about it is sufficient for an attentive reader to be able to notice a certain similarity between the narrator's and his beloved's diseases, namely, the trance-like condition they both often suffer from. When Berenice's condition has deteriorated rapidly, Egaeus envisages her as an "abstraction"; she is no longer "a thing to admire, but to analyze; not… an object of love, but the theme of the most abstruse although desultory speculation" (189). Berenice resembles a screen on which Egaeus reads symptoms stimulating his analytical mind. Somewhat deceptively, he talks about the terror and sadness which every appearance of the beautiful cousin arouses in him. Gillian Brown emphasizes the fact that the death of women is Poe's stories "is regularly accompanied by the imagination of their regeneration." The resurrected heroines "testify to the stories their partners tell; they verify the narratives about themselves." Brown concludes, "Their regenerate corpses thus embody a principle of preservation, safeguarding the consciousness in which they figure as memories and thus poetic subjects" (340-41). In the gallery of Poe's heroines, Berenice fulfills a singular role of the narrator's "patient." All in all, the extraction of her teeth is a surgical intervention.

With some reservations in mind, it is possible to argue that a corresponding reconstitution of the medical authority takes place on the metanarrative level and involves the narrator and the reader, on whom the narrator, in a sense, sets a trap. This textual trap depends on inducing the reader to take Egaeus's statements for granted; in other words, to accept his authority. Egaeus has one advantage over the reader – knowledge; therefore he speaks as if he were someone like a guide. For instance, he makes sure that the reader will comprehend the medical problem he is concerned with. Egaeus says, "in my case, the powers of meditation (not to speak technically) busied and buried themselves, in the contemplation of even the most ordinary objects of the universe" (187). The phrase put in parentheses is of great significance as it clearly implies that Egaeus can talk about technical details and that he translates intricate medical discourse into its more comprehensible alternative. The parenthetical remark designates specific medical discourse as a subtext of Egaeus's narrative. Apparently,

the narrator's craves the reader's sympathy; however, what he expects from the reader, first and foremost, is a subconscious recognition of his authority. The reader's acknowledgement of the narrator's trustworthiness is the ultimate test of whether Egaeus exercises true control over his narrative.

Several critics have commented on the traps inherent in the role that Poe's narrators have reserved for the reader. Essentially, the reader should be persuaded to follow the leads which the narrator suggests. Sybil Wuletich-Brinberg writes,

> Virtually all of Poe's characters pride themselves on their intelligence. The reader, therefore, must take special care to resist its magnetic appeal that is re-enforced by the magnetic power of the first person subjective point of view by which Poe attempts to diminish the distance between art and life so that the reader becomes – to use a word Poe often used in his tales – "infected" with the anxiety and the bizarre misconceptions of reality that afflict his characters. (100-01)

In a like vein, Paul Witherington, in an article on "The Tell-Tale Heart," describes the implied listener in Poe's confessional tales as an "accomplice after the fact" (472).

Summing up, "Berenice" is an intriguing illustration of the interplay of contrasting ways and purposes of introducing authoritative, scientific discourse into a literary work. On the one hand, in usurping the right to speak this kind of language, Egaeus precludes the power which, potentially, a medical specialist can claim over him. The deconstruction of medical discourse is, accordingly, a liberating gesture. On the other hand, the manipulation of medical discourse toward the re-establishment of its authority facilitates the narrator's control of literary discourse. This kind of control is meant to guarantee an appropriate positioning of the reader in relation to the narrator and the narrative.

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Marek Brola

Louisa May Alcott's *femmes fatales*: A Critique of Patriarchal Hypocrisy in Sentimental American Society

When the antebellum America witnessed the birth of Louisa May Alcott in 1832, its literary scene was populated by several writers of advice manuals who – in accordance with the sentimental credo of honesty – called for sincere behavior and transparent conduct in all spheres of life. It might have seemed that, if the postulates of those authors were to be fulfilled, Alcott would happily live in the world of truth and moral lucidity. Yet, neither her life nor the condition of the society she was cast into proved blissful enough for the sentimental writers to rest satisfied. Quite the reverse: once elevated to the rank of enforced standard, the romantic ideal of sincerity proved to be more of a fashionable disguise for immoral demeanor than a reliable determinant of chaste character. In result, Alcott had to try her literary hand amidst the world of deceit, and even the Spartan upbringing exercised by her transcendentalist father did not shield her from the atrocities of Victorian America as it was supposed to. Having first suffered humiliation as a servant and tasted the bitter cup of Civil War experience, Alcott finally resolved to defy by her life and work the deceptive America she was observing all around her.

Still, in order to be noticed among men and women of letters, Louisa May Alcott had to play by the rules of the society she undertook to criticize. Accordingly, she published stories that described and ridiculed the hypocrisy of contemporary middle class, but did so only anonymously or under the penname of A. M. Barnard. She was well aware that those stories were considered immoral by most Americans of her time; ironically enough, however, they helped Alcott pay the bills incurred by her family.[1] This meant that, in spite of the contempt they earned among Alcott's contemporaries, they sold well and were widely read. The financial aspect of Alcott's sensation stories thus ridicules Victorian double standards and calls into question the morality of those who stealthily devour Alcott's thrillers overnight but openly criticize them in daylight. More importantly, the stories themselves tell of cunning "confidence women" that inhabit Alcott's world and turn the patriarchal American culture upside down, disclosing its inherent hypocrisy. As a specific variation of con (wo)men, who threaten the morality and stability of the

[1] Even when she became famous after publishing *Hospital Sketches*, Alcott herself observed: "I can't afford to starve on praise, when sensation stories are written in half the time and keep the family cosey" (Delamar 73).

nineteenth-century American society, those *femmes fatales* menace both self-assured male patriarchs and women of fashion who rest tranquilly on Victorian (im)moral duplicity.[2] These dangerous women are very often victorious in posing a threat to the societal order in which they find themselves; as such, however, they serve less as examples to follow than as foils highlighting the false premises on which the Victorian order has been constructed.

One of the most successful of Alcott's belligerent heroines is Jean Muir of "Behind a Mask; or, a Woman's Power" (BM), published in 1866 in *The Flag of Our Union*, a weekly periodical concerned with "violent narratives peopled with convicts and opium addicts" (Strickland 93). Jean Muir comes to the Coventry estate as a servant of young Bella, who instantly takes to her guardian. The Coventry circle is an apotheosis of the sentimental "family of fashion" defined by Charles Strickland as "patriarchal in politics," a family in which

> men are plunged into cutthroat business competition, while their wives are robbed of meaningful work, reduced to mere symbols of their husbands' success and valued the more as they have less to do. These pampered ladies filled their hours thinking only of parties and foolish finery, gossiping about their friends and engaging in petty intrigues. Rigid barriers of class separate them from their unfortunate sisters, the working women…. The world inhabited by families of fashion is one devoid of warmth, justice, or charity, and it corrupts all whom it touches – men and women, rich and poor, old and young. (92)

As a servant, Jean Muir must suffer humiliation upon entering such a family. Indeed, the Coventries' attitude toward the newcomer is made clear from the very beginning of the tale: Gerald Coventry, the proud heir of the estate, openly announces that he "[has] an inveterate aversion to the whole tribe [of governesses]" (BM 361), while his cousin Lucia, to whom Gerald is said to be betrothed, lectures young Belle on the Victorian code of behavior when she attempts to dash forward to greet Jean: "Stay here, child. It is her place to come to you, not yours to go to her" (BM 362).

Entangled in the net of artificial conventions, Jean Muir wisely resorts to play by its rules, and thus avenge the wrongs she suffers as a servant of a pompous Victorian family. A skillful actress herself, she manages to attract the admiration first of Edward, Gerald's younger brother, and then of Gerald himself, even though the latter aptly describes

[2] For a thorough discussion of the role of confidence men in the sentimental American society see Halttunen, esp. chapter one "The Era of the Confidence Man," 1 - 32.

the governess to Lucia as "the most uncanny little specimen" (BM 365). Yet, Jean makes use of different means to captivate the two men. Edward falls in love with her because he is not able to see through the mask of moral sincerity and physical beauty that Jean painstakingly assumes every day, while she is actually "a haggard, worn, and moody woman of thirty at least," with a face full of "weary, hard, bitter [expression]" (BM 367). To Edward, however, as well as to the rest of the Coventry family, Jean appears as "very earnest and pretty… with the sunshine glinting on her yellow hair, delicate face, and downcast eyes" (BM 368); in short, she seems "meek, modest, faithful, and invariably sweet-tempered" (BM 377). So strong and influential is the effect of Miss Muir's artful image that Edward soon falls prey to her skill. "She is unlike any girl I ever saw; there's no sentimentality about her; she is wise, and kind, and sweet. She says what she means, looks you straight in the eye, and is as true as steel" (BM 384), confesses Edward to his brother, and the reader is well aware that his words could not be further from the truth. Yet, because she "isn't a woman to be fluttered by a man's shadow" (BM 385) and, more importantly, because she cannot rest satisfied until she has ridiculed the patriarchal family of fashion, Jean ventures to win Gerald's respect and love. She does it with astonishing ease, and thus derides even more the Victorian values upon which Gerald's world of manners leans. By forfeiting her descent from a noble Scottish family, she strikes the most vulnerable of Gerald's "moral" principles. When Gerald, as if by accident, learns about Jean's birth, he feels "his interest in his sister's governess much increased by this fact; for, like all wellborn Englishmen, he value[s] rank and gentle blood even more than he care[s] to own" (BM 392). Finally, after Jean craftily makes him feel "the indescribable spell of womanhood" in one of the *tableaux vivants* in which they both participate, Gerald can no longer "quench the unwonted fire of his eyes, or keep all trace of emotion out of his face" (BM 395) – he falls victim to Miss Muir's deceitful art, and is unable to defy the sway she holds over him until he receives his punishment at the end of the story.

But Jean, true to her vengeful resolution, seeks to disrupt the patriarchal family in a most thorough way, and therefore is not satisfied by merely subordinating the heir of the estate. Sir John Coventry, the patriarch of the Coventry family, challenges the governess with his male superiority and easily-won deference. To subdue him, Jean employs all she has at her disposal: the art of beautiful appearance, the coquetry of speech, the power of sentimental body language, and, last but not least, the omnipotent strength of the fast-spun story of her noble birth. The means she uses occupy a prominent place in the hierarchy of values of the Victorian middle class, and Sir John – the idealization of Victorian patriarch – cannot remain immune to their destructive force. In haste and secrecy he marries the cunning governess, thereby unconsciously completing her victory by endowing her with the most powerful weapon in the Victorian world: a noble name. In result,

when the rest of the family discover the dreaded truth about their servant, Jean hastens to lecture them on her position and authority: "Poor Jean Muir you might harm, but Lady Coventry is beyond your reach" (BM 428). No one in the family can fail to give credit to Jean's words; trapped in Victorian conventions of behavior and moral conduct, the members of the patriarchal community fall prey to their own credo of social relationship.

It is interesting that the other female characters in the narrative act as foils to their male counterparts (with the exception of Mrs. Coventry, Gerald's mother, who remains quite out of the picture for the best part of the story). Both Gerald's supposed fiancée and her maid Dean instinctively distrust the new governess and seem not to be taken in by her sly acting. Lucia even tries to forewarn her infatuated uncle against the deceitful Miss Muir: "Her art is wonderful; I feel yet cannot explain or detect it, except in the working of events which her hand seemed to guide. She has brought sorrow and dissension into this hitherto happy family" (BM 418). Neither her admonition nor Dean's clever observations, however, can check the restive Jean's stampede towards her final triumph. The Coventries are a patriarchal family, and female voices seem to be of little, if any, significance in the dialogue of Victorian society.

As a woman, and, more importantly, a woman of lower social rank, Jean Muir would therefore have few chances of success in the Victorian world. That Alcott grants her bellicose female character the final victory over the patriarchs of the convention-bound Coventry estate gains far-reaching implications in view of the position women occupied in the American family of fashion in the mid-19th century. A mere supplement to men's authority, females symbolically depicted the vices of the age: addiction to deceitful fashion, insincere behavior, and theatrical relationships between people. It is by all means obvious that women would not have found themselves ensnared in the mesh of spurious conventions had it not been for the silent consent and patriarchal attitude of their male counterparts. Jean Muir transcends the sexual division as well as class distinction on which Victorian order insists; by artfully ridiculing both the male authority on which the stability of the patriarchal estate is contingent and the female post-romantic intuitive behavior, she emerges as a matriarchal rebel for whom the artificial, deceptive organization of social and moral rules of her age victimizes true humanity.

Jean Muir is not Alcott's only revolutionary female character. In "Pauline's Passion and Punishment" (PPP) the title heroine is as tenacious in her pursuit of revenge on her ex-lover as Jean Muir is in carrying out her ambitious plan. Pauline Valary is wronged by her beloved Gilbert Redmont, who leaves her for a wealthy Barbara. By this act Gilbert violates the sentimental ideal of chaste and sincere marriage, accurately and concisely defined by Charles Strickland: "no sexual intercourse without love, no love without marriage, and no marriage without love" (6). Once the sentimental marital law has

been breached, Pauline feels at liberty to disobey the Victorian code of feminine subjection. In the mid-19th century "a woman must be prepared to suffer, and to suffer in silence, for it was not her place to challenge the authority of her husband…. Her only release from suffering and subordination came through death" (Strickland 10). The rancorous Pauline embodies the exact denial of sentimental submissive woman; far from being meek and humble, she is rather "like a wild creature in its cage… with bent head, locked hands, and restless steps…. Passion burn[s] in the deep eyes… pride [sits] on the forehead" (PPP 3). As such, Pauline Valary contrasts sharply with Jean Muir, who resorted to skillful disguise in order to win credence of those she intended to ridicule. More than that, Pauline does not even attempt to camouflage her true feelings when she endeavors to marry the rich Manuel: "I want fortune, rank, splendor, and power; you can give me all these, and a faithful friend beside" (PPP 6). Surprisingly, Manuel does not hesitate long before he agrees to espouse his friend; moreover, when he openly confesses to his beloved, "soul and body, I belong to you; do with me as you will" (PPP 21), he readily submits his masculinity to Pauline's feminine power, never to regain it.

The vindictive Pauline does not demand more to begin her devilish chase for Gilbert's punishment. She admits that sentimental conventions condemn such an action, but her awareness does not hinder her pursuit in the least: "yes, it is weak, wicked, and unwomanly," she declares, "yet I persist as relentlessly as any Indian on a war trail…. I have been wronged, and I long to right myself at once" (PPP 6). This she does by first seducing Gilbert anew and challenging his male pride, and then, with the help of the submissive Manuel, by leaving him without either his money or the love of Barbara. In the end, Gilbert becomes as docile as Manuel, and, labeling his marriage "a disgraceful servitude," is prone to promise Pauline everything to "retrieve [his] faultful past" (PPP 28). His utter self-humiliation is exactly what Pauline has waited for; and when she makes Gilbert admit that he believes she loves him still, she strikes the final blow by pronouncing Manuel the object of her love. Pauline's punishment thus becomes complete, her vengeful arrangement turning a jest for her, and "a bitter earnest" for Gilbert (PPP 30).

It might seem peculiar, however, that the story describes the fate of a victim and victimizer, both of whom act against the norms of proper sentimental behavior. Yet, Gilbert turns out to defy the conventions of Victorian society only partially. In his disingenuous marriage to Barbara, Gilbert indubitably mirrors Pauline and her spurn of the sentimental credo; with his unrestricted belief in outward appearances, on the other hand, he surfaces as another blind slave to Victorian moral and societal etiquette. In this he follows the lectures of sentimental magazines on the value of beauty, for, as Karen Halttunen aptly observes,

> An attractive woman… sheds an uplifting moral influence over a man simply through the beauty of her appearance…. True womanly beauty was not an accident of form; it was the outward expression of a virtuous mind and heart. (71)

Gilbert therefore falls prey to his mistaken conviction that, because of a woman's assumed transparency, beauty equals true, spotless moral creed. Such is the image Pauline evokes when at a party in a hotel Gilbert sees her for the first time since he abruptly left her:

> a woman fair-haired, violet-eyed, blooming and serene, sweeping down the long hall with noiseless grace. An air of sumptuous life pervaded her, the shimmer of bridal snow surrounded her, bridal gifts shone on the neck and arms, and bridal happiness seemed to touch her with its tender charm. (PPP 11)

Taking Pauline's sincerity for granted, Gilbert assumes he can "read the signs" (PPP 29) which Pauline supposedly leaves for him to decipher, such as her innocuous smiles and meaningful glances. In fact, however, Pauline imitates Jean Muir's crafty masking, even though she does not pretend to pardon and befriend the one who wronged her but solely restrains her true emotions by appropriate social conduct. Once more, female power not only artfully subordinates and thwarts male authority, but does so by taking advantage of the very conventions upon which this authority has been built.

On the one hand, Louisa May Alcott's *femmes fatales* may seem quite bestial and vicious, while on the other hand they demonstrate Alcott's own longing for independence from sentimental culture. Pauline Valary and Jean Muir obtain sexual and class autonomy but, by employing such "unwomanly" (in the sentimental meaning of the word) means to satisfy their desires, they might stand vulnerable to the harsh critique of fervid apostles of Victorian lifestyle, both male and female. Yet, in Alcott's literary output there is a place for women who are not driven by the hunger for revenge, but who nonetheless serve as foils for sentimental and patriarchy-centered men. One of them is Natalie Nairne of "La Jeune; or, Actress and Woman" (LJ), a thirty-seven-year-old English lady forced by brutal fate to live her life as a Parisian actress known as La Jeune. A wealthy Florimond had fallen in love with her and taken her to his luxurious home in Normandy, but once he fell victim to mental illness, Natalie's only choice was to don the mask of a twenty-year-old tragedienne, concealing her miserable burden from the attention of the world. La Jeune is therefore a truly tragic heroine who, having devoted her life to the man who used to love her sincerely, cannot drop the disguise she has chosen to wear. In consequence, whenever she is mistreated by men who perceive her exclusively through her disparaged profession, the wrongs she suffers appear doubly painful.

The antagonistic attitude towards La Jeune that Ulster, the narrator of the tale, adopts and fosters, is a similar example of the destructive force of misconception based upon the rules of Victorian order. Ulster is a self-centered person who believes himself to be "ten years older and wiser" (LJ 625) than his friend Arthur Brooke, a theatergoer. When Arthur becomes enchanted with the famous actress, Ulster immediately assumes the position of his custodian, admonishing his friend of the perils of a relationship with a theater performer: "I know her class; they are all alike, mercenary, treacherous, and shallow" (LJ 626). In his biased approach to La Jeune Ulster reiterates the error of sentimental dandies who, in their unrelenting pursuit for definite expressions of truth and sincerity, were overeager to scorn all manifestations of histrionic, double-faced behavior. Simultaneously, however, those men of verity were oblivious to the fact that their own conduct turned into fashion and their transparent figures acquired the status of disguise for moral vices.[3] Ulster does not apprehend that his misguided evaluation of the actress stems from his self-granted moral superiority. Unlike Arthur, who is cognizant of the fact that "actress as [Natalie] is, there's not a purer woman than she in all Paris" (LJ 626), Ulster cannot subordinate the prejudiced image of La Jeune he fosters to his friend's description of Natalie off stage: "see her at home; the woman is more charming than the actress" (LJ 627). In fact, in a truly sentimental fashion, Natalie-the-actress is not ethically translucent for Ulster because in appearance she is exactly like Pauline Valary: beautiful, assertive, and not liable to submit herself to patriarchal authority:

> She looked scarcely twenty, so fresh and brilliant was her face, so beautifully molded her figure, so youthful her charming voice, so elastic her graceful gestures. Petite and piquant, fair hair, dark eyes, a ravishing foot and hand, a dazzling neck and arm, made this rosy, dimpled little creature altogether captivating. (LJ 627)

Moreover, with her alluring figure La Jeune not only challenges Ulster's masculinity but also spurs his curiosity about her moral standards, even though he takes her assumed dissolute inner life for granted. Here, nevertheless, La Jeune proves to be Pauline's most unmitigated contradiction, and Ulster falls in the trap of sentimental standards. Expanding in his unfair judgment Natalie's external theatricality onto her inner sphere, he cruelly maltreats the woman; more importantly, seeking the proofs for La Jeune's alleged double standards in histrionic disguise, Ulster dons a mask himself, thereby violating sentimental conventions whose advocate he desires to be. Worse still, Ulster does not

[3] Describing the changes that took place in the morale of American society in the 1840s and 1850s, Halttunen speaks of "a growing willingness to abandon the sentimental posture of moral earnestness toward matters of self-display and moral ritual" (157).

even allow for the possibility of the actress's virtuous character, even though he is more than once "affected… with a curious sense of guilt for [his] hard judgment of her" (LJ 630) and "half long[s] to drop [his] mask" (LJ 633). In consequence, Ulster becomes the exemplification of an inexorable sentimental arbiter of morality, the egocentrically all-powerful patriarch *par excellence*. Accordingly, when he eventually condescends to confess his love to the actress, who honestly refuses him and tells him her life story, he attempts to shield his wounded masculine pride by transcending sentimental standards and hazarding a most hypocritical assumption: "that was art, this nature; I admired the actress, I adored the woman" (LJ 636). It is understandable that he cannot be spared Alcott's pitiless critique, and indeed he passes out of the tale doubly humiliated by his awareness that Arthur overheard his love avowals. In such a manner Ulster's patriarchal conduct is ridiculed not only by female nature but also by its male counterpart, while La Jeune surfaces as an anti-sentimental woman, wronged by masculine hypocrisy.

Alcott provides one more example of a female combatant in the world of patriarchal sentimentality. La Jeune's mockery of post-romantic conventions, Pauline Valary's revengeful pugnaciousness, and Jean Muir's female craftiness are combined in the figure of Countess Varazoff, the protagonist of the story by the same title (CV). Irma Varazoff is in fact the child of a Polish serf, and exists in the realm of upper-class symbolism only due to her cunning disguise and well-spun life story. By undeservedly assuming what Victorian society values most, namely her title of a Polish countess, Irma, in a La Jeune-like fashion, aims at saving the life of Count Cremlin, her Polish benefactor, who is serving an unjust sentence in an Austrian prison. The person powerful enough to grant him freedom is Alexander Czertski, a Russian prince. In order to win his acquitting word, Irma endeavors to seduce the proud prince, a task which appears extremely difficult to achieve. Prince Czertski is not only a sworn enemy of Poland, but, first and foremost, a patriarch commanding the highest respect of both sexes:

> Prince Czertski never forgot or forgave a slight. He was a man of forty, above the usual height, with a martial carriage, a colorless, large-featured face, fierce black eyes, a sensual, yet ruthless mouth… sharp white teeth under a heavy mustache…. Dressed with an elegant simplicity, and wearing one order at his buttonhole, the prince was a striking figure. (CV 639)

More importantly, Alexander emanates masculine superiority, and is more than willing to assert his dominating position over women whenever he encounters them: "I know your fair and fickle sex too well to trust them till they are won" (CV 644). Yet, confronted with Irma Varazoff, Prince Czertski duplicates Ulster's fatal mistake: brought up in

the symbolic world of sentimental standards, he is unable to surpass them in order to gain insight into the true state of affairs. Just as La Jeune's victim, Alexander questions Irma's earnestness and transparency, but, prey to sentimental conventions, he rests mistakenly assured of his omnipotent masculine power. Thus, he smoothly albeit unwittingly subordinates himself to Irma's feminine influence. Firstly, he is dangerously challenged by the countess's provoking beauty at a party:

> Never had she looked more beautiful, for through the veil her skin was dazzlingly fair, her eyes shone large and lustrous as stars, her lips were proud and unsmiling, and in her carriage there was a haughty grace which plainly proved that her free spirit was still unsubdued. (CV 640)

Moreover, Prince Czertski is doubly captivated by Irma's dress, that of a Polish slave in golden chains. Unable to silently tolerate the "womanly bravado" (CV 641), as he labels Irma's bold appearance, Alexander meets the challenge and agrees to send a pardon for Count Cremlin on condition that he marries the belligerent Pole with a view to her post-marital humiliation and subordination. In his assumption and determination Alexander acts like a Victorian patriarch *par excellence*, heedlessly relying on the symbolic authority of a husband. His absolute dependence on sentimental hierarchy simultaneously supplies his vengeful wife with the most deadly weapon: when Count Cremlin is eventually set free, Irma reveals her true ascendancy in messages sent to upper-class men of power and in her last letter to her husband, written before her suicide. As her parting words to Alexander clearly accentuate, Prince Czertski ends up a victim of his own patriarchal class standards: "To a Russian noble the disgrace of such an alliance as yours is an indelible stain…. There is no cure for such a wound, and your proud heart will writhe under this blemish on the name and honor you hold dearer than life" (CV 647). Thus, once again female art and devotion triumph over male-governed Victorian principles, and Louisa May Alcott's anti-sentimental message flashes anew.

Thus, in retrospect, Alcott's heroines are seen playing manifold roles: they serve as foils to patriarchal men; they underline the vices of the Victorian age; they ridicule sentimental conventions; and they reveal the hypocrisy of the mid-nineteenth century society. Most significantly, in their dissent from the Victorian order Alcott's *femme fatales* are armed with the age's most treasured (anti-)values: the strength of beauty, the power of wealth, the reverence of class titles, and, above all, the art of two-facedness. Louisa May Alcott, herself familiar with the perils of hypocrisy, makes her female characters use these weapons with effective skill, to the detriment of the patriarchal order founded upon the artificial standards of Victorian age.

In result, Alcott's "pot-boilers" exerted strong influence on their readers, who shaped the double-faced American society. Overtly dubbing sensational stories "trash," as Professor Bhaer from *Little Women* conspicuously indicates (2: 160), the public nonetheless took to them ardently, thereby verifying their strongly-denied moral and behavioral duplicity. In consequence, Alcott ridicules sentimental American society perhaps even more than she would have liked to admit; her literary stratagem is all the more tricky and efficacious as she places her stories in a European setting, supposedly so far away from the New World's "chaste" scenery. Because for Alcott, as for other anti-sentimentalists of her time, "fashionable American forms were the cultural remnants of a corrupt and decadent Old World aristocracy" and "all attempts to ape foreign manners undermined American independence from Europe" (Halttunen 156), Strickland's conclusion might provide a clue for understanding Alcott's literary maneuver: "Alcott strongly implied that… unhappy family style was spawned by a decadent European aristocracy" (93). However, her disparaging emphasis on faulty societal conventions seems to fall primarily on American society rather than that of Europe. Thus, following Washington Irving, who covertly expressed his disapproval of the hidden atrocities of American revolution in his France-centered "The Adventure of the German Student," Louisa May Alcott takes her unsentimental heroines to Europe, from where their voice is not only more audible, but also more effective in exercising its unconscious power over the two-faced American audience.

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From the Music of Poetry to the Music of the Spheres: The Musical-Logocentric Vision in T. S. Eliot and Stéphane Mallarmé

All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music.

Walter Pater, *The Renaissance*

As early as the sixteenth century, in *An Apology for Poetry* Sir Philip Sidney denounces those who "cannot hear the planet-like music of poetry" (Leitch 362). By doing so, he alludes to a well-known concept dating back to ancient times. Sidney's "music of poetry" bears much resemblance to the music of the spheres mentioned in the works of Pythagoras, Plato and Cicero. The great writers of antiquity believed that the universe was musically constructed and that there existed a kind of celestial music, the most beautiful of all sounds (Alldritt 121; Leitch 362). It seems only natural that such a concept is linked with poetry, whose roots are melic. The art of versification thus came to be regarded as analogous to music, and Sidney remains but one of the poets who believe that verse, as the supreme form of literature, should aspire to recover the supreme, unifying *melos* of the cosmos.

Three and a half centuries after Sidney's death, his term "music of poetry" recurred in the title of an essay by a poet who is to contemporary literature what Sidney is to the English Renaissance. Given T. S. Eliot's penchant for the Elizabethans, it is hardly surprising that he should draw on this particular source for the title of his lecture delivered at Glasgow University in 1942 and published in the same year. The essay contains numerous references to other authors, one of them being the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé. Again, the choice is what one might have expected of a poet as deeply influenced by the French symbolists as Eliot. Interestingly, however, the affinities between both poets' view of the musical aspect of poetry are not limited to this one mention. A close comparison of "The Music of Poetry" and "Crise de vers," an 1896 essay by Mallarmé, reveals so many striking parallels that one might in fact speak of the French and the Anglo-American poets sharing a similar conception, in which *ars poetica* is equated with *ars musica*.

What strikes even a reader who has a passing acquaintance with both texts is the musical nature of the vocabulary Mallarmé and Eliot use. In the former's essay, one comes

across such terms as *orchestration*, *instrumentation*, *musicalité*, *accompagnements*, *concert*, *orchestre*, *instrument*, *orgues*, *clavier*, *flûte*, *viole*, *rythme*, *cadence*, *dissonances*, *euphonie*, *échos*, *mélodie*, *timbres*, *sonorités*, *accords*, *notation*, *symphonie*, *fugues*, *sonates*. This assemblage of melic terminology culminates in the word *music* being capitalized in Mallarmé's essay. Throughout the text, the author uses musical metaphors and comparisons while dealing with the condition of poetry. The poet is likened to a musician, composer or singer, and, consequently, the recipient of poetry is more of a listener than a reader, as references to the ear and the sense of hearing suggest. Finally, Mallarmé explains how, in an ideal poetic image, the essence of the thing presented arises "musically." Indeed, the whole essay seems to be pervaded by an aura of musicality.

"The Music of Poetry" differs from "Crise de vers" in being more straightforward and clear. The essay by Mallarmé, who is renowned for the obscurity of his writings and for what the critic Malcolm Bowie terms "the art of being difficult" (Leitch 844), is an example of what the French poet himself calls the "critical poem" (Leitch 842), a genre of theoretical text as stylistically dense and complex as his verse. Eliot, with his preference for order and hierarchy, never breaks down the distinction between theory and poetic practice. Therefore, one shall not find in "The Music of Poetry" the figurative language of Mallarmé with his musical metaphors. Instead, Eliot states directly that to him, as to his French predecessor, the work of the poet is, to a certain extent, that of a musician: "I think that a poet may gain much from the study of music: how much knowledge of musical form is desirable I do not know, for I have not that technical knowledge myself" (*On Poetry* 38). With his characteristic reserve, Eliot mentions that he is not uncritical of the connection between the two arts, and that it is "possible for a poet to work too closely to musical analogies" (38), which might result in artificiality. While avoiding Mallarmé's effusiveness, Eliot still uses expressions which have musical or aural connotations throughout the essay: *hear*, *listener*, *ear*, *sound* and *instrumental music*, to name but a few. A passage referring to his memories of W. B. Yeats reading his poems aloud makes it clear that to Eliot, as to Mallarmé, poetry is to be heard as well as, or maybe rather than, read.

Both poets inevitably deal with prosody, and both seem to suggest that an intuitive approach to it is the optimal one. To Mallarmé, metrical rules are something the poet has to guess rather than learn. Similarly, Eliot implies that the principles of prosody should be acquired through induction rather than deduction:

> The only way to learn to manipulate any kind of English verse seemed to be by assimilation and imitation, by becoming so engrossed in the work of a particular poet that one could produce a recognizable derivative.… we may find the classification of metres, of lines with different numbers of syllables and stresses in different places, useful

> at a preliminary stage, as a simplified map of a complicated territory: but it is only the study, not of poetry but of poems, that can train our ear. (27-28)

In admitting to his inability "to retain the names of feet and meters, or to pay the proper respect to the accepted rules of scansion" (27), Eliot echoes the French poet's view of prosody as "*ce qu'il n'importe d'apprendre*" (Mallarmé 362).

Regarding prosody as restrictive, Mallarmé cannot help but consider the advent of *vers libres* a revolution. He even goes so far as to treat it as a kind of second French Revolution, and enthusiastically celebrates the breaking up of the poetic line as a "liberation" of verse, allowing for personal expression and individuality. As a successor to the French symbolists, Eliot inevitably touches upon free verse, a crucial part of their legacy, in "The Music of Poetry." However, while Mallarmé lauds *vers-libristes* such as Verlaine and Laforgue, who depart from the classical French verse form – the alexandrine, Eliot seems to have reservations about such prosodic freedom, claiming that "no verse is free for the man who wants to do a good job" (*On Poetry* 37). The author of *Four Quartets* warns that "a great deal of bad prose has been written under the name of free verse" (37) and concludes that "only a bad poet could welcome free verse as a liberation from form. It was a revolt against dead form, and a preparation for new form or for the renewal of the old" (37). The difference in attitude is perhaps rooted in chronology: Mallarmé praised *vers libres* at a time when it was still a novelty, whereas Eliot's essay, published almost half a century later, reacted to the period of intense practice of free verse, which by then had come to stand for consolidation rather than innovation. Interestingly, Mallarmé appears to have predicted Eliot's skepticism, as he reassures the readers of "Crise de vers" that "*dans les occasions amples on obéira toujours à la tradition solennelle, dont la prépondérance relève du génie classique*" (363). Like Eliot, Mallarmé hints that the prosodic freedom brought about by his fellow symbolists might be only an *interregnum* prior to the establishment of new versification forms, as some regularity and similarity are essential as far as prosody is concerned.

Importantly, Mallarmé perceives the explosion of *vers libres* as inextricably linked with language. Free verse, a rediscovery of poetic form, entails a rediscovery of language itself. Thus, Mallarmé equates music with language, just as he equates music with poetry in the oft-quoted passage: "*ouïr l'indiscutable rayon – comme des traits dorent et déchirent un méandre de mélodies : où la Musique rejoint le Vers pour former, depuis Wagner, la Poésie*" (365). To Mallarmé, expressing yourself poetically equals bursting into song. By mentioning Wagner, whose influence is pervasive among late-nineteenth-century French poets and to whom Eliot, significantly, refers in *The Waste Land*, Mallarmé suggests that the poet should struggle to achieve in verse what the German

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composer accomplished in music. The author of "Crise de vers" realizes that, unlike the musician, the poet is doomed to struggle with the constraints of the language and the impossibility of communicating one's thoughts clearly through the verbal medium. The sounds of words may be related to their meanings, but the very existence of multiple languages indicates that this relation is not one of perfect correspondence. Mallarmé notes that, unlike God, we do not speak words which are themselves the things they name. While God can say "Let there be light" and there is light, *jour*, the French word for *day*, has a dark vowel sound whereas *nuit*, the French equivalent of *night*, has a light sound. There is no supreme, ideal language which would be perfectly in tune with itself, with no discrepancy between sound and sense; there is no verbal equivalent of the supreme music of the spheres. Poetry, however, is superior to language, redeeming its shortcomings and creating a new, total word, unknown to language, suspending the multiple facets of an idea so that its fragments balance in a kind of universal musicality. Verse should therefore aspire to the condition of pure poetry, comparable to the celestial music of the cosmos.

In pure poetry, according to Mallarmé, words themselves take the initiative in their clashes and rhymes while the poet is anonymous and absent, as in Eliot's doctrine of poetic impersonality. The word, "*l'immortelle parole*" (Mallarmé 364), is thus central to Mallarmé's theory, just as it is central to Eliot's concept of poetic musicality. In his essay, the author of *The Waste Land* identifies the music of poetry with the music of the words. Like his French predecessor, Eliot delves into the alchemy of the word, examining the phonetic-semantic relation, to find out that no word is beautiful in itself, "from the point of view of *sound* alone" (*On Poetry* 32). This statement leads Eliot to conclude that

> The music of a word is, so to speak, at a point of intersection: it arises from its relation first to the words immediately preceding and following it, and indefinitely to the rest of its context; and from another relation, that of its immediate meaning in that context to all the other meanings which it has had in other contexts, to its greater or less wealth of association. (32-33)

It is the poet's task to take account of the whole anatomy of words, of their various connotations, of what they suggest rather than explicitly mean. This knowledge of all verbal connections is a prerequisite for creating, or better composing, the "musical poem" (33) as Eliot understands it:

> My purpose here is to insist that a "musical poem" is a poem which has a musical pattern of sound and a musical pattern of the secondary meanings of the words which compose it, and that these two patterns are indissoluble and one. And if you object

> that it is only the pure sound, apart from the sense, to which the adjective "musical" can be rightly applied, I can only reaffirm my previous assertion that the sound of a poem is as much an abstraction from the poem as is the sense. (33)

In his definition of musicality, Eliot makes suggestion an integral part of the poem's "soundscape." He thus puts great emphasis on allusiveness, one of the key features of symbolist poetry. So does Mallarmé in "Crise de vers," noting that evocation, allusion and suggestion are more beneficial to poetry than description. To prove his view that reality cannot be presented directly, Mallarmé evokes, somewhat humorously, a book trying to enclose a palace, on which the pages have difficulty closing. He welcomes the advent of new schools of poetry which rely solely on the aforementioned techniques, and places their achievements in a musical context by comparing their poetic works to fugues and sonatas. In Mallarmé's view, the task of poetry is to make allusions, to distil the essence of the thing – its idea, as the following oft-quoted passage indicates:

> *Je dis: une fleur! et, hors de l'oubli où ma voix relègue aucun contour, en tant que quelque chose d'autre que les calices sus, musicalement se lève, idée même et suave, l'absente de tous bouquets*. (368)

While Mallarmé celebrates suggestiveness as a novelty brought about by the symbolist movement, of which he is one of the leading representatives, Eliot sees it, in a historical perspective, as intrinsic to poetry in general:

> This is an "allusiveness" which is not the fashion or eccentricity of a peculiar type of poetry; but an allusiveness which is in the nature of words, and which is equally the concern of every kind of poet. (*On Poetry* 33)

In fact, Eliot goes further in applying the tenets of symbolism to all kinds of verse. In "The Music of Poetry," he seems resigned to the fact that the entire meaning of a poem can never be captured and paraphrased "because the poet is occupied with frontiers of consciousness beyond which words fail, though meanings still exist" (30). Significantly, he illustrates his skeptical approach to deciphering poetry by discounting attempts to unriddle the meanings of Mallarmé's poems. In the symbolist vein, Eliot asserts the open-ended nature of poetry and its inevitable vagueness. He thereby extends the symbolists' chief aim – to express the inexpressible – to poems overall. When Eliot claims that "poetry attempts to convey something beyond what can be conveyed in prose rhythms" and that "the poem means more, not less, than ordinary speech can communi-

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cate" (31), he echoes Mallarmé's transcendent desire to approach, through suggestion and allusion, "la musicalité de tout" (366).

It is precisely this universal musicality that the poet should aspire to. In "Crise de vers," Mallarmé sets a poetic ideal which he likens, at some point, to the philosopher's stone or a chimera. Mostly, however, his highest ambitions for poetry are expressed in terms of music, which to him is not only a system of sounds which appeals directly to the senses and emotions, but also a system of pure relations and intervals which has a structural rather than referential existence. According to Mallarmé, poetry should attempt to enact the correspondences between the earthly and the ethereal, and recreate the music of the spheres. He regards poetry as "un art d'achever la transposition, au Livre, de la symphonie" (367), the art of capturing, through symbols and suggestion, the essence of the great unifying symphony of the cosmos. Toward the end of "Crise de vers," Mallarmé points to the word as a source of all music, including that of the spheres:

> *ce n'est pas de sonorités élémentaires par les cuivres, les cordes, les bois, indéniablement mais de l'intellectuelle parole à son apogée que doit avec plénitude et évidence, résulter, en tant que l'ensemble des rapports existant dans tout, la Musique*. (367-68)

Mallarmé's "intellectuelle parole" can be equated with the *logos*, a philosophical term derived from Greek, which stands for *word*, but also *speech*, *thought* and *reason*. It may also be associated with divine reason, a force unifying the universe. By composing the kind of poetry Mallarmé aspires to through "the mystery of the word, which may evoke the Word – the Logos, the poet seeks to commune with and to reveal the invisible, the infinite or the unknown" (Brée 3). The word becomes central to both Mallarmé's and Eliot's poetic theories, justifying their experiments with incantation.

The year 1942, in which "The Music of Poetry" appeared, also saw the publication of Eliot's *Four Quartets*. Interestingly, while in the essay Eliot refrains from referring to ultimate metaphysical realities, in the poem he places Mallarmé's ideas in a Christian context. The French poet's musical-logocentric vision informs *Four Quartets*. It suffices to look at the beginning of "Burnt Norton," the first quartet, to detect traces of Mallarmé. The poem opens with the image of a rose garden, in which

> the bird called, in response to
> The unheard music hidden in the shrubbery
>
> (*Complete Poems* 118)

Eliot's "unheard music" may be identified with the *logos*, the eternal word, which can only be heard in silence, the silence Mallarmé so often alludes to in "Crise de vers." In "Burnt Norton," this silence is associated with timelessness, stillness and redemption, and opposed to the quotidian motion and clamor of the world, which prevents humanity from experiencing eternity. It is, however, possible to attain stillness and timelessness through art, as the closing section of "Burnt Norton" suggests:

> Words move, music moves
> Only in time; but that which is only living
> Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
> Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
> Can words or music reach
> The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
> Moves perpetually in its stillness.
> (121)

Art offers a paradoxical combination of motion and stillness: every composition, whether verbal or musical, has a pattern, and can be performed endlessly. Poetry and music exist in and out of time, and in silence when they are not being performed. To Eliot, as to Mallarmé, poetry and music grow out of the temporary to reach the eternal *logos*. Eliot, like Mallarmé, realizes that the task of the poet is extremely difficult:

> Words strain,
> Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
> Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
> Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
> Will not stay still. Shrieking voices
> Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering,
> Always assail them. The Word in the desert
> Is most attacked by voices of temptation,
> The crying shadow in the funeral dance,
> The loud lament of the disconsolate chimera.
> (121-22)

Significantly, Mallarmé also compares his poetic ambitions to a chimera. Both poets are thus aware of the unattainability of the ideal they pursue. However, neither of them can abandon his task as "the Word is the perfection moving the poem and the poet, too, in

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his own empty desert" (Smith 267). To both poets, the words of the poem are also its music, which reaches into the silence and the *logos*. Eliot's "unheard music" is thus Mallarmé's "musicalité de tout," and the silence which recurs in their works is parallel to the music of the spheres, a music too perfect to be audible to human ears.

In this quest for a poetic ideal which is at once elevated and inaccessible, Mallarmé seems more ardent and more desperate, steadily gravitating towards hermeticism. The evolution of Mallarmé's conception of poetry and of his technique was a function of his pursuit of the Absolute: from clear, almost explicit symbols to obscure, equivocal ones. The poetry he practiced was increasingly hermetic, and his poetic idiom increasingly esoteric and accessible only to the chosen few. To him, poetry is sacred and thus the profane are denied access to its temple. Hence his penchant for the mysterious, which will discourage accidental worshippers and appeal to the true ones. To that end, the poet needs to invent "*une langue immaculée*" and "*des formules hiératiques*" (Lagarde 531). In search of this new language, Mallarmé dislocates syntax, multiplying appositions, ellipses and periphrases. Highlighting words, he recreates them and allows them to take control. In keeping with his idea of musicality, he arranges words according to their sonorous affinities. However, his attempts, ambitious and impressive as they are, entail a serious danger: poetry as understood by Mallarmé is at risk of becoming totally incommunicable and reduced to the silence he repeatedly refers to in his writings. Mallarmé neglects the communicative aspect of language, focusing on its aesthetic function. It results in the poet being separated from the general public. The lack of communication excludes the possibility of communion between the poet and his reader.

While Mallarmé steers his verse towards pure structure and abstract poetic constructs, composing a poetry which creates a world of its own, a poetry with no concrete references to the external world, Eliot is more meaning-oriented, and thus more rational, in his conception of the music of poetry. Like Mallarmé, he attaches great importance to form, which guarantees order where the forces of chaos seem to prevail. Importantly, however, Eliot does not dissociate the structure from the content, nor does he ignore the communicative function of language, thus avoiding "the mossiness of Mallarmé" (*To Criticize* 170). Eliot has a message to convey, and therefore his poetry cannot be devoid of subject matter. Musicality, to him, is a very broad term: it is not only the melodic properties of verse, but also a musicality of structure, which likens the poem to a musical composition. However, what it is not is a purely musical arrangement of words bereft of meaning. Rightness in poetry, according to Eliot, depends on a combination of sound and sense, and on no account should the former be divorced from the latter.

Though mysticism is but one aspect of this multifarious work, *Four Quartets*, the poetic culmination of Eliot's idea of the music of poetry, is undoubtedly a religious poem,

in terms of content as well as form, with its mantra-like, liturgical repetitions of phrases and motifs. The religious context, so important to Eliot, is largely absent from Mallarmé's work. Throughout his life, the French poet worshipped only one cult – that of poetry – and practiced only one religion – that of the Ideal. He was the priest, the saint and the martyr of a poetry striving to capture the essence of things as opposed to contingent appearances. His revelations are poetic rather than religious. If Eliot associates the concept of the transcendent music of the spheres and of the Absolute with the sacred, Mallarmé remains secular. In the verse of the former, Christian beliefs replace the symbolist ideas which drive the work of the latter. In Bush's words, "Eliot's attraction to 'the music of poetry' has Platonic and Christian overtones" (168); Mallarmé, by contrast, is Platonic *tout court*. While the French poet is interested mainly in aesthetics, Eliot tends towards the realm of theology and ethics. To quote Bush again, "for the Eliot of the *Quartets*, music is not simply a formal property of verse; it is the emanation of a spiritual fountain" (168). Thibaudet's statement that "dans la poésie pure de Mallarmé, l'initiative est cédée aux mots, comme dans la mystique du pur amour, l'initiative est laissée à Dieu" (480) is applicable to the influence of Mallarmé on *Four Quartets*. In the poem, the word which, through the concept of the music of poetry, plays a crucial role in the symbolist poetics of Mallarmé becomes central to Eliot's Christian logocentric vision.

Despite Eliot's admiration for Mallarmé and the theory and idea of pure poetry, of which the French poet is a chief exponent, the author of *Four Quartets* does not succumb to Mallarméan hermeticism. Both these concepts, the hallmarks of Mallarmé's *œuvre*, are inextricably linked with the music of poetry. If Mallarmé's *poésie pure* is said to tend towards music, it means that the beauty of the poem's words struggles to be in harmony with the melody and sound the words convey. Mallarmé, who wanted to do with words what a musician does with musical notes, helped develop the idea that pure poetry was a form of music and expressed the essence of things. Though tempted by the possibilities of this kind of purity in verse, Eliot never crosses the borderline into incommunicability. In an introduction to his anthology of *Pure Poetry*, George Moore praises the works of Poe because they are almost "free from thought" (Cuddon 758). Another notable advocate of the concept, the Abbé Bremond, associates poetry with prayer, as it aspires to an ineffable and incantatory condition (Cuddon 758). Both Eliot and Mallarmé make use of the powers of incantation; however, it seems that while *Four Quartets* draws closer to Bremond's view, Mallarmé, opposed to a poetry of ideas, goes further in striving towards freedom from thought and, inevitably, from meaning in the strict sense of the term.

Unlike Mallarmé, a hermetic poet *par excellence*, Eliot, though drawn to a highly subjective use of language in poetry and the music and suggestive power of the words, does

not seem to aim at verse which is too obscure and in which the two aforementioned qualities are of greater importance than the sense. In *Four Quartets*, Eliot does "loosen words from their referents and places discursive syntax in the service of music," but he "honors the cultural roots of language at the same time" (Bush 157). Or, as Donald Davie put it, Eliot's poem "swings to and fro between the sonorous opalescence of Mallarmé and… a prosaicism so homespun as to be… positively 'prosey' or 'prosing'" (194). Although *Four Quartets* is a post-symbolist poem permeated by the difficult music of Mallarmé, it would be a mistake to link it with the French poet without any reservations. In spite of his deep personal interest in the symbolist legacy, Eliot is careful not to sever the language of poetry from the outside world and refrains from creating poems which are as abstract and non-referential as musical compositions. Eliot did, in fact, hope that *Four Quartets* was "much simpler and easier to understand than *The Waste Land* and 'Ash Wednesday'" (Dick 126). It might therefore be concluded that in writing his last poem Eliot, whose mother complained about the unintelligibility of her son's verse, was driven by "an impulse to *himself* express a 'commonplace message' in a language any educated person's mother could understand" (Bush 161) and that to combine in *Four Quartets* "a *Symboliste* heritage with an Augustan may have been Eliot's most original act" (Kenner 439).

It is impossible to question Eliot's reverence for what he refers to as "the labour of Mallarmé with the French language" (*Chapbook* 3), his elaborate, comprehensive idea of the music of poetry, his concept of the word, his experimental, incantatory syntax, in short, all that contributes to the disconcerting, transcendent nature of his verse. Yet the example of Mallarmé, though tantalizing, is not followed slavishly and uncritically by the author of *Four Quartets*. Despite the vital role his French predecessor played in Eliot's view of poetry and the development of his technique, paving the way for his poetic practice, it was obvious that to follow Mallarmé all the way meant reaching poetic nothingness. Eliot's ambition was "to write poetry which should be essentially poetry, with nothing poetic about it, poetry standing naked in its bare bones" (qtd. in Matthiessen 90). So far Eliot's statement seems to describe the Mallarméan ideal of pure poetry. Yet the difference becomes clear as Eliot goes on to say that he aims at

> poetry so transparent that we should not see the poetry, but that which we are meant to see through the poetry, poetry so transparent that in reading it we are intent on what the poem *points at*, and not on the poetry. (qtd. in Matthiessen 90)

He concludes that it is his intention "to get *beyond poetry*, as Beethoven, in his later works, strove to get *beyond music*" (qtd. in Matthiessen 90). In spite of his devotion to

the French symbolists, Eliot transcended symbolism and its intrinsic limitations, best summed up in what Georges Poulet said of Mallarmé:

> From the beginning, therefore, poetry takes on the aspect of a mirage, a mirage in which one perceives himself on the horizon, not as he is, not where he is, but precisely as he is not and where he is not… poetry constitutes itself in a closed circuit. (237-38)

The abstract, pure aestheticism of Mallarméan poetry seems to be a *via negativa*, leading to a void. Eliot manages to bypass this lack of matter, this unrelatedness to life as well as the Mallarméan obscurity stemming from aesthetic perfection. Eliot wants to approach the unvoiced condition of music, but not at the expense of fixed associations and unequivocal references. This freedom from specific reference inevitably drives symbolist poetry to freedom from any meaning at all, which is something Eliot does not want. In *Four Quartets*, he succeeds in making use of the symbolist concept of the music of poetry, at the same time avoiding its traps. It is not so much "beyond music" or even "beyond poetry" as beyond symbolism that he gets, establishing the post-symbolist tradition.

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Anna Wawrzyniak

Henry James's "The Real Thing" and the Triumph of Simulacra

In Henry James's story "The Real Thing" (April 1892) the narrator-painter, working on illustrations for a book, is visited by "[a] gentleman and a lady" who wish to find employment as models. The artist instinctively feels they are somehow unfit for the job, but he decides to employ them, partly out of compassion and partly out of curiosity.

On the one hand, the Monarchs are considered by the painter to be "artistic": "'Oh yes, a lady in a book!' She was singularly like a bad illustration"; and Major Monarch says that in her earlier days she was even called "the Beautiful Statue" (207). In the eyes of the artist, "they gratified the general relish for stature, complexion and 'form'" (209). More importantly however, the Monarchs want to pass for "the real thing," genuine models of "a gentleman… or a lady'" (210-11).

The Monarchs were, indeed, the real thing, as far as their descent, manners and appearance were concerned. It is striking, therefore, that the artist should be somehow skeptical about them:

> But somehow with all their perfections I didn't easily believe in them. After all they were amateurs and the ruling passion of my life was the detestation of the amateur. Combined with this was another perversity – an innate preference for the represented subject over the real one: the defect of the real was so apt to be a lack of representation. I liked things that appeared; then one was sure. Whether they *were* or not was a subordinate and almost always a profitless question. (209)

Although the word "simulacrum" never appears in the text, while "copy" does, the distinction seems to be tacitly drawn. Naturally, the "represented subject" in the above quotation denotes a copy, expressly at least; but the narrator also subsumes "things that appeared" under that category, significantly slighting the question of their origin: "Whether they *were* or not was a subordinate and almost always a profitless question." The appearance of a thing which has no origin, which is an appearance *only*, and which is *not* a representation of an object, is a simulacrum; and it is the ascendancy of the simulacrum over the copy of which the narrator grows gradually aware.

His idea of an "excellent model" is personified by Miss Churm, who "being so little in herself… should yet *be so much in others*.… [S]he could represent everything" (211, emphasis added), and, later, Oronte: "a young man whom [he] at once saw to be a foreigner and who proved in fact an Italian acquainted with no English word but [the narrator's] name which he uttered *in a way that made it seem to include all others*" (217, emphasis added).

There is indeed a quality in both models which makes them somehow interchangeable: not only can Oronte look like an Englishman, but also Miss Churm may well pass for an Italian woman; they both can represent virtually anything, but this is almost to say that they do *not* represent anything, for in the model-copy relation the situation is unthinkable. The distinction between a model and a copy seems to be shaken in the case of the perfect sitters; hence the necessity of introducing the term *simulacrum*.

According to Brian Massumi, simulacrum commonly denotes a copy "whose relation to the model has become so attenuated that it can no longer properly be said to be a copy." The idea of a copy presupposes a reality that is represented through it, hence the world of copies-icons is simultaneously the world of representation. The world of simulacra, conversely, is freed from representation, since simulacra do not re-present any reality; rather they are "reality" in themselves.

In *The Logic of Sense*, Gilles Deleuze analyzes the question of simulacrum in the context of Platonism. He declares that Platonic motivation of the theory of Ideas is a consequence of a will to separate the copy from the original; to distinguish "the 'thing' itself from its images… the model from the simulacrum" (Deleuze, *Logic* 253), appearance from essence, or, to put it differently, to recognize false pretenders (inauthentic copies).

It is important to emphasize that the simulacrum does not merely signify a false copy; rather, it undermines the very "notations of copy and model" (Deleuze, *Logic* 256). It does not actually enter the opposition between good and bad copies, since copies are always founded on resemblance, while simulacra are founded on dissimilarity. For Plato, however, resemblance was not an external relevance of the image to the thing, but of the image to the Idea of the thing. Hence the copy is a faithful image of something only if it is founded on its essence, if it is essentially, internally similar. Simulacrum, on the other hand, is

> an image without resemblance [which] still produces an *effect* of resemblance; but this is an effect of the whole, completely external and produced by totally different means than those at work within the model. The simulacrum is built upon a disparity or upon a difference. It internalizes dissimilarity. This is why we can no longer define it in relation to a model imposed on the copies, a model of the Same from which the

copies' resemblance derives. If the simulacrum still has a model, it is another model, a model of the Other (*l'Autre*) from which there flows an internalized dissemblance. (Deleuze, *Logic* 258)

Having established the transcendent foundation with the Same as model and the Similar as copy, Plato initiated the metaphysics of presence which dominated philosophical fields for centuries. Yet, as Deleuze concludes, the reversal of Platonism was already incipient in Platonism itself, in the power of repressed simulacra. For Deleuze, Platonism is based on "the error of transcendence," that is, thinking difference as grounded on identity (the Same). According to Deleuze, there is no such foundation, as there is no ultimate truth or reality to be represented (Colebrook 76). In fact, there is no fixed being, whether human or inhuman, since everything is immersed, as it were, in the flow of becoming. Life is a continual "becoming-other" and the images are not copies of *a* reality but they *are* "real"; they are simulacra, images based on difference (becoming) rather than on similarity (identity).

Moreover, in the process of becoming Deleuze sees difference as the principle of life, a creative force which eternally repeats itself, always producing new powers of becoming. A copy cannot be based on difference, whereas simulacrum necessarily is. Instead of the production of replicas, there is constant repetition of difference, and "the only 'Same,' is the power of not remaining the same" (Colebrook 60). Identity, says Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition*, is only an effect generated in the process of the game of repetition and difference (22).

To return to James's tale, the difference between "the real thing and the make-believe" (215), that is, Mrs. Monarch on the one hand and Miss Churm or Oronte on the other, is one of variety, of – indeed – a *difference*:

> At first I was extremely pleased with her ladylike air, and it was a satisfaction, on coming to follow her lines, to see how good they were and how far they could lead the pencil. But after a little skirmishing I began to find her too insurmountably stiff; do what I would with it my drawing looked like a photograph or a copy of a photograph. Her figure had *no variety of expression – she herself had no sense of variety.* (214, emphasis added)

Even more telling is the following passage:

> I placed [Mrs. Monarch] in every conceivable position and *she managed to obliterate the differences*. She was always a lady certainly, and into the bargain was *always the*

> *same lady*. She was the real thing but *always the same thing*. There were moments when I rather writhed under the serenity of her confidence that she ***was*** the real thing. (214, original emphasis in bold, remaining emphasis added)

The narrator's complaint that Mrs. Monarch is always the same and that she is able to "obliterate the differences" sounds oddly Deleuzean, since Deleuze aims to do the opposite, that is, to obliterate the Same and create difference.

> After I had drawn Mrs. Monarch a dozen times I felt surer even than before that the value of such a model as Miss Churm resided precisely in the fact that what she did have was a curious and inexplicable talent for imitation. Her usual appearance was like a curtain which she could draw up at request for a capital performance. (215)

At this point, it is necessary to emphasize the ambivalence of the word "imitation," which directs one's attention to the concept of mimesis. The latter term comes from the Greek word *mimos,* mime, which means "a form of drama in which actors tell a story by gestures" (Cuddon 511) as well as an actor performing in such a drama. According to Zofia Mitosek, who traces the etymology of mimesis at the beginning of her book, the subsequent form of the word *mimos* was the verb *mimeisthai,* "signifying an action of imitating, playing somebody else, being similar. *Mimesis*… the latest form from the semantic group designated picture, image, imitation, reproduction" (15). She further clarifies the meaning of the term as "an action or procedure as a result of which an object or behavior comprises in its matter some aspects of form of another object or behavior, existing before and in another matter" (17). In relation to art, explains Mitosek, mimesis is a "creation of a work of art, of which aspects are similar to the form of objects external to that work of art" (17). Functioning on two levels, artistic imitation denotes both a process of producing a copy of an object and a relation of representation which is a result of the process. For instance, in a drama, a performance pertains to the process, being based on a finished text which itself is a result of mimetic practice (17).

Apparently, Miss Churm's imitation is not exactly of the same sort, since neither she as a model for the picture nor the picture for which she sat were actually copies, and the process involved was not representation but simulation. The very fact that she was able to "represent" everything undermines the very notion of *the represented*, a copy. In her case there cannot exist any internal resemblance to a model, for there is no model to be copied; and even if Miss Churm were to imitate Mrs. Monarch, she would simply lack the essential qualities of "a lady" – she was "vulgar" (218). The pictures were not representations or copies either. As the painter asserts, the models were not "discoverable in

[his] picture[s]," as opposed to the drawings taken from the Monarchs: "They saw a couple of drawings that I had made of the establishment [Oronte] and Mrs. Monarch hinted that it never would have struck her he had sat for them. 'Now the drawings you make from *us*, they look exactly like us,' she reminded me, smiling in triumph; and I recognized that this was indeed just their defect" (218).

The painter is confronted with two modes of reading the world, which can be expressed by the following formulas: "'only that which resembles differs' and 'only differences can resemble each other'" (Deleuze, *Logic* 14). As Deleuze declares, the former statement defines difference founded on prior identity or similitude, while the latter reverses the relation in such a way that the resemblance *and* identity become the product of a difference. In Deleuze's words, "[the] first reading precisely defines the world of copies or representations; it posits the world as icon. The second, contrary to the first, defines the world of simulacra; it posits the world itself as phantasm" (Deleuze, *Logic* 261-62).

The narrator evidently opts for the difference and repetition; he resists the Same and the Similar as personified by the Monarchs and welcomes simulation and simulacra in the persons of Mrs. Churm and Oronte. Interestingly, this also involves the rejection of the real as opposed to the unreal and simultaneous affirmation of the unreal as "realer than the real," to use Baudrillard's famous expression. The narrator's friend even claimed that the Monarchs "got [him] into *false* ways" (224) and by saying this he reversed the very opposition between the false and the true. In fact, the opposition is annihilated rather than reversed when one perceives that the Monarchs, though consistently referred to as "the real thing," are nonetheless presented as extremely artificial (the word "artistic" also connoting artificiality), and are rather flat as characters.

In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze writes that once "the simulacra rise and… affirm their rights among icons and copies" (262), the distinction between essence and appearance or copy and model stops operating, since it can function solely in the world of representation. Such a world, according to Deleuze and Baudrillard, does not exist. In the world of simulacra posited by them there is no original reality that can then be represented, and each event, as well as each image, is always already different from itself, an instance of simulation in the perpetual process of becoming.

Each thing or being "is" only its ability to transform, to become other than itself, and to generate false, masked images of itself. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze argues that masks are "the true subject of repetition," that "repetition is really what masks itself while it is constituted" (48-49), and that there is no original thing which is thus repeated: there are only masks, fake images, simulacra. Originality, just as identity, is rather an *effect* produced by simulation; the Same and the Similar are simulated – but this, main-

tains Deleuze, does not make them illusory; they are real as long as they are simulated. Illusion presupposes the real/true, and in the world of simulacra the division is invalidated. For him, both simulacrum and simulation *are* real – it is becoming and creating the difference (Colebrook 101).

The Nietzschean concept of the eternal return used by Deleuze is inseparable from the concept of simulation understood as "a process of disguising, where, behind each mask, there is yet another" (Deleuze, *Logic* 262), since it is in the eternal return that the reversal of representation and destruction of icons is ascertained. What returns eternally is difference:

> Only the divergent series, insofar as they are divergent, return: that is, each series insofar as it displaces its difference along with all the others, and all series insofar as they complicate their difference within the chaos which is without beginning or end. The circle of the eternal return is a circle which is always eccentric in relation to an always decentered center (Deleuze, *Logic* 264).

No foundation and only difference: endlessly repeated, the proliferation of simulacra and the ruin of representation necessarily pertain to art as well. The world presented in a literary work of art is no longer a mirror reflection of reality, for the "reality" to be represented is missing. It cannot precisely be termed illusory, as that would necessitate the opposing term – true or real. As Baudrillard says, "It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself; that is, an operation to deter every real process by its operational double, a metastable, programmatic, perfect descriptive machine which provides all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes" (2).

Literature does not, then, represent, it *creates* reality; it opens new possibilities of becoming and creates new meanings. In great literature (*minor* literature, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms) language is apparently a foreign element, liable to mutation and variation, a potential carrier of new sense and "the vehicle for the *creation* of identity rather than the *expression* of identity" (Colebrook 103-04). Minoritarian literature does not propose a unified image, either of a world or of the human being, but it always affirms the transformative power of difference. Language which is constitutive of literature is itself a flow of difference.

Great literature repeats; it does not imitate. Moreover, it does not repeat or reproduce the established surface structures, such as forms and rhythms. It is literary becoming that is repeated, which means reactivation of the forces that initially produced the work of art which is later repeated (Colebrook 119). Simply put, it means repetition of the cause, not

of the effect, which may actually mean abandoning the "original" forms absolutely. An example given by Colebrook illustrates the problem well:

> More broadly, imagine if we were to really repeat the French Revolution. If we were to dress up in eighteenth-century costume, build a mock Bastille and re-enact the gestures, then we would only be repeating the surface form; there would be nothing revolutionary about this at all. If, however, we were to seize the revolutionary power, the demand for difference that opened the French revolution, then we would end up with something quite different, necessarily unpredictable because the first event was unpredictable. The history is true anachronism. Real repetition maximizes difference. (Colebrook 120)

Literature is, for Deleuze, an instance of his Nietzschean concept of the eternal return. It is again the difference only that returns, and it has the power of transforming and disrupting the literary tradition and the literary context. Therefore, the only constant in literature is always being different.

In James's tale, always being different is opposed to being "real," and, consequently, difference is forced into the domain of the unreal – of the simulacrum. However, as has already been mentioned, the supposed "real" is simultaneously rejected as something defective, something that, significantly, can lead one "into *false* ways." Paradoxically then, the "real" Monarchs are somewhat *untrue* and are, in the eyes of the artist, more unbelievable than his false pretenders, Miss Churm and Oronte.

It is the question of remaining the same ("[Mrs. Monarch] was the real thing but always the same thing") versus becoming other (the excellent sitters being always different from themselves) that is made conspicuous in the text. Through *not* remaining the same, or in other words, through repeating the difference, the simulacra, personified in the story by Miss Churm and Oronte, affirm their own existence, or, in fact, their very life. Since life is the constant flow of becoming, to remain the same is to refuse to exist, or to be unable to exist. Not only do the Monarchs fade away from the text, as it were; they also gradually disappear from life (literally, they lack the means of subsistence), yielding to the pressure of once repressed and now rising simulacra.

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Beata Skwarska

The Blue Jay's Dance: A Birth Year as Louise Erdrich's Self-Portrait

The Blue Jay's Dance: A Birth Year (*BJ*), Louise Erdrich's first major work of nonfiction, was published in 1995. For some reasons, it did not seem to draw so much readerly attention as her previous fictional works,[1] nor did it incite a substantial body of critical appraisals or commentaries, which may seem surprising given the general interest in Native autobiographies. Labeled parenting/memoir, *The Blue Jay's Dance* was presented as personal reflections of a woman, mother, and writer on pregnancy, birth, and caring for an infant, a statement against the stereotypical portrayal of women in their domestic environment, against the infantilization of women, and against the clichés concerning women and parenthood permeating Western culture. Because of the autobiographical traits and origins of this account, the book was generally construed as a kind of autobiography – even though its time span is limited to one year and the "story" does not really concern the singular events of an individual's life. Most likely, the lack of success and the difficulties readers and critics have faced in their responses to the book result from the failure to identify *The Blue Jay's Dance*'s generic matrix. This failure is related to mis-directing critical attention, i.e., focusing on the temporal axis of the work-as-autobiography instead of the spatial axis it is build upon as an auto-portrait.

Discussing the genre of autobiography and the history of literature, Philippe Lejeune declares that literary works are always created and received in a relation to some exemplary work (57). All new texts are, therefore, set against what Hans Robert Jauss terms a horizon of expectations (Lejeune 67-68), which in the case of Native American self-referential writing has been established by N. Scott Momaday's *The Names*. This acclaimed memoir came into being as a culmination, at a given point in his life, of the author's way toward self-understanding, and the narrative identity worked out therein is the end result of temporal movement, although grasped instantaneously by the imaginative act. On the other hand, Erdrich's circumscribing of her identity, while necessarily concerned with time and temporal elements, is constructed primarily on the spatial basis,

[1] By 1995 Erdrich had already published her tetralogy with the highly acclaimed and best-selling *Love Medicine*, for which she received a number of awards, e.g. The National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction in 1984, the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters award for Best First Novel, or the *L.A. Times* award for best novel of the year.

hic et nunc. Whereas Momaday offers the means to read his account indicating on the title page that it is a memoir, Erdrich describes hers as "a birth year." This caption, first of all, emphasizes a relatively short time span her reflections apparently deal with and one definitely too short for an autobiography. Moreover, when viewed against the all-encompassing screen of time – even that of a person's life – a year is just a point, a dot, a spatial element graspable at a glance. Birth as an event portrayed against the screen of spatially limited time appears to function like perspective in spatial arts; an element providing focus and directing viewer's gaze. The "birth year" subtitle alone relates Erdrich's linear and temporal written work to the spatial art of painting and portraying. It echoes Erdrich's preoccupation with spatiality and picturing that can be identified in her fictional works making up the Little No Horse saga[2] and, more importantly for the present discussion, it lets her inscribe the work, which is apparently devoid of the ethnic sign, into the continuity of American Indian personal narratives.

Self-portrait and autobiography are often confused and sometimes, as in the case of Erdrich's non-fictional work, are not even differentiated. Philippe Lejeune defines the autobiography as a retrospective prose narrative in which a real-life person presents his or her individual life, emphasizing the history of his/her personality or self. The elements decisive for classifying a work an autobiography are the sameness of the author and the narrator as well as the sameness of the narrator and the main protagonist (22). From the configurational perspective, therefore, the dominant of the autobiography is historical, temporal, and linear. In contrast, as Lejeune himself suggests, the narrative dominant of the auto-portrait is thematic, logical, or analogical – its configuration is spatial.[3] Whereas Lejeune concentrated on the temporally-determined genre of autobiography, whose *locus classicus* is Rousseau's *Confessions*, the self-portrait, its sister genre dating back to Montaigne's *Essais*, was studied by Michel Beaujour and described in his article "The Autobiography and Auto-portrait" (1977). The most characteristic thematic element of this genre as defined by Beaujour is epitomized in St. Augustine's formula, "I am not going to tell you what I have done and achieved but I am going to tell you who I am" (319).

Before attempting to identify who Erdrich says she is, it must be stressed that who one is or thinks to be is not an issue open to an individual. Beaujour states that the author of a self-portrait never knows where he or she is heading and that what auto-portraitists finally come up with depends on categories provided by their culture and tradition. Saying who the author is, self-portraits make use of different culturally valid and specific

[2] For an analysis of spatiality, pictorial elements, and impressionistic techniques in the Little No Horse saga see Skwarska.

[3] Lejeune notes that most autobiographical accounts include self-portraying parts as well, and *vice versa* (184).

identity-forming categories and strategies. Needless to say, in Erdrich's case such strategies must necessarily be both Western and Native American; however, the way she answers the question "Who am I?" is to a significant extent rooted in and influenced by her American Indian descent. According to Arnold Krupat, "Native Americans tend to construct themselves not as individuals but as persons" (210). This is clearly Erdrich's goal. In "Dedication and Household Map," an introduction to her book, Erdrich specifies the roles that her reflections concern, namely "what it is to be a parent," "a writer," and "a woman" (*BJ* ix, x). Already in this foreword she hints at another significant feature of Native American and female identity constructions and autobiographies,[4] that is, their relational or synecdochic orientation.[5] Offering "a thumbnail sketch of [her] household set up…. *When this book was written*" (ix, emphasis added),[6] she begins with her immediate family and moves outward to her and her husband's families living elsewhere, including in this picture the place where she lives and the animals.

From the Western point of view Native American accounts of the self are often perceived as fragmented. In her study of American Indian autobiographical forms Wong says that it is so because they are usually event-oriented. What or which events are deemed important and meaningful, moreover, is culture specific (*Sending* 17). The event Erdrich's reflections center on is birth extended to comprise the pregnancy and infant-care. While this "most involuntary work we do" (*BJ* 42) is one of the two experiences common to all living organisms and the one which is primary, conditioning and allowing for the other one, death, Erdrich states that "in our western and westernized culture women's labor is devalorized beginning with Genesis" and that women are "culturally stripped of any moral claim to strength or virtue in labor" (35). Erdrich's question, "why is no woman's labor as famous as the death of Socrates?," seems to refer to Beaujour's argument that the events of an individual's life in the self-portrait are always shadowed by the culture's images and that the figures of Christ and Socrates at the moment of death are the two most often employed in the Western genre of auto-portrait (335-36).

[4] As far as identity formation strategies are concerned, both autobiographies and auto-portraits can be treated *ensemble* since the two genres only differ in this respect in their configurational dominant.

[5] Arnold Krupat declares that "[t]he centrality of the self to Western autobiography has no close parallel in Native American autobiography" and, to differentiate between identity constructions in Western and Native autobiographical narratives, he proposes a distinction based on figures of language, defining the former as metonymic and the latter as synecdochic. The metonymic construction, he explains, follows the part-to-part model and an individual's self is constructed as different and separate from other individuals, whereas the synecdochic one is based on the part-to-whole model and the sense of self is constructed in relation to a collective social unit. "The preference for synecdochic models of the self" in Native American autobiographies, he writes, "has relations to the oral techniques of information transmission typical of Native American cultures" (201, 212, 216).

[6] The phrase emphasizes again the spatial and pictorial focus of Erdrich's work, saying more or less that it is how it "looked" at that particular moment in time.

The historical problem inherent in writing birth narratives – women's lack of voice or education – coupled with the want of appropriate language and exemplary descriptions of the physicality and drama of labor result in the fact that this basic and most fundamental experience has neither been described or narrativized nor granted due attention. What Erdrich inscribes in her book is thus a new *locus* in Western literature. She turns inside out the tradition with its icons – dying Socrates and dying Christ – and opposes the implied finality, teleology, and closure of the death image. She chooses to focus on the woman, on "guarding and giving life rather than death" (*BJ* 146), the moment of birth of life, the origins, the beginning, the repeatedness and the continuity – features characteristic of Native American outlook,[7] and attempts to work out appropriate language for such a description. "Every birth is profoundly original and yet plotted a billion times" (*BJ* 46), writes Erdrich and tries to describe it from as many angles as possible. She refers to the physical and physiological levels of each labor – hospitals, blood, surgery tools, pain, effort, the body's tremendous work, the perfect or imperfect division of cells, DNA, chance and order, nature. Then she focuses on mental deliberations connected with creating a new "self," the need of closeness and intimacy, the desire to remain one with the baby and the necessity to let go, the choices to be made when one has a baby. And, finally, she points to the difficulties inherent in trying to give an account of something that can hardly be described – "bending the bow too great for a woman's strength (50).

While birth in itself and its unwritten history is what Erdrich focuses on in her work, it is also what provides her with an image or metaphor for defining her self in relation to people, place, and the activity of writing. Birth implies both bondage and release, the cutting of ties. First of all it allows the writer to establish her self and thus herself in relation to other women. "We are all bound… the shining presence behind the net" (*BJ* 141), writes Erdrich referring to the veils behind which women have been forced in our culture. On the one hand, she writes, these veils are like prison bars, symbols of incarceration and obstacles women encounter in life; on the other, however, they may become something of an umbilical cord, "primary cords" (141) between women, providing them with history and relations to all other women: "We are all in need of the ancient nourishment. And if we walk slowly without losing our connection to one another, if we wait, holding firm to the rock while our daughters approach hand over hand, if we can catch our mothers, if we hold our grandmothers, if we remember that the veil can also be the durable love between women" (141). In the part "The Veils" Erdrich emphasizes this

[7] In *Sacred Hoop* Paula Gunn Allen writes that even in pre-contact American Indian cultures women were very highly regarded and celebrated, they cherished the roles of vitalizers, motherhood was considered powerful and valued due to its creative and transformational powers (see esp. Part One). The high status of women is some traditional Native communities is also evident in their matrilinear nature. Erdrich also frequently deals with the issues of motherhood, giving life, and womanhood in her fiction.

fact by describing three photographs, of her grandmother, her mother, and herself, thus expressing the continuity, family values, and matrilinearity that characterize many American Indian cultures.

In her portrait of the woman, Erdrich does not fail to include the domestic rituals traditionally associated with women and devalorized like labor, such as gardening and cooking. Susan Castillo describes Erdrich's relation to these rituals as metonymic (40). There can be no doubt that Erdrich situates herself *vis-à-vis* these rituals. She goes as far as to enrich her account with encyclopedic information on different plants, including many Latin names, descriptions of vegetables, trees, and flowers, as well as recipes for a variety of dishes – often foreign, like Polish pierogies – most of which, let us add, are said to be prepared by her husband. On the other hand, it seems that these same domestic rituals allow Erdrich to relate herself synecdochically to other members of her family as well as to unrelated others. Her interest in gardening the writer apparently inherited from her grandparents – both grandmother and grandfather – and passed on to her little daughter. Gardening also connects her with a long-dead woman who used to live in the house and tend the garden. This "narrative of flowers" (*BJ* 107) has survived the unknown woman, especially in the foxglove:

> I don't really know if Mrs. B planted that mournful biennial, missed it in the off years, knew it would come back the following summer. I only know that foxglove, a flower that would look well in a spray laid across a gravestone or pinned to a black church bonnet, best expresses the slate-hearted gaze that meets mine in the old portrait. And so it is the foxglove I am most careful not to disturb, And it is the foxglove – the sandlike seeds sown in flats each spring, its deadly poisonous leaves the source of the cardiac medication digitalis, that I keep for her and multiply with slow perseverance, as if in the presence of the foxglove these ghosts are not so much laid to rest as still able to partake of the rich and rooted fullness of this life. (109-10)

Birth also provides Erdrich with an identity as a mother, a parent. She calls parenthood a job, hinting at the hard work inherent in the task, often belittled and overlooked. It is a job, she writes, "in which it is not unusual to be, at the same instant, widely joyous and profoundly stressed" (*BJ* 116) and she calls up the circumstances – stress, depression, despair, problems with children, lack of time for oneself – traditionally omitted in discussions of parenthood. It is also a task of great dilemmas, which involves celebrations, feats, and holding on to the child, but also loss, the letting go. And again, parenthood appears to be a cultural category which circumscribes a person in a given now, relates him or her to other parents in a given presentness and, finally, inscribes him

or her into the earth-old chain of continuity. A woman remains herself in her individuality and, at the same time, takes on the role of a parent and becomes a parent. We "are slowly made up of one another," concludes Erdrich, "yet wholly ourselves" (159). This role is passed down from generation to generation, staying dormant, like the newborn dance, until one has a baby:

> There is a dance that appears out of nowhere, steps we don't know we know until using them to calm our baby. This dance is something we learned in our sleep, from our own hearts, from our parents, going back and back through all of our ancestors. Men and women do the same dance, and acquire it without a thought. Graceful, eccentric, this wavelike sway is a skilled graciousness of the entire body. Parents posses and lose it after the first fleeting months, but that's all right because already it has been passed on – the knowledge lodged deep within the comforted baby. (54)

The way Erdrich answers the question "Who am I?" clearly differs from how Momaday constructs his answer in *The Names*. While Momaday's narrative identity is constructed along with his narrative, Erdrich's identity is not so much constructed or created as discovered in and through the categories provided by her culture; actually, to a greater extent, one of the cultures that have played a part in her formation. As such it seems very much in line with the way identity was constructed in traditional societies, where mythology served to define people and their place in the world. A person's way towards identity and wholeness in those societies took the form of discovering – and then accepting – one's identity in the storehouse inscribed in the stories which made up the mythology. In other words, the individual had to inscribe him/herself in the world by taking on one of the roles sanctioned by their society – like Abel accepting the role of a dawn runner in Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*. Saying that in traditional societies the individual discovers his/her identity does not mean, however, that the process is passive. Discovering, accepting, and re-enacting one's role is an active process of consciously choosing one's destiny. It is a far cry from the doomed destination of the Western tragic hero as described by Bakhtin. It means assuming responsibility and, as Owens argues, choosing another plot and another destiny.[8] Such an attitude is definitely not foreign to

[8] According to Mircea Eliade, for the *homo religiosus* the myth is about ontology, it tells of reality, and the only true reality for that matter. It contains the patterns of dealing with reality presented by gods *in illo tempore*. A religious person is never ready-made and static, it is his or her responsibility to construct and create him- or herself by imitating traditionally sanctioned patterns stored in the myth (78-82). In *Other Destinies* Louis Owens identifies the tendency of Native novelists to make their protagonists the heroes of other plots and destinies as an important feature of the Native American novel. Discussing the Indian's role in the Western consciousness, he writes that it "was supposed to be romantic, tragic, and epic" and refers to Bakhtin,

Erdrich. Consciously and willingly, she takes on the roles of a woman and a parent which have been overlooked and devalorized in the Western world, re-inscribes them with new values and meanings, and thus creates – for herself and for other women/mothers – another plot and destiny. "A woman needs to tell her version of the story" writes Erdrich, as if in a manifesto, "to tell the bloody version of the fairy tale. A woman has to be her own hero" (*BJ* 104).

Having said that Erdrich defines herself primarily in the categories significant in the American Indian worldview, it is necessary to point to its two more indispensable elements: landscape and dreams. Castillo defines Erdrich's relation to dreams as metaphoric, pointing out that in Native American cultures dreams and visions have been an important, and sometimes the primary element of a person's way of inscribing into the life of society. It is also in dreams that the boundaries of space and time become blurred and the unbroken continuity comprising all space can be accomplished (41). Erdrich's relation to the landscapes of North Dakota and New Hampshire is defined by Castillo as synecdochic (40). Already in the foreword Erdrich hints at the presence of these landscapes in her "domestic setup." For the writer, as it seems, the earth or the landscape and humans are related by the event of birth and defined by the mother-child relationship. The primary landscape is the body: "in our own beginnings, we are formed out of the body's interior landscape. For a short while, our mother's bodies are the boundaries and personal geography which are all that we know of the world" (Erdrich, "Where" 49). From a mother's perspective, Edrich writes that during pregnancy she becomes "less a person than a place, inhabited land" (*BJ* 9). In this way she combines the mother and the Earth in one image, known not only in Native America. Viewed against the physicality of the tremendous work a body needs to manage to give birth, this image is, however, stripped of its usual romanticism and pastorality. That and the earth's similar relationship to children allow Erdrich to refer to ecology and the need to look after the natural environment: "once we no longer live beneath our mother's heart, it is the earth with which we form the same dependent relationship, relying completely on its cycles and elements, helpless without its protective embrace" ("Where" 50). The practical value of this statement is reflected in the structure of *The Blue Jay's Dance*: its body is divided into four parts – from winter all through spring and summer to fall – matching the four natural cycles and making up a circle, a vehicle of continuity. It is also evident in a

according to whom to perish was in such heroes' nature and they could not become heroes of other plots or destinies. "The noble savage's refusal to perish," continues Owens, "throws a monkey wrench to the drama…. With few exceptions, American Indian novelists – examples of Indians who have repudiated their assigned plots – are in their fiction rejecting the American gothic with its haunted, guilt-burdened wilderness and doomed Native and emphatically making the Indian the hero of other destinies, other plots" (18).

body's or a person's response to seasons, weather, places. Nature, as Erdrich shows, can offer us consolation in difficult moments, and in nature we can find analogues of real-life situations.[9]

Finally, actual physical landscapes play an important part in a person's life. "We cannot abandon our need for reference, identity, or our pull to landscapes that mirror our most intense feelings," writes Erdrich in her essay ("Where" 49). Born and raised in North Dakota and marked by the ever-present horizon, she has difficulty trying to adjust to life in New Hampshire, which is "a beautiful place but not where [she] belongs" (*BJ* 87). Erdrich must try and define anew her relationship to a new landscape that has entered her life, the "small scale" of the East as opposed to the large scale and openness of the West and the Red River Valley. With the West being part and parcel of the cultural landscape of her people – "horizon sickness" both "romantically German and pragmatically Ojibwa" (92) – the writer must make accommodations to "sink roots" and feel home elsewhere. As she declared in an interview: "I'm so attached to our home… that I really love being there, but I certainly miss North Dakota and this area [Minnesota] a lot…. Sometimes I think that the sheer nostalgia sends me back emotionally in a stronger way" (Wong, *Casebook* 109). According to Beaujour, what the self-portrait has in common with utopia is that they are both born out of a missing structure. It may be related to the fact that with old harmonies broken down and topoi lost, the writers need to re-build their connections and redress their balance to ensure themselves in their stability (31). To account for her lost direct connection with the West and its landscape defined by the ever-present horizon, and to find a new harmony in the East which is defined by closure and trees, Erdrich needs to re-think and re-write herself to be balanced again.

Birth also serves Erdrich as a metaphor for writing and an image allowing her to relate to the whole community of writers, and women writers in particular. The relation between Erdrich and the activity of writing is basically metonymic, while that between Erdrich and other writers and women writers is synecdochic. Already in the first paragraph of Part I Winter "Making Babies," she equates having babies with writing: "Growing, bearing, mothering or fathering, supporting, and at last letting go of an infant is a powerful and mundane creative act that rapturously sucks up whole chunks of life" (*BJ* 4). This statement can be read as a description of the time-, energy-, and life-consuming creative process of wring a book-infant that eventually needs to be freed from the motherly/fatherly embrace and that must find its place in the world. And indeed, *The Blue Jay's Dance: A Birth Year* says as much about pregnancy and the birth of Erdrich's

[9] When faced with problems with older children Erdrich finds consolation in nature: "to watch a wild creature move is like a visual prayer" (*BJ* 123). She also finds analogies to her own situation, for example, between her moving to her husband's farm and the building of nests by male finches and female finches moving in (87).

daughter[10] as about the process of writing a literary work. Both activities seem to be driven by the same wish: "the need to write and to reproduce are both all absorbing tasks that attempt to partake of the future" (79). Both, in addition, involve a similar danger of self-erasure as a result of love of an infant and the blurring of boundaries between one's self the new self of the baby (4). The needs of writing and having babies are presented as unconditional, inborn, and to be accepted, like one's role or functional identity:

> I write poems during the late nights up until the week of birth, and fiction by day. I suppose one could say, pulling in the obvious metaphors, that my work is hormone driven, inscribed in mother's milk, pregnant with itself. I do begin to think that I am in touch with something larger than me, one of the few things. I feel that I am transcribing verbatim from a flow of language running through the room, an ink current into which I dip the pen. It is a dark stream, swift running, a twisting flow that never doubles back. The amazement is that I need only to enter the room at those strange hours to be drawn back into the language. The frustration is that I cannot be there all the time. (25)

The fact that Erdrich considers herself a woman writer ties her to other women writers, both those having babies and those childless. In fact she creates a whole list of women writers and of mothers (144-45), obviously inscribing herself into the continuum.[11]

The above roles are the pieces with which Erdrich builds her self-portrait in *The Blue Jay's Dance*, and her partial answers to the question "Who am I?" at the present moment. While all of them are true and identity-defining, none can alone serve to describe the writer's self. And, no doubt, there are more roles that could become parts of this picture, making it even more complete. It has to do with the fact that, as Beaujour elaborates, the unity of the auto-portrait is open – it is never given or complete and more homologous elements can be added to the structure's paradigmatic order. By contrast, the unity of the autobiography is closed or limited – it is implied by the very choice of *curriculum vitae* and governed by the flow of the syntagmatic order of discourse. The coherence of self-portrait, therefore, is structured like *montage*, an assemblage of parts related by analogy, memory, repetitions, etc. (319). This paradigmatic configuration of self-portrait resembles the whole body of American Indian mythologies which consist of

[10] It does not really tell of a birth of a specific daughter of Erdrich's; this issue will be dealt with later on in this essay.

[11] She goes even further and pinpoints what gives "savage coherence" to the best of mothers' visions and work: "the ability to look at social reality with un unflinching mother's eye, while at the same time guarding a helpless life" (*BJ* 147). At the same time she finds the wholeness that women achieve when nursing babies to be the missing element that drives men writers to create and desire (148).

a growing number of stories, out of which the storyteller chooses those necessary or relevant under given circumstances. The same associative structure can be discerned in Erdrich's other works: *Love Medicine*, the other parts of the Matchimanito saga studied on their own, as well as all these works approached as a whole united by the all-encompassing matrix of the Little No Horse reservation. All of them make up one growing "compost pile."[12] In different parts, stories, or books the writer only chooses to focus on different aspects, events, persons, etc. This is also why *The Beet Queen* and *The Master Butchers Singing Club* can be included in the configuration even though in their thematic focus they depart from Erdrich's other works. Recognizing such connections in Erdrich's fictional works and taking into account *The Blue Jay's Dance* as an autoportrait, finally, allows one to view these works against the autobiographical space thus constructed. One easily finds other links, such as the resemblances between characters and Erdrich's family members: Erdrich's grandmother Mary and Marie; the illness of her grandfather Patric and that of Nector in *Love Medicine*, her other grandmother and Mary Adare in *The Beet Queen*; repetitions of situations: boiling the skunk in *Love Medicine*, sleeping with the skunk in *The Bingo Palace*; and places.

Adapting the written and *par excellence* Western genre of self-portrait to convey ideas or the sense of American Indian – Ojibwa outlook, Erdrich also strengthens herself in the role of storyteller and clearly inscribes herself into the timeless continuum of her people's heritage. In the postmodern-trickster fashion, not only does she appropriate another's discourse and internalizes it to serve her purposes, but she also enriches another's language with new and newly valorized signs enumerated above: the mother, the parent, and the woman writer. Let us now see by what means she achieves this goal.

In his studies of the early forms of novelistic discourse and their spatial and temporal determinants, Bakhtin traces the origins of (auto)biographical accounts to the early Greek novels, the two types of which he identifies as the Platonic and the rhetorical. Both, as he relates, were highly rhetorical and public in nature – in their all-encompassing *agora*-determined chronotope the individual was utterly exteriorized. While the Platonic type was basically the expression of the seeker's path towards knowledge and of metamorphosis – we could say it was organized temporally and syntagmatically, like autobiographies – the rhetorical type, which originated in memorial speeches, was crudely a public account of the individual's achievements (*Dialogic Imagination* 130-146). If one understands "recounting the achievements of" as describing the individual at a finite point in time or saying who he was at the moment of death, the

[12] Using this Rabelaisian metaphor, Erdrich herself describes her writing, indicating that it is a growing whole (Chavkin 41).

paradigmatic and spatial structure of the portrait becomes recognizable. With time, however, and with the evolution of the genres, the rhetorical nature of self-portraying written forms of discourse was lost. Even though the modern genre of self-portrait – epitomized in and evolving from *Essais* – is rooted in the rhetorical matrix, explains Beaujour, its original rhetorical modality of doing something by speaking and speaking for a purpose disappeared. The self-portrait, from Montaigne to Barthes, he says, is just "sinful writing," which "brutally reveals uselessness and idleness as the basic traits of our culture." It is also tragic as it has "nothing to convey or hide" and it is "a perfectly redundant statement, simply a book " (323). This redundancy can find expression in the abundance, verbosity, commonplace, and triviality that enter the self-portrait after the original aphasia accompanying at first the self-portraitist. Nothing, furthermore, can guarantee the statements' value or soundness, their only guardians are the codes and conventions informing the writer's prefigurational world (319).

Reading Erdrich's self-portraying account, one cannot fail to notice the occasional abundance verging on excess, especially with regard to seemingly trivial and irrelevant issues, such as gardening and the encyclopedic specification of plant names, cooking and ready-made recipes for numerous dishes.[13] The book is also fraught with apparently commonplace details, such as different kinds of morning sickness and references to vomiting, mental ups and downs triggered by seemingly banal reasons, the cell division mechanism, etc. Such verbosity and specificity may definitely put the potential reader at a loss as to the purpose of all this writing. However, when one reads Erdich's account as an example, her confession – like other self-portraits – becomes useful, and its exemplary status grants the writer an alibi. Erdrich makes sure that she has an alibi early on in her confession: "I finished this book for our daughters because I hope these pages will claim for them and for others, too, what it is to be a parent" (*BJ* ix). Such insistence on giving in the very first sentence of the foreword seems most curious and suggestive, especially when approached in terms of guilt born out of sinful writing and the need to have an alibi to plead innocent when the writer realizes that the discourse is actually turned upon itself (Beaujour 324). "This book," confesses Erdrich, "is a set of thoughts from one self to the other – the writer to parent, artist to mother" and a "personal search and an extended wondering at life's complexity" (*BJ* 5). Thus she realizes that her book – or, simply *a* book – especially in the light of the divagations on writing it contains, is really "a self-portrait of a writer for other writers," which, according to Beaujour, is the only kind of self-portrait that has ever come into being (325). If we accept Beaujour's

[13] They can go on for many pages, for example, "An all-licorice dinner to saturate the senses" which is basically a licorice-based menu and recipes, takes as many as 9 pages, from 124 to 132.

point of view, this is precisely the reason why *The Blue Jay's Dance* has proved less successful than Erdrich's fictional works. Determined by their genre, self-portraits limit their potential receivers to those who wish to follow the self-portraitist's example and create more discourse. In the case of Erdrich's work, the group – thanks to the birth metaphor underlying the book – can be extended to comprise women and parents as well.

The discourse of self-portrait, according to Beaujour, is directed to itself or to its author and it can be directed towards readers only inasmuch as they stay out of the dialogue, as the third party (324). Erdrich does realize that. She is also aware of the difficulties faced by the eavesdroppers. "In case the reader becomes confused," she turns explicitly to those that are about to follow her conversation with herself, "I offer here a thumbnail sketch of our household setup" (*BJ* ix). Such a move on her part is undoubtedly related to the second of the three fields in which, according to Lejeune, personal narratives function: the field of historical cognition; of acting/performing; and of artistic relations within the work (5). That second field is connected with the rhetoric and the promise on the part of the writer to tell the truth, which in the case of self-portraits needs to be interpreted differently from the way it is decoded by readers in autobiographies.[14] The readers of autobiographical accounts behave in a special way, unlike readers of fiction. They take on the active role of psychologists-interpreters and researchers *vis-à-vis* the actual human being and his/her life-story (Lejeune 15). The end result of this research is what gives them the pleasure of learning something new. Readers of self-portraits, however, are in a different position. Their activity consists in abandoning the role of a passive witness to the author's secluded conversation and accepting the writer's reflections as their own, and thus ultimately identifying with the author (Beaujour 324). Apparently, this identification is made possible by the particular nature of the potential receivers of the portrait, all of whom want to follow the author's steps. Moreover, identification with the author is what brings about the difficulty of giving critical commentaries on self-portraits (324) and what also accounts for the small number of such commentaries on *The Blue Jay's Dance*.

Lejeune identifies one more pact that defines and informs personal narratives – the so-called autobiographical pact. This agreement, which informs the reader and determines

[14] It becomes even more peculiar in the case of Erdrich's portrait. "The baby described is a combination of our three babies whom I nursed and cared for in a series of writing offices" (*BJ* ix) – that proclamation in the introduction on the one hand validates what follows but, on the other hand, it admits a certain freedom of the consolidating mind at work in the configuration. Therefore, to prove the veracity and establish the truth-referent of her work, in the text Erdrich occasionally calls up proper names, e.g. of the mailman, encyclopedic data, and recipes. All of them can be verified by the reader, which seems to give him/her enough evidence as to the book's truth-claim.

the writer, is a kind of contract concerning the writer's identity and signed with his/her proper name (43). The writer, according to the rules imposed by the pact, must be identified as an individual affirming his/her identity, and his/her name must be affirmed in its "author function." Both these aspects are easily identifiable in *The Blue Jay's Dance*. The book is signed with Louise Erdrich's proper name; in the household setup sketch in the foreword she presents the initial autobiographical data, and there are more personal facts throughout the book. By saying who she is, Erdrich affirms her identity as promised by the contract. Last but not least, on the page preceding the title page as well as on that following the account there are lists of other works by Louise Erdrich the writer. In this way her name is affirmed in its author function.

Thus, in its emphasis on the author's proper name underlying the work, Erdrich's account inscribes itself in the body of autobiographical or personal statements that are "shrines of individuals" expressive of the grand Western myth of "I" (Lejeune 18, 91), which is what "self" in the term self-portrait would imply. Were that the case, however, her pronouncement would stand in sharp contrast to the Native American outlook, American Indian constructions of the self, and the body of mythological narratives, all of which have been referred to in the analysis of *The Blue Jay's Dance* as its background. As a matter of fact, it is as early as in the foreword that Erdrich demolishes the shrine of individualism, saying: "I am not a scientist, not a naturalist, not a chef, not an expert, not the best or worst mother, but a writer only, a woman constantly surprised" (*BJ* x). By identifying herself as "a" or one of, generalizing her experiences as a representative of all these different groups of people,[15] she universalizes her experience and gives potential readers a possibility of accepting it as their own. Also, by presenting her reflections as an example, on the one hand she grants herself the alibi and, on the other, endows her work with a purpose – acting like most, if not all, Native American writers. Due to codified constructions it is rooted in and which it offers and, therefore, generalizations as its structure, the self-portrait – in contrast to the autobiography – ceases to be individual. Its role is always, states Beaujour, to make up for the gap or the lack brought about by the loss of communication and orality of culture and to oppose the *ego*, which is becoming the norm in our modern epoch (329). As such the self-portrait is always discovered – like identities in traditional people's mythologies, it is an old structure in which the writer recognizes and inscribes him- or herself and then passes the possibility to the readers. Erdrich gives expression to this aspect of her work by preceding it with the following epigraph from Marianne von Willemer, adapted by Goethe:

[15] By negating, she also immediately and unfailingly calls up all the referents.

You wakened this book in my mind, you gave
    it to me;
 for the words I spoke in delight and from a full
    heart
were echoed back from your sweet life.

Like mythology, finally, Erdrich's self-portrait – as well as other self-portraits – is simultaneously modern or contemporary and ahistorical or timeless. Based upon stable topoi, the self-portrait comes into being as a topography, a reaction to, and a process directed at a certain state of affairs. It is always concerned with rhetorical, mythological, and encyclopedic horizons – always updated and modern (Beaujour 331). *The Blue Jay's Dance* does deal with questions of and about time and history but these are always treated personally. In its human dimensions both time and history become universal – time is shown as related both to physicality (the body) and mentality (the mind and history) to people and places, as epitomized in the house.

Summing up, *The Blue Jay's Dance: A Birth Year* comprises both the diachronic and the synchronic axes. Although constructed spatially or associationally, the book extends diachronically *ad infinitum* to comprise the past with the ancestors and the future with the generations to come. While the "self"-referential character of the account might imply emphasis on the individual self, *The Blue Jay's Dance* is both Erdrich's circumscribing of herself in her individuality and her inscribing herself into the continuity of women, mothers, and writers. More than that, it also inscribes itself into the ancient tradition of American Indian personal narratives, understood in a broader sense than it is usually done in the West. If, following Wong, we accept pictographic personal narratives or "picture writing" as personal accounts, we shall notice the missing link. Wong writes:

> Plains Indian pictography can be considered a type of literacy if we acknowledge indigenous sign system and do not insist, like some scholars, on the superiority of alphabetic literacy. And pictographic personal narrative can be considered autobiography if we free ourselves from the Eurocentric insistence on such literary conventions as chronology, unity, and closure. Reading these pictographic texts is like reading a diary or examining a photograph album. Each entry-image is discrete, but is related to the others thematically or spatially. Read individually, each captures the immediacy of the moment. Read together, they compose an associational visual narrative. Like Euro-American diaries, journals, and letters, Plains Indian pictographic self-narrations are not "failed versions of something more coherent and unified," but culturally constructed graphic mode of autobiography. (*Sending* 87)

Erdrich's *The Blue Jay's Dance* is a new and written version of the mode.

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Sławomir Wącior

"Patterns of silver on bronze" – An Intertextual Matrix of Imagist Poems

The Modernist intellectual revolution in the humanities and sciences resulted in a specific democratization of themes and areas of artistic investigation. It elevated some of them – e.g., found objects (*objets trouvés*), ready-mades, *écriture automatique* – to the position of high art and dismissed the sanctioned forms (mostly didactic and mimetic) as exhausted and unproductive techniques to be avoided by serious artists. This is why, as Daniel J. Singal aptly points out, Modernist artists struggled to find "whatever provisional order human beings can attain" in a world that must be reassembled again according to a new modern worldview, which

> begins with the premise of an unpredictable universe where nothing is ever stable, and where accordingly human beings must be satisfied with knowledge that is partial and transient at best. Nor is it possible in this situation to devise a fixed and absolute system of morality; moral values must remain in flux, adapting continuously to changing historical circumstances. To create those values and garner whatever knowledge is available, individuals must repeatedly subject themselves – both directly, and vicariously through art – to the trials of experience. (Singal 15)

This democratic parity of themes, represented spatially in poems by means of diverse areas or planes, is in keeping with modern art's universalism and its immanent tendency toward syncretic representation. In contrast to Victorian conceptions of art which saw its roots in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, modern artists are more liberal in accepting primitive, folk, and unconventional forms of artistic activity. Moreover, they would view such artefacts as equally "beautiful" and accomplished as Venus de Milo or *The Odyssey*. Thus, modern artists avoid a formulation of a unified canon of beauty in the vein of the classical ideal of harmony and proportion to be followed by all artists. Instead, they believe that art is manifested through a diversity of styles and techniques, none of which is privileged or better in the way in which it represents reality.

1. Photography and Cinema

In general, Modernist art endeavors to represent, by whatever means are considered the most effective, the atomized world of coordinate spaces which are synthetically amalgamated into a new assemblage of forms. Among other factors, technological de-

velopment triggered such changes. One such phenomenon was the camera, which, according to Jarvis, was the culminating invention of the nineteenth century:

> from the late 1820s and through the 1830s Niepce, Daguerre and Fox Talbot all developed methods to record images permanently, and from 1839 the camera burst into the public domain, at once capturing the popular imagination…. [It] represented a democratisation of the gaze, a potential for recording and intensifying the significance of everyday occasions through encapsulating the little ceremonies that constitute the framework of family memories, linking public drama and personal experience. (Jarvis 281-84)

When discussed in the context of Imagist poetry, the photograph, this "mirror with memory," as Oliver Wendell Holmes called it (Ewen 24), accounts not only for the democratization of the gaze but also for its apparent realism of representation. There is a clear link between the sharp focus of photographic representation with most of the details meticulously delineated and some of the major postulates of the Imagist manifesto from *Some Imagist Poets 1915* (*SIP 1915*):

> we believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities however magnificent and sonorous…
> to produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred and indefinite…
> most of us believe that concentration is of the very essence of poetry… (3)

Hence, Imagist poems become – at least in theory – concentrated amalgams of crystallized components of the "here and now," which in turn become a Baudrillardean simulacrum of reality. Imagist poems often include realistic close-ups of elements of nature represented in a "hard and clear" way, as, for instance, in H.D.'s "Priapus" from Pound's anthology *Des Imagistes* (*DI*):

> The fallen hazel-nuts,
> Stripped late their green sheaths,
> The grapes, red-purple,
> Their berries
> Dripping with wine,
> Pomegranates already broken,
> And shrunken fig,
> And quince untouched.
>
> (lines 22-29; *DI* 24-25)

The modern city with its bustling life is represented in a similar way, as in John Gould Fletcher's "Bus-Top" episode of "London Excursion":

Black shapes bending
Taxicabs crush in the crowd.
The tops are each a shining square
Shuttles that steadily press through woolly fabric…

(lines 1-4; *SIP 1915*, 21)

The influence of the camera and the new optics it introduced opened the eyes of Modernist artists to a radically new way of seeing the surrounding world. Its far-reaching impact can also be noticed in the creative potential of experimentation it offered with the speed of aperture, depth of focus, or zooming techniques. Some Imagist poems demonstrate, more or less consciously, such photographic vision/optics in the way they frame the represented world. Those are quick snapshot poems which just catch a glimpse of the world in a realistic, overtly transparent way:

Is it a dragonfly or a maple leaf
That settles softly down upon the water?

(Lowell, "Autumn Haze"; Jones 90)

Upon the maple leaves
The dew shines red,
But on the lotus blossom
It has the pale transparence of tears.

(Lowell, "Circumstance"; Jones 89)

The petals fall in the fountain,
The orange-coloured rose-leaves,
Their ochre clings to the stone.

(Pound, "Ts'ai Chi'h"; *DI* 46)

Likewise, some poems play visually with spatial planes, shifting focus from the specific in the foreground to the panoramic in the background. This technique is used in Fletcher's "Blackberry-Harvest," written for *Some Imagist Poets 1917*:

Purple-blue globes amid the brambles,
Tangled with scarlet hips of roses,
And the hazy, lazy autumn
Drifting out with the drifting leaves;
Down the hill the slow movements of browsing cattle,
Up the hill the shrill laughter of children
Fighting their way through the tangle
Towards the drooping spoil.

(lines 11-18; *SIP 1917*, 44)

Finally, zooming and close-ups are commonly found in Amy Lowell, whose poems often concentrate on a tiny, specific detail in the much vaster space which surrounds it. "Illusion" exemplifies such interplay of planes in which a tiny beetle with spotted wings is juxtaposed with a huge statue of Buddha in the background. Similarly, a miniaturized world of Ming porcelain is contrasted with a distant view of the huge Fujiyama mountain in the brilliant oriental lyric "One of the 'Hundred Views of Fuji' by Hokusai":

Being thirsty,
I filled a cup with water,
And, behold! Fuji-yama lay upon the water
Like a dropped leaf!

(*SIP 1917*, 84)

In his "Revolution in the Visual Arts," Cyril Barrett alerts us to other and more complex experimental photographic techniques used by the early artists (218-40), such as "the extraordinary series of humans and animals in motion, and birds in flight by Muybridge and Marey in the 1870s and 1880s [which] may have, if only subconsciously, suggested the cubist use of facetting to show various viewpoints of a figure simultaneously" (236). Even more relevant to the Imagist technique of representation is the method used by Marey, called *chronophotograph*, which Barrett describes in contrast to Muybridge's *facetting* method:

Whereas Muybridge showed the successive phases of a moving object as separate pictures, Marey superimposed the phases in a single multiple image, which gives not only the phases of a movement, but the impressions of movement. (236)

What we see in these pictures is, after all, inspired by an impulse similar to the Imagist intention to "present an intellectual and emotional *complex* in an instant of time" (Zach 234) or the concept of the "visual chord" as a fusion of two variant images into a unified whole. By and large, the Imagist technique is a manifestation of what Bradbury and McFarlane designate curtly as "superintegration," that is, the overlapping and final superimposition of several images:

> the defining thing in the Modernist mode is not so much that things fall *apart* but that they fall *together*; the true end result of Modernism is not disintegration but (as it were) superintegration. (Singal 13)

Photographs range from short static representations to polymorphic, dynamic compounds resembling the sister genre of cinema: "a magic-lantern show of optical illusions, rapidly changing size and blending into one another" (Buck-Morss 81). George Roeder sees the impact of the camera lens on the perception of modern artists as "liberating as well as alienating" (65). In an ongoing process of analyzing and synthesizing the surrounding reality, things are "broken into parts then reassembled in a manner shaped by human choice" (65). He concludes that

> [t]he camera and other devices which chopped the flow of experience into previously invisible segments, the train and other forms of transportation which parcelled out reality in quick glimpses, and the proclivity for breaking tasks into elemental parts characteristic of contemporary methods of production from meat packing through computerised data processing all opened up new artistic possibilities. (69)

An example of a longer, sequential Imagist poem which appears to reflect similar optics based on grouping fragmented frames which are cut and spliced together in random order can be found in Fletcher's "London Excursion":

> Roses – pavements –
> I will take all this city way with me –
> People – uproar – the pavement jostling and flickering –
> Women with incredible eyelids:
> Dandies in spats:
> Hard-faced throng discussing me –
>
> ("Transposition" lines 21-26; *SIP 1915*, 22)

The greatest contribution of the cinema, then called the moving pictures, are the revolutionary methods of representing spatio-temporal relationships in narrative arts. As Hutnikiewicz elucidates, space in the movies is dynamic, changeable, and infinite, and is created, as it were, in front of the viewer's eyes, whereas the space of the other arts, theater included, is static, unchangeable, homogenous, and contemporaneous (50-52). In a similar way, time in cinema is plastic and may be slowed, stopped, reversed, or even flashed forward in anticipation of the events to come. More importantly, in contradistinction to empirical time with its linear, progressive, uninterrupted flow, cinematic time in its highly subjective organization may undergo all forms of transformation, such as the "freeze frame," the juxtaposition of different yet temporally parallel incidents, relativity, and inconsistencies in the perception of time by different characters.

Yet, in the opinion of both critics and practitioners of cinema, what makes cinema a sophisticated artistic form of communication is montage.[1] As Lotman notes, montage in movies follows similar rules to the composition of photograph frames, where diverse objects interact in such a way that their mutual interrelations carry more meaning than the sum total of the separate objects put together (126-27). The formation of new meanings, both through a montage of two different pictures on the screen and through a change of different states in the same frame or picture, should be viewed not as a static utterance but as a dynamic narrative text (Lotman 127). As early as 1902 Henri Bergson noticed a correspondence between cinematic narration and human perception. Both of them organize the flux of changeable reality into a collection of isolated yet arranged pictures (Płażewski 127). An example of such spatio-temporal experimentation is Fletcher's "Bus" episode of "London Excursion," where space is formed in the lights of the bus:

Soft-curling tendrils,
Swim backwards from our image:
We are a red bulk,
Projecting the angular city, in shadows, at our feet.
Black coarse-squared shapes,
Hump and growl and assemble.
It is the city that takes us to itself,
Vast thunder riding down strange skies.

(lines 7-14; *SIP 1915*, 19)

[1] On the role of montage in cinema, see Lotman 106-35; Płażewski 149-97; Spottiswoode 201; Reisz; Eisenstein 307.

Apart from demonstrating intertextual proclivity, the emphasis placed upon the technique of montage illustrates the general tendency in modernist arts to give priority to the manner of presentation over its context or "moral" import. Imagists share this approach, declaring that "Imagism refers to the *manner* of presentation, not to the subject" (*SIP 1916*, v). Also, they regard their creative technique of organizing poetic texts as their greatest contribution to the development of modern art: "It is not what Imagists write about which makes them hard of comprehension; it is the way they write it" (*SIP 1916*, viii). In a similar fashion, early cinematic artists viewed montage as a specific arrangement of film material by means of an organized composition of separate picture frames in a certain sequence of temporal or cause-and-effect episodes grouped in a coherent and patterned manner. Thus, it is only natural that segmentation, parataxis, superimposition and variegated mosaic perceptions of reality are the common property of modernist art, irrespective of discipline or the material used by the artist. All Modernists see their primary role in performing unrestrained experiments which artistically render fluctuating reality and expose the way it is perceived by the individual mind.

2. Painting

Besides photography and cinema, Imagist poetry displays an intertextual relationship to painting, the most diversified of Modernist arts. Like photographers and movie directors, painters were "insatiable" in the range of artistically exploitable themes. As Roeder notices, such democratization of vision

> combined with the voracious appetite for experience which engendered and was engendered by Modernism, and the breakdown of older hierarchies of knowledge, social order, and artistic production, this visual quest undermined existing distinctions between things considered deserving, and those considered undeserving, of an artist's attention. (72)

Yet even a cursory perusal of such Modernist paintings as Matisse's *The Piano Lesson,* Picasso's *Guitar*, or Kandinsky's *Lyrical* shows that Modernist painters were curiously analytical in their investigations, decomposing reality into partible units which allowed closer and more penetrating observations. Again, Roeder's synthesis of Modernist aesthetics may shed more light here:

> Segmented modes of viewing joined with developments internal to painting to foster art that focused on one or a few of the various elements, such as line, colour, form, volume, texture, materiality, subject matter, and concept which were brought together

or modulated in a less radical way in traditional paintings. Cubist paintings, in addition to facetting depicted objects, often muted colour in order to emphasise form. Synchromist painting, by contrast, constructed all other elements from colour. Modernist paintings which have narrative usually tell parts of uncompleted stories… (69)

The revolutionary movements in painting of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries demonstrate that visual artists and Imagist poets shared certain interests and techniques. Impressionism planted the first seeds of change and experimentation. The Imagists' strong reliance on sensory perception can be traced back to the Impressionist fascination with the senses as specific transmitters of raw impressions of the world. Fletcher's "The Blue Symphony" with its "sensory" title amalgamates the senses to produce a total image:

O old pagodas of my soul, how you glittered across green trees!
Blue and cool:
Blue, tremulously,
Blow faint puffs of smoke
Across sombre pools.
The damp green smell of rotted wood;
And a heron that cries from out the water.

(lines 13-19; *SIP 1915*, 16)

The four senses of sight, smell, touch, and hearing are amplified by a clever use of the unison of vowels and diphthongs within lines and consonantal repetitions in anaphoric iterations of plosives. Similarly, F. S. Flint's "Trees" renders the speaker's internal moods ("the things that are within me now") by means of images of "rough and sandy" elms, poplars that are "smooth to the fingers," oaks with "their bitter mast," hawthorns "white and odorous with blossom," and "the hum of bees."

To a certain extent, the dynamic, heterogeneous structure of many Imagist poems has its roots in the Impressionist view of art as a process, reflected in paintings by a vehement interplay of pulsating dots of color reflexes, spilt dyes, and values. Such Imagist techniques of representation as juxtaposition, synaesthesia, or parataxis, whose goal is primarily to amalgamate different sensations, partly derive from Impressionist experiments with coloration. Moreover, Impressionist painting was composed of segmented units whose arrangement, often arbitrary, draws the viewer's attention to the cognitive processes in the human mind. This cognitive propensity was also a key motif of many

Imagist poems. Finally, despite their strong claims to objectivity, many Imagist poems resemble Impressionist paintings in that they are subjective expressions of the poet's individual vision of reality, like Richard Aldington's "Images":

The blue smoke leaps
Like swirling clouds of birds vanishing.
So my love leaps towards you
Vanishes and is renewed.

("Images 2"; Jones 54)

A rose-yellow moon in a pale sky
When the sunset is faint vermilion
On the mist among the tree-boughs
Are you to me.

("Images 3"; Jones 55)

Similarly, some of Amy Lowell's shorter lyrics are impressionistic poems in which reality is viewed in a totally subjective and painterly fashion:

Upon the maple leaves
The dew shines red,
But on the lotus blossom
It has the pale transparence of tears.

("Circumstance"; Jones 89)

All day I have watched the purple vine leaves
Fall into the water.
And now in the moonlight they still fall,
But each leaf is fringed with silver.

("Autumn"; *SIP 1917*, 82)

Impressionism demonstrated an almost organic attachment to urban civilization. Not only did the city provide exciting and stimulating subject matter for Impressionist painters, but they also looked at it from the point of view of the civilized modern man

(Hutnikiewicz 55). Imagist poems often choose similar themes and a similar viewpoint, as, e.g., in Fletcher's "The Unquiet Street" with its images of "omnibuses with red tail-lamps, taxicabs with shiny eyes [which] rumble, shunning its ugliness" (*SIP 1916*, 42) or Richard Aldington's "Whitechapel" resounding with "noise, iron, smoke; / iron, iron, iron."

Imagist intertextual affinities also involve the European vogue for oriental cultures and the art of the Far East, especially that of Japan and China. Dynamic political and economic changes at the end of the nineteenth century along with the belief that Mediterranean aesthetic models had been depleted led artists to a fresh interest in primitive or distant cultures and their new, untried patterns of representation. This fascination with clarity of presentation, specific randomness of design, and purity of color and line characteristic of, e.g., the color wood-engravings of Hokusai, Hiroshige, or Utamaro can already be observed in some Impressionist paintings. Its fullest manifestation, however, can be found in the works of the Postimpressionists: Gaugin, Matisse, and Van Gogh (Rzepińska 400-08). As a matter of fact, Gaugin and Matisse are among the painters mentioned in the "Preface" to *Some Imagist Poets 1916* as forefathers of Imagism:

> The only reason that Imagism has seemed so anarchaic [sic!] and strange to English and American reviewers is that their minds do not easily and quickly suggest the steps by which modern art has arrived at its present position. Its immediate prototype cannot be found in English or American literature, we must turn to Europe for it. With Debussy and Stravinsky in music, and Gaugin and Matisse in painting, it should have been evident to every one that art was entering upon an era of change. (qtd. in Jones 137)

Although probably more complex in its causes, Pound's famed fascination with Chinese and Japanese art and literature may also be viewed in the light of the modernist interest in distant cultures. Moreover, T. E. Hulme, the undeclared theorist of Imagism, pointed out in his influential lecture "Modern Art" that "as forms follow needs… modern Western man may use 'formulae' derived from archaic civilisations to express his changed sensibility and needs" (Zach 238).

All these early stimuli might have been quite important for the Imagists, yet the real revolution in representing reality came with the emergence of the Cubists. Dissatisfied with the traditional optics which showed a coherent reality, represented mimetically by means of a perspective based upon the optimum point of view, the Cubists originated an aesthetics of deformation whose coherence is determined by multiple coordinate perspectives and where mimesis is replaced with geometrical representation by means of cubic, prismatic, or cylindrical objects and planes. A central theoretical problem for the Cubists and Imagists alike was the choice of an artistically satisfying method of express-

ing the universality of a singular, instantaneous situation, state, or incident. Both Cubists and Imagists solved it by similar methods, breaking up the objects or situations into separate, irregular fragments and reassembling them again according to the artist's individual viewpoint. Painterly Cubism aimed at a totality of representation resulting from the multiplication of planes and fragments of objects, which mutually interpenetrated and overlapped to create a compound interfused picture. Imagism also disintegrates a previously coherent reality and, having distinguished separate planes, singles out fragments of them and arranges them paratactically into a new visual/intellectual compound. This Imagist technique draws on the Cubist doctrine of "merging object, observer, and world within a kind of observational geometry," like the geometry in which we see the strollers in "The Boulevard" by Gino Severini, "united by the pervasive rhythms of its triangular construction" (Butler 140-41). A poetic example is Aldington's "Whitechapel" with its mosaic of disparate images, all related more or less directly to the idea of the emptiness and monotony of modern existence:

Noise;
Iron hoofs, iron wheels, iron din
Of drays and trams and feet passing;
……
Soot; mud;
A nation maddened with labour;
Interminable collision of energies –
Iron beating upon iron;
Smoke whirling upwards,
Speechless, impotent.

(lines 1-3, 11-16; *SIP 1916*, 8)

Another meeting point of Cubist painting and the Imagist doctrine of poetic composition is the experimental use of collage.[2] This technique originated in Picasso's, Braque's and Juan Gris's artistic experiments dated to 1912 and known as *papier-colles*. In *The Futurist Movement*, Marjorie Perloff quotes what is now a classic text: Gino Severini's letter to Raffaele Carrieri describing both artists' early attempts to render visually a fragment of reality by means of a new, apparently discordant method (45-46). This letter unveils the premises of such intense experimentation, observable in the Imagist tech-

[2] For more discussion on the use of collage in painting and literature, see Janis and Blesh; Meilach and Hoor; Wolfram; Porębski; Nycz.

nique of contrasting planes and juxtaposing the realistic and psychological spheres to capture the momentary essence of a phenomenon or emotion. The Imagist "collage sensitivity" can also be seen in the superimposition technique, which amalgamates two disparate planes. Barrett explains that the authors of *papier-collés*

> could build up a basic abstract composition with the paper, and then *superimpose* the painting of a guitar or bunch of grapes or the inevitable bottle. Coloured paper brought back the element of colour without restricting it to local colour. In other words, you could make a colour composition and then draw in the representational bits as you thought fit. (224)

Most importantly, Cubism is an art based upon the perception of an "omnivorous eye" which is curious to see not so much the objects as such but the patterns they make when arranged into new wholes; the vast world they disclose if used in the way Gleizes and Metzinger postulated in their manifesto of 1912:

> without resorting to allegorical and symbolic literary gimmicks but by means of the operation of lines and colors a painter is able to show in the same picture a Chinese and a French town together with their mountains and oceans, their flora and fauna, the people with their problems, their desires with everything that life has to offer. (Estreicher 540)

This cognitive proclivity is the core of the Modernist movement. Characteristically, Cubism is sceptical of plastic representations of reality and favored parataxis and associative discontinuity. This is mirrored by the nondiscursive presentation of poetic material by modern poets. Poems become dynamically organized structures full of apparently incoherent and equivocal clusters of images. Although not as revolutionary as some Cubist collage poems – e.g., Apollinaire's "Lettre-Océan" (1914) – many Imagist lyrics also arrange their images into a nondiscursive pattern. In F. S. Flint's highly allusive poem "Cones," passionate expectation of the lover's arrival is expressed by the tension between representations of nature and its makeshift imitation in the interior of the room:

> The blue mist of after-rain
> Fills all the trees;
> The sunlight gilds the tops
> Of the poplar spires, far off,
> Behind the houses.

Here a branch sways
And there a sparrow twitters.
The curtain's hem, rose embroidered,
Flutters, and half reveals
A burnt-red chimney pot.
The quiet in the room
Bears patiently
A footfall on the street.

(*SIP 1916*, 56)

The Imagists, who, according to Bergonzi, "were the first poets of the demythologized world, concerned to make poetry from naked, isolated objects, stripped of all outworn mythical accretions" (198), eagerly embraced the collage principle that plain, bare, or "rejected" objects may become art, or that indeed "so much depends upon a red wheel-barrow". Aldington's "Childhood" evokes such scenes with appropriately "hard" imagery:

How dull and greasy and grey and sordid it was!
On wet days – it was always wet –
I used to kneel on a chair
And look at it from the window
The dirty yellow trams
Dragged noisily along
With a clatter of wheels and bells
And a humming of wires overhead.
They threw up the filthy rain-water from the hollow lines
And the water ran back
Full of brownish foam bubbles.

("Childhood III" lines 22-32; *SIP 1915*, 6)

3. Sculpture

The importance of sculpture and its "spatial sensitivity" for the Imagists became evident when T. E. Hulme published, in 1913, his first articles praising Jacob Epstein and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska. Had it not been for his death in the trenches of World War I, Hulme would probably have produced a book-length study of Epstein's innovative tech-

nique, which he was preparing. Hulme described Imagism as "this new verse [which] resembles sculpture rather than music [as] [i]t builds up a plastic image which it hands over to the reader" (Roberts 269-70). Similarly, the first issue of the Vorticist magazine *BLAST* contained Gaudier-Brzeska's "manifesto celebrating the 'sculptural energy' and 'intensity' of Vorticist art" while the second and final issue was to include Gaudier-Brzeska's essay "The Need for Organic Forms in Sculpture" (Roston 233). Even for Pound Imagism was that "sort of poetry where painting or sculpture seems as it were just coming over into speech" (qtd. in Jones 21).[3] Pound's cryptic definition can best be viewed in the light of Zach's comments about Imagism as "a doctrine of hardness, the commonest, wide-ranging concept in the movement's vocabulary… whose verse becomes hard" (238):

(1) through being concise and paring away all ornamental frills;
(2) when, in remaining close to everyday speech, it conveys some of the harshness of quotidian reality;
(3) when it tends towards concrete objectivity, thus avoiding sentimental effusions;
(4) because, in rendering what purports to be an accurate account of its subject, it approximates the scientist's "hard" methods, his hard observation of detailed facts;
(5) when it "dares to go to the dust-bin for its subjects" (Pound's praise for Fletcher's work);
(6) when it avoids symmetrical, isochronic metres, which are branded soft, monotonous and soporific, and instead traces in its rhythms the "rough" (i.e. irregular) contours of "things." Even the concentration on the image may be interpreted in terms of the desire for a resistant hardness, the image being one of the least "convertible" elements of poetry. (Zach 238)

H.D.'s poetic diptych "The Garden" provides an example of the point at issue. Part I freezes in a hard and clear image of a fossilized rose, its impenetrable beauty concentrated in the natural solidity of its contours:

You are clear,
O rose, cut in rock,
hard as the descent of hail.
I could scrape the colour
from the petal,
like spilt dye from a rock.

[3] The quotation is from Pound's article "Vorticism" published in *Fortnightly Review* (Sept. 1914).

If I could break you
I could break a tree.

If I could stir
I could break a tree,
I could break you.

(*SIP 1915*, 12)

Part II shows a Cubist space made of solidified blocks of thick air, pears and grapes which become hot steel spherical casts, and the wind as the flat, sharp edge of a plough or knife that cuts them into halves:

O wind,
rend open the heat,
cut apart the heat,
rend it sideways.

Fruit can not drop
through this thick air.
fruit can not fall into heat
that presses up and blunts
the point of pears
and rounds the grapes.

Cut the heat,
plough through it,
turning it on either side
of your path.

(*SIP 1915*, 12)

Flint's poem "Houses" shows a correspondence with Braque's Cubist painting *Houses at L'Estaque*. In both works the nondescriptive use of color turns the houses into radically simplified building-block mansions:

No wind;
the trees merge, green with green;
a car whirls by;

footsteps and voices take their pitch
in the key of dusk,
far-off and near, subdued.

Solid and square to the world
the houses stand,
their windows blocked with venetian blinds.

Nothing will move them.

(lines 9-18; *SIP 1915*, 29)

Typical elements of landscape are represented in a sculptorly manner, with great attention paid to their volume, texture and solidity.

In conclusion, all the inter-art stimuli which affect the formation of the intertextual hybrid called the Imagist poem should be viewed as potentially dynamic components. Consequently, the any such field can be activated in the process of reading and the number of such points of interference depends upon the reader's receptiveness. In a sense, these texts operate

> in a state of flux in which meanings and/or perceptions are moving from intertextual-collage (which indicates enmeshment of new text and its intertexts) via the new text to a reader-modified intertextual-collage, and so on, as many times as the reverberation makes sense to any reader…. New texts, intertexts in their various contexts (including any new contexts), and intertextual-collages are alternately and/or sporadically foregrounded, moved to background positions, and/or erased in a reading activity that is incapable of being traced in all its intricacies of motion, intersections, and erasures. (Caney)

Viewed from this perspective, Imagist poems become semantically energized palimpsests of meaning which incorporate alternative readings in their intertextual charge.

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Magdalena Zapędowska

The Writing of Melancholia in Edgar Allan Poe and Antoni Malczewski

A student of American and Polish romanticism cannot fail to notice correspondences between Poe and Malczewski on a number of levels. Perhaps the most striking is their parallel obsession with the ineluctable entwinement of Eros and Thanatos, yet affinities range from biography and literary fascinations to themes and motifs, to aspects of language and style, to their positions in respective national romanticisms. Without relating the dismal vicissitudes of Malczewski's short life (1793-1826), marked by failure, abortive venture, and misguided love, suffice it to mention that both writers lost their mothers in childhood, were separated from their siblings and taken into foster care, and received hardly any emotional support from their father figures; both found themselves unfit for military service and had unconventional relationships with women; both shared in the romantic era's widespread fascination with Byron and the vogue for mesmerism;[1] and

[1] Mesmerism, or "animal magnetism," was invented in the 1770s by the Viennese physician Franz Anton Mesmer as a method of healing patients through regulating the flow of the magnetic fluid in the body. From Paris, where Mesmer resided, its popularity soon spread all over Europe, reaching Warsaw and Vilnius by 1815. Mesmerism later evolved from a quasi-medical practice into a kind of occult religious belief related to spiritualism, and it was in this latter version that it became popular in America in the 1830s. "Mesmeric Revelation" (1844) and "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" (1845), commonly received as true accounts of magnetic seances, document Poe's interest in mesmerism and its supposed metaphysical potential. For a brief discussion on these points and a bibliography of related criticism see Silverman, *Mournful* 230-31, 294-95, 487. Malczewski was first attracted to "animal magnetism" in Paris, and his own reputed "mesmeric talent" proved to have disastrous consequences. On his return to the Ukraine he developed a turbulent intimate relationship with a distant relative, Zofia Rucińska, a married woman suffering from nervous spells who came to rely on him for treatment, demanding his constant presence as a requisite for her well-being. Together they moved to Warsaw, where Malczewski soon died in extreme poverty. See Przybylski 129-38; Gacowa 226, 244, 263.

According to Leonard, the earliest American reference to Byron was in the Philadelphia *Portfolio* for March 1809, but the Byronic vogue in the United States began after the publication of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Cantos I and II (1812). It gained momentum over the next decade to reach its peak after Byron's death in 1824, and gradually declined through the 1830s and 1840s. Byron's early American reviewers, favoring the didactic and moralizing tone of much of contemporary prose fiction, often condemned his immorality; one spoke of "that daring wickedness and loathsome licentiousness which distinguishes the head of the Satanic School," another predicted "the most dreadful but yet unavailing torments of his death-bed" (qtd. in Leonard 24, 25). This, however, did not prevent the same magazines from reprinting Byron's poetry. His immense popularity sparked off numerous poetic tributes by American rhymers and countless imitations of his verse. As Longfellow remarked in 1832, there was hardly a village that would not have "its little Byron, its self-tormenting scoffer at morality, its gloomy misanthropist in song" (qtd. in Leonard 20). Young John Greenleaf Whittier was at the time one of the most popular Byronic poets. For more discussion of the early phase of

finally, both died prematurely, having suffered from ill health and nervous exhaustion. Poe, however, was a far more productive writer than Malczewski: during his lifetime he composed about sixty poems, a drama, some seventy tales and sketches, three longer narratives, and the philosophical treatise *Eureka*, as well as numerous essays and reviews, a prolificacy partially imposed by the fact that he had to live by his pen. Malczewski, by contrast, is an *auctor unius libri*, the Byronic tale in verse *Maria* (1825), apart from which he only produced a handful of short, minor pieces in prose or

American Byronism culminating after the English poet's heroic death in Greece, the phase to which Poe's proclaimed fascination with Byron also belongs, see Leonard 19-35. As can be expected of a study published in 1907, Leonard barely mentions Poe (52, 109).

Byron's popularity in Poland, notwithstanding the language barrier, was almost as immediate and no less widespread than it was in the United States. Along with Shakespeare and Sir Walter Scott, he was the most celebrated British writer in the nineteenth century. The earliest reference to Byron appeared in *Pamiętnik Warszawski* (vol. 16, 1816), the first journal to champion European romantic literature in Poland. Not surprisingly, just as in the U.S., conservative critics excoriated the English poet for his immorality, abandonment of hope, and "Satanism," all of which could exert a corruptive influence on young people. Still, the 1820s saw the beginning of a wave of Polish translations of Byron's works which continued until the end of the century, and which included Mickiewicz's rendering of *The Giaour* (*Giaur*, 1835). Byron's popularity did not wane with the end of the romantic period; to the contrary, the greatest number of his books saw print in the 1880s and 1890s. At the same time, Byron's influence on Polish romanticism was more profound than on the other side of the Atlantic. Early in their careers most Polish poets alligned themselves with the school of Byron. Firstly, the Byronic tale in verse, which did not get assimilated into American literature, became, along with the ballad and the short lyric, the most widely practiced genre of early Polish romanticism, utilized by such poets as Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Malczewski, and Goszczyński, as well as by a number of less outstanding authors. That Polish criticism recognizes the Byronic tale as a distinctive genre testifies to its crucial role in Polish literature. Secondly, the Byronic hero, proud, rebellious, passionate, egotistic, and tragically alienated, was the model for the early romantic protagonist, often reinterpreted in the context of Polish struggle for independence. Thirdly, mature Słowacki's drew inspiration for his *Podróż do Ziemi Świętej z Neapolu* and *Beniowski* on Byron's long narrative poems, *Childe Harold* and *Don Juan* respectively. For an overview of the Polish romantic reception of Byron see Treugutt. One may conclude, in a broad generalization, that Byronism – which itself can be treated as a species of the gothic – was in Polish literature what gothicism was in American literature: an alternative to the bright, hopeful Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment vision marked by epistemological optimism and confidence in human rationality and goodness.

Poe's Byronism is most conspicuous in his early poetry, particularly "Tamerlane" and "Al Aaraaf." Of the latter poem the young author wrote to John Allan that it "commences with a sonnet (illegitimate) a la mode de Byron in his prisoner of Chillon" (*Letters*, 1: 19). Silverman lists the following Byronic motifs in *Tamerlane and Other Poems* (1827): "the blend of ambition and the 'feminine'; the enveloping gloom, pride, and guilt; the picture of a soul damaged from birth and lost beyond redeeming" (*Mournful* 41). Poe's youthful fascination with Byron found expression in his self-image as a dejected young artist and in such emulative adolescent gestures as swimming six miles in the James River at Richmond, as the English poet had done in the Hellespont, and later spreading the rumor that he was going to Greece to fight for its independence (*Mournful* 24, 38, 41). In 1829, in a letter asking John Allan for money to support the publication of *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane and Minor Poems*, Poe stresses his independence from Byron as a sign of his poetic maturity: "I would remark, in conclusion, that I have long given up *Byron* as a model – for which, I think, I deserve some credit" (*Letters*, 1: 20). Later, he returns to Byron in a 1844 plate article "Byron and Miss Chaworth." However, if the Byronic mode is distinguished by gloom, unredeemable despair, and the perverse impulse to self-destruction, then Poe clearly remains a Byronist in his tales of horror as well. For a discussion of "Metzengerstein" and "William Wilson" from this perspective, and for an overview of critical discussions

verse. His literary output is far smaller than that of a Byron, Shelley, or Keats – the other romantic poets who met an early death – yet *Maria* is distinguished by a finality which proleptically renders superfluous, if not impossible, any other statements by its author, and which is the reverse of Poe's iteration of the same masterplot of loss, death, and despair.

Symptomatically, the two writers have had a similarly uneasy status in American and Polish literary studies. In *A Fable for Critics* (1848), James Russell Lowell characterized the author of "Ligeia" as "three fifths… genius and two fifths sheer fudge" (188); in Matthiessen's *American Renaissance* (1941), written almost a century later, he is buried in a footnote as a writer whose "value… is now seen to consist in his influence rather than in the body of his own work," and whose "stories… seem relatively factitious when contrasted with the moral depth of Hawthorne or Melville" (xii); in a similar vein, in Harold Bloom's *Poetics of Influence* (1988) he is deemed hysterical and tasteless.[2] Malczewski's accomplishment, unlike that of Poe, was quickly recognized by the best minds of his era, and his important position in Polish romantic literature was never questioned.[3] However, the author of *Maria* is usually considered a literary outsider without a tangible genealogy or a historical context other than the so-called Ukrainian school of Polish poetry.[4] While there exist excellent analyses of his idea of history, style, and point

of Byron's influence on Poe, see Soule. Even Poe's protagonists'compulsion to confess can be at least partially traced to Byron's narrative poems, where the hero's dramatic deathbed confession is a way of explaining his mysterious past as well as of enhancing authenticity. (For example, the entire "Prisoner of Chillon," which Poe mentions in his letter to Allan, is the protagonist's confessionary monologue.) This connection is usually overlooked by U.S. critics: Benfey, who pays much attention to the significance of confession in "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Black Cat" (36-38), never mentions Byron, perhaps because the English poet's influence on American romanticism is not as pervasive as his impact on Polish literature of the period, and therefore is less self-evident.

Just as Poe, Malczewski shared the Englishman's melancholy and his pessimistic view of human existence as absurd. The scant library he left on his death consisted of the complete works of Byron, *A Thousand and One Nights*, and a few other books in English and French. Byron's contemporary – the English poet was born in 1788, five years before Malczewski, and his death in 1824 preceded Malczewski's by two years – the Polish poet self-consciously follows in Byron's footsteps. *Maria* is a Byronic tale in verse, which, like Byron's poems, employs similarly discontinuous narration and uses a historical mask to speak of the romantic predicament of alienation, misplacement, and despair; it also features a Byronic hero who self-destructively violates moral norms in the name of his individual values. Last but not least, a passage from *The Corsair* serves as an epigraph to Canto II: "On Conrad's stricken soul exhaustion prest, / And stupor almost lull'd it into rest," and the author's notes supplementing the text of *Maria* include a reference to *Childe Harold*: "Like to the apples on the Dead Sea's shore, / All ashes to the taste" (n. 3). For more critical elaboration on Malczewski's Byronism, see Przybylski, "Wstęp"; Dopart 26-29.

[2] For a concise overview of the critical reception of Poe, see Kennedy, "Violence" 533-34.

[3] Responses to *Maria* by such Polish romantic writers as Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Krasiński, Mochnacki, Goszczyński, and Michał Grabowski are quoted in Gacowa 299-317.

[4] Until the partitions of Poland, the Ukraine formed part of the Polish kingdom and had a large Polish population. The term "Ukranian school," coined by Aleksander Tyszyński in 1837, refers to Polish romantic poets who lived in the region and drew on its nature, culture, and folklore: Malczewski, Goszczyński, Józef

of view, Malczewski's otherness makes it difficult for critics to find a framework for a comprehensive interpretation of his work.[5] Thus, Kennedy's observation that "[p]art of the difficulty of situating Poe within an American tradition derives from the obstinate fact that his writing resists assimilation into the broad interpretive paradigms constructed to define [American] literature during its so-called 'renaissance'" ("Violence" 534) might also be applied to Malczewski's place in Polish romanticism.

Arguably, one reason for this situation, is both writers' belatedness: Poe was a materialist in the era of spirit, an unwilling successor and fierce opponent of Transcendentalism, a latter-day American Byron who explored the impossibility of resurrecting the romantic ideals of love and beauty; Malczewski, a poet who in his youth had witnessed the shattering of hope for resurrecting independent Poland in 1812 and who made his appearance in the wake of Mickiewicz's immensely popular collection of verse *Ballads and Romances* (1822), which had determined the dominant voice of the early phase of Polish romanticism. Poe and Malczewski both tread on the detritus of romantic idealism, the scattered remains of Emerson's and Mickiewicz's "bright" epistemological projects. Their characters, irrevocably alienated from nature, are doomed to despair, hopelessly misplaced, deliberately or unwittingly spreading death and destruction. Roderick Usher and Egaeus, Montresor and William Wilson; the nameless narrators of "Ligeia," "The Black Cat," "The Imp of the Perverse," and "The Tell-Tale Heart"; as well as Malczewski's Voivode and Wacław, all reenact what Michael Davitt Bell terms "a tale of compulsive self-murder… however elaborately the impulse may be displaced" (99).

Maria is set in the Ukraine in the 17th century, the period of Poland's greatest military glory and her victorious wars against the Turkish empire. Its plot draws on the Byronic tale of unhappy love and atrocious crime. The title heroine is married to Wacław but his father, the Voivode, who disapproves of the union as a mesalliance, has enforced the couple's separation. Thus Maria still lives with her father, the Sword-Bearer, until the Voivode unexpectedly announces that he will accept Wacław's wife on the condition that Wacław leads a campaign against the Tatars in which the Sword-Bearer will also take part. The young couple hope to be reunited before long, yet when Wacław and the

Bohdan Zaleski, and Maurycy Gosławski (Witkowska and Przybylski 567). The critical commonplace of Malczewski's isolated otherness has recently been challenged by Danuta Zawadzka, who convincingly approaches him as a member of the generation that witnessed the failure of Napoleon's Moscow campaign in 1812.

[5] See Żmigrodzka for a comparison of Mickiewicz's *Ballads and Romances* and Malczewski's *Maria* as two alternative beginnings of Polish romanticism; Maciejewski, "Śmierci 'czarne w piersiach blizny'" for a reading of *Maria* as an expression of of despair; Maciejewski, *Narodziny* (185-263) for an analysis of rhetoric, style, composition, and point of view in *Maria*; Zawadzka for a well-informed discussion of Malczewski's philosophy of history. For a sensitive and imaginative but sketchy reading of *Maria* in terms of loss and melancholia, see Bieńczyk.

Sword-Bearer are away fighting the Tatars, a group of strange characters in carnival masks arrive at the Sword-Bearer's mansion and drown Maria in a nearby pond. Wacław comes back from his victorious campaign only to find his wife dead in her bedroom, and learns what happened from the mysterious stripling who witnessed the scene. He suspects his father of deception, mounts his horse, and, with the stripling behind his back, gallops away, probably to kill the Voivode. The Sword-Bearer soon dies of grief.

Except for the historical and geographical background, which Poe persistently omits from his stories, the key elements of his and Malczewski's plots are remarkably similar. Most conspicuously, *Maria* features the Poesque death of the beautiful woman, just as "Ligeia," "Berenice," "The Black Cat," "Morella," or "The Fall of the House of Usher." With the exception of the latter tale, which alludes to incest, Poe explores this theme in the implicitly sexual context of marriage, either extant or forthcoming, a circumstance unmentioned in his programmatic "Philosophy of Composition." Furthermore, the Voivode's treachery is reminiscent of Montresor's artful scheme to take revenge on Fortunato in "The Cask of Amontillado," and the two murderous impostures are further linked by the motif of the carnival mask, which Montresor uses to better disguise his intentions. In addition, the mask brings to mind "William Wilson," where the protagonist is also wearing a carnival costume when he kills his namesake. The ontologically ambiguous doubling of the two William Wilsons is in turn paralleled, at least to some extent, by the relation between Wacław and the stripling who incites him to revenge. Finally, if we bracket the difference in motivation, Wacław's intended patricide corresponds to the murder of the father by the narrators of "The Imp of the Perverse" and "The Tell-Tale Heart." Yet even more significant than those individual analogies is Poe's and Malczewski's shared melancholy sensitivity and the obsessive preoccupation with death and mourning which informs their narratives. Death is not so much an event as a state of mind and a state of the world. Poe's tales abound in examples of life in death: Berenice and Madeline Usher suffer from catalepsy; Madeline and Ligeia revive; Roderick Usher, William Wilson, and Montresor continue living despite being spiritually dead; M. Valdemar and Vankirk are suspended between life and death by a mesmeric experiment. In Malczewski, by contrast, it is not life which continues into death but death which intrudes into life: marks of death appear in the title heroine's face long before she is drowned; the memory of the dead poisons the minds of the living; a stripling, himself undead rather than alive, comes to the hero as a messenger of death. In both writers, however, the blurring of this fundamental ontological barrier between life and death reflects their melancholy predicament.

In her discussion of depressed narcissistic individuals, Kristeva proposes that "[their] sadness would point to a primitive self – wounded, incomplete, empty….

Their sadness would be… the most archaic expression of an unsymbolizable, unnameable narcissistic wound, so precocious that no outside agent (subject or agent) can be used as referent" (12). The depressed narcissist, says Kristeva, does not mourn an actual object but an archaic, unrepresentable Thing of which he or she is "knowingly disinherited" (13). Centered upon loss and absence, suffused with despair, Poe's arabesques and *Maria* are expressions of this predicament in which mourning precedes bereavement and the wound that will not heal undercuts the boundary between self and world. The uncompleted work of mourning results in a heavy, overwhelming sadness, a unity of mood which counterbalances the fragmentation of Poe's and Malczewski's plots.

The opening sentences of "The House of Usher" epitomize the oppressive melancholy of the Poesque mode:

> During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country; and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher. I know not how it was – but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit…. I looked upon the scene before me – upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain – upon the bleak walls – upon the vacant eye-like windows – upon a few rank sedges – and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees – with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium – the bitter lapse into everyday life – the hideous dropping off of the veil. There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart – an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime. (317)

While the appearance of the house corresponds to the condition of the Usher family, the narrator, susceptible to the poisonous influence of their malady, is instantly drawn into the sufferers' circle; furthermore, he deems the oppressive gloom the natural state of the soul into which he has awakened from an opium dream. Overcome by decay, the house resembles a cadaver, and the narrator's heart sickens as though he were looking at an unveiled human corpse. Yet the house, like its inhabitants, is curiously undead, suspended in the ambiguous, indeterminate, anguished state of melancholia. From the very first sentences – which, interestingly, seem to parody Emerson's "transparent eyeball" passage, despair a sarcastic reversal of the Emersonian ecstasy on the

bare common[6] – the narrator lapses into the melancholy, death-driven language of repetition and approximation in an attempt to communicate the emotional essence of his experience. This frame of mind seems to shape his perception of Roderick Usher: he describes Roderick's radical change in appearance as "mere exaggeration of the prevailing character of [his facial] features" (321), yet, at least at the level of language, there is hardly any difference between the former "cadaverousness of complexion" with "an eye large, liquid, and luminous beyond comparison," and the present "ghastly pallor of the skin, and the now miraculous lustre of the eye" (321). But whether the deterioration is the narrator's projection or whether, caused by the all-devouring wound, it resists symbolization even by another party, Roderick, just as his house, is not alive but undead, and communicates his confinement in melancholy asymbolia by the only accessible, nonverbal means – his unnerving abstract art. The narrator, for his part, tries to avoid what Kennedy terms the contagion of death (*Poe, Death*) through the shelter of language, constructing a verbose narrative which, nonetheless, is inevitably poisoned by melancholia.

The setting of *Maria* is the vast expanse of the Ukrainian steppe traversed by the mounted Cossack, a messenger of the Voivode carrying the news of his ostensible change of mind:

> Into the empty wilderness the desert-king darts off –
> The steppe – horse – Cossack – darkness – are all one wild soul.
> Ah! Who is going to restrain his freedom there?
> He's gone – no one will catch him in his native steppe. (Canto I, iii)[7]

The Cossack's swift flight only momentarily breaks the unbearable melancholy stillness of nature. Malczewski's oft-quoted description of the empty steppe corresponds to

[6] Just as Emerson in *Nature*, Poe's narrator experiences his negative revelation in the evening under a sky full of clouds; his passing through "a dreary tract of country" parallels Emerson's "crossing a bare common"; and his sudden "sense of insufferable gloom" corresponds to Emerson's unmotivated "perfect exhilaration."

[7] There exist several English translations of extracts from *Maria*, including one by August Antoni Jakubowski, Malczewski's natural son, who died in the United States. Arthur and Marion Coleman ventured to translate the entire poem (1935), but their translation is unsuccessful. Since in terms of language and style *Maria* stands between the neoclassical and romantic traditions, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English poetry would provide viable models of language (e.g., Byron's tales in verse and Pope's translations of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*) and of versification (e.g., the blank verse of Wordsworth and Browning, which would be a more felicitous model for a twentieth-century translation than Byron's rhyming verse). Instead of turning to English poetry, however, the translators aimed to reproduce in English the prosodic features of the Polish original, retaining its rhyme scheme with full rhymes and using approximate syllabic meter with twelve to fourteen syllables to a line as an equivalent of the original's thirteen-syllable line. The resulting English version, rendered in manneristic language, sounds extremely unnatural and certainly does not do justice to the original. I therefore quote passages from *Maria* in my literal translation, which sometimes draws on that of the Colemans.

Poe's portrayal of the House of Usher as another quintessential expression of the despair pervading the world of the tale:

> The gaze wanders in space, yet, go where it may,
> It meets no movement and cannot find rest.
> …….
> And silence – only in the air there's some unease.
> How is it? Will the thought of the past not find
> In this land one monument to the forefathers
> Where it could leave the burden of its longing?
> No – unless, winding downward, it dives into the ground:
> There it will find old armor, all covered in rust,
> And the bones that belong no one knows to whom;
> There it will find rich grain in fertile ashes
> Or worms breeding in newly dead bodies;
> But in the fields it only wanders without rest –
> Like Despair – without home – without aim – without end. (I, viii)

Whereas Malczewski also stresses sight as an instrument of melancholy perception, seeing in *Maria* is without agent or focus. Immanent in the steppe, the gaze belongs to no one, has no source and no target; abstract and impossible, it is there only to see nothing. The still emptiness, uninterrupted by any objects which could attract or arrest the gaze, offers no relief but sustained unease. Likewise, the thought of the past restlessly haunting the steppe cannot settle on any symbolic representation of the nation's heroic history, a monument which, as an expression of collective memory and object of veneration, would free the minds of the living from the besetting presence of the dead whose anonymous remains or still rotting bodies lie buried in the ground. In contrast to Poe's story, where the deterioration of the Usher siblings is exteriorized in the cadaverous appearance of the sentient house, in *Maria* the decay underlying the boundless void of the steppe is repressed, hidden from sight, and thus all the more inescapable. Melancholy asymbolia, Roderick's condition in "The House of Usher," becomes in Malczewski a universal predicament which encompasses nature and national history and makes impossible the reconciliation of the living with the dead.

Thus, the sole articulation, or rather, vocalization of despair reverberating in the steppe is the sad murmur of the wind and the uncanny "sighs from graves and from beneath the grass the groans / Of those who sleep on withered wreaths of their old fame" (I, ii), incoherent symptoms of the repressed bursting through the barrier of the national

unconscious, and in this respect a counterpart of the "low and apparently distant, but harsh, protracted, and most unusual screaming or grating sound" (333) coming from the basement vault where Madeline Usher is entombed. The wild rhapsody made up by the signs and groans of the dead is referred to as "Mad music, madder still the words of the song / Which the Spirit of old Poland saves for posterity" (I, ii). This formulation, in turn, brings to mind Roderick's guitar performances: the "singular perversion and amplification of the wild air of the last waltz of Von Weber" (324) or the "wild fantasias" which combine eccentric music with "rhymed verbal improvisations" (325).[8] Since music, in contrast to language, is essentially asymbolic, it is a viable mode for communicating melancholia. Like the tone of voice in depressed patients, it is a direct expression of loss, which words inevitably fail to convey. As Kristeva proposes, "[t]he arbitrary sequence perceived by depressive persons as absurd is coextensive with a loss of reference. The depressed speak of nothing, they have nothing to speak of: glued to the Thing… they are without objects" (51).

As the shattering of meaning, melancholia is always a form of negativity. The negativity of *Maria* seems even more radical than that of a Poe tale as it extends to the construction of the world of the poem, which is described in terms of absence and lack, of that which is *not* there. Besides, while in "The House of Usher" or "Ligeia" it is the protagonist who is sunk in mourning even prior to bereavement, in *Maria* the experience of loss is not associated with any particular subject. Rather, from the very beginning of Malczewski's tale the whole universe suffers from melancholia, which in Canto II is personified in the nameless stripling. For unlike Poe, who always mourns a personal loss,[9] Malczewski superimposes on his personal bereavement, symbolically expressed through Maria's death, his country's loss of independence and his generation's loss of hope for winning it back after the crushing defeat of Napoleon's army in the Moscow campaign of 1812. Thus, first and foremost, the Polish poet mourns a historical and national loss, and in mourning it he goes back in history to the time when Poland was still an independent country and a European military power. The seventeenth-century universe of *Maria* is thus proleptically marked by the loss Malczewski witnessed during his lifetime.[10] This accounts for the paradoxical nature of *Maria*'s narrative conscious-

[8] For a different perspective on Roderick's poetry, music, and painting, discussed as an attempt at pure art and negation of the palpable world, see Kaplan 54-57.

[9] Silverman convincingly argues that the underlying theme of Poe's writings is his childhood bereavement of the mother and his unconscious denial of her death (*Mournful* 76-77). A similar argument is made by Kennedy ("Poe, 'Ligeia'" 117-18).

[10] For an excellent discussion of the ostensible cleavage between the time of action and time of narration and of their actual identity, see Zawadzka, 240-41. The critic objects that the mention of graves and freshly

ness, represented in Canto I by the disembodied sight and in Canto II by the uncanny stripling; irrevocably enmeshed in history, yet curiously free from temporal bonds, as if suspended in the timelessness of melancholia defined solely as the aftermath of loss.

The scene of writing in Poe's tales can be even more problematic as the reader must situate the first-person narrators in some physical time and space where they could pen their stories. As Kennedy observes in his discussion of "Ligeia," "the scene of writing remains unspecified and almost unimaginable, for the hysterical conclusion seems to preclude the possibility of future composition. We must assume, as we do in 'The Fall of the House of Usher,' that the narrator somehow escapes the horrific final scene to inscribe his tale" (*Poe, Death* 33). But whereas Kennedy seems to concede that the evident contradiction between the narrator's breakdown and his subsequent act of storytelling results primarily from narrative convention, it might be more fruitful to treat the narrative as the protagonist's retrospective reenactment of the events, which is ineluctably a construction by the subject deeply sunk in mourning.[11] That the narrator commences the story *after* all the events have taken place can account for his idealization of Ligeia as the absolute, impossible object of desire, an object that is not lost in the course of the narrative but is a *lost* one from its very beginning. The narrator does not simply recollect his experiences but lives them again: "what marvel that I shudder while I write?" (276), and the urge to confess that he shares with Poe's other narrator-protagonists is not so much an urge to unbury the secret – the effect of the tales on the tellers is not therapeutic but destructive, and the repressed returns against their conscious will – but to fill with words the void created by loss. This perspective also helps solve the problem posed by Kennedy: the conclusion, hysterical as it is, emerges in the telling, and it is this bizarre climax of the tale as told, and the experience as *re*-lived, that marks the narrator's collapse into the incommunicable otherness of madness or death. "'Here then, at least,' I shrieked aloud, 'can I never – can I never be mistaken – these are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes – of my lost love – of the lady – of the LADY LIGEIA!'" (277). The present tense and direct speech mark the obliteration of distance between the moment of the original experience and that of writing; as they merge into one, the narrator is crushed by horror, which replaces his sheltering melancholy sadness.[12]

dead bodies before the battle is not a mark of nineteenth-century consciousness but a comment about Polish history, "where old graves generate new ones" (240).

[11] Elizabeth Bronfen argues along these lines in her discussion of "Ligeia": "[The narrator's] act of textual representation as recollection is clearly marked as an attempt to deny the absence of his beloved, as this gesture emerges precisely from an acknowledgement of his loss" (330).

[12] A similar process can be observed in "The Tell-Tale Heart": "'Villains!' I shrieked, "dissemble no more! I admit the deed! – tear up the planks! – here, here! – it is the beating of his hideous heart!" (559).

Kristeva's observations about melancholia can elucidate the inconsistencies, lacunae, and discontinuities in Poe's and Malczewski's plots. Madeline Usher escapes from the fortified vault; Egaeus removes Berenice's teeth while sleepwalking; the narrator of Ligeia does not know how he met his beloved wife; in *Maria*, it is impossible to explain away the masks' appearance or the role of the stripling. As Kristeva argues, "From the analyst's [or reader's – MZ] point of view, the possibility of concatenating signifiers (words or actions) appears to depend upon going through mourning for an archaic and indispensable object" (40). If every narrative strives for wholeness and coherence as the text expresses and explains itself to the reader, then the fissures, blanks, and concealments in Poe's tales and Malczewski's *Maria* betray an incomplete, impossible mourning of a fundamental loss. The texts, like speech, emerge from an unhealed wound, produced by a bad, unapproachable past buried in a crypt, as Madeline is buried in the basement vault or the warriors' bodies in Malczewski's Ukrainian wilderness:

> in the vast fields heavy silence lies;
> Neither merry noblemen's, nor knights' voices can be heard,
> Only the wind murmurs sadly, bending down the grain;
> Only the sighs from graves and from beneath the grass the groans
> Of those who sleep on the withered wreaths of their old fame. (I, ii)

Located at the level of the national historical unconscious, the crypt in *Maria* holds the nameless national heroes whose deaths poison the present with despair, since they transfer to the sons, as if by contagion, the obligation to continue the pointless heroic struggle whose only outcome is death for its own sake. The oppressive emptiness of Malczewski's steppe corresponds to the cramped interiors in Poe's stories: the one claustrophobic, the other agoraphobic, both are projections of human events, and neither offers an escape. Just as Poe's enclosures are composed of Gothic and romantic props, artificial, unbelievable objects which provide a stage set for the strange events, like Roderick Usher's room or the bridal chamber in "Ligeia," Malczewski's open spaces have no meaning in themselves; his indifferent, death-poisoned nature is but an allegory of history and its destructiveness, while his preoccupation with the bloody and vainly heroic Polish history parallels Poe's entanglement in the repressed, unspeakable family past.

In "The House of Usher," repression is, so to say, a joint effort by Roderick and the narrator, as his relation of the circumstances of Madeline's burial makes clear:

> At the request of Usher I personally aided him in the arrangements for the temporary entombment. The body having been encoffined, we two alone bore it to its rest. The vault in which we placed it… was small, damp, and entirely without means of admission for light; lying, at great depth, immediately beneath that portion of the building in which was my own sleeping apartment…. Having deposited our mournful burden upon tressels within this region of horror, we partially turned aside the yet unscrewed lid of the coffin, and looked upon the face of the tenant…. Our glances, however, rested not long upon the dead – for we could not regard her unawed…. We replaced and screwed down the lid, and, having secured the door of iron, made our way, with toil, into the scarcely less gloomy apartments of the upper portion of the house. (329)

Of significance here is not only the fact that the narrator participates in Madeline's premature entombment but also his own relationship to the woman. The location of the vault directly under his bedroom, which he refers to as "sleeping apartment," indicates its status as the representation of his own unconscious, which normally finds expression in dreams, during sleep. The shift from the first person singular ("I aided him") through emphasis on his intimate bond with Roderick created by sharing the secret and the guilt ("we two alone bore it to its rest") to the first person plural reflects the narrator's increasing identification with Roderick as he begins to share Usher's feigned bereavement, his forbidden desires, and his effort to repress them. The awe they both feel at the sight of Madeline's body is caused by her physical beauty: "the mockery of a faint blush upon the bosom and the face, and that suspiciously lingering smile upon the lip which is so terrible in death" (329). The coffin has not obliterated Madeline's sexuality, which continues to arouse desire, now even more terrifying because necrophiliac and therefore immediately repressed. Her return exposes the futility and self-destructiveness of this effort, but whereas Roderick is finally reunited with his lost object in death, the narrator remains afflicted with loss and impossible desire.

Reminiscent of Poe's obsession with dying women, Malczewski's version of the romantic ideal of female beauty also relies on the inseparable connection between female sexuality and death. Dressed in mourning, Maria is described in terms of lifelessness, disease, and decay:

> downcast black eyes and a black mourning gown
> and in her face – sorrow that bends down her head …
> and if suddenly, amidst the thick shadows
> some thought or memory flushes her cheek

it is with such dull, pale light as when the full moon
fills a statue's features with a strange life. (I, x)

The image of a statue, which brings to mind Poe's poem "To Helen" (1831), here alludes to tombstone representations of female figures in mourning: like statues momentarily enlivened by moonlight – the latter a stock element of Gothic scenery but also Hawthorne's emblem of the romancer's art freeing objects from their ordinary referentiality – Maria is endowed with a strange, sickly beauty which hides a void, the dry heart of one who is spiritually dead.

She spoke – and as in still and rotten water
Dregs suddenly stirred rise from the bottom,
From her heart rose feelings that have long been absorbing tears
And cloaked her paleness with a greenish shade. (I, xii)

Maria's sickly appearance, bordering on the abject, prefigures her death. An object of desire throughout the poem – she and Wacław are referred to as "lovers" rather than as husband and wife – she resembles the women in Poe's tales who fall ill and begin to hold a morbid fascination for the narrators. Before her entombment, Madeline Usher's spectral presence haunts the house as well as the protagonists' minds, but her ostensible death fully reveals her alluring carnality. Egaeus says of Berenice, "During the brightest days of her unparalleled beauty, most surely I had never loved her" (229). Her illness does not arouse his love but disturbs his indifference: "[Now] The forehead was high, and very pale, and singularly placid; and the once jetty hair fell partially over it, and overshadowed the hollow temples with innumerable ringlets now of a vivid yellow…. The eyes were lifeless, and lustreless, and seemingly pupil-less, and I shrank involuntarily from their glassy stare to the contemplation of the thin and shrunken lips." (229-30). Berenice's eyes offer a glimpse into the void, but it is his fixation on the teeth between the "thin and shrunken lips" that draws Egaeus to spiritual self-destruction.

Finding no one to answer the door when he is back from battle, Wacław, overcome by longing and desire, violates the privacy of Maria's bedroom entering it through the window. This act is construed as transgressive not only for reasons of social decorum. For if the house represents not only the space of the mind but also feminine space, the open window leading into the dark interior resembles the most mysterious female orifice. Wacław's entry thus symbolizes penetration of the female body and proleptically becomes the acting out of a necrophiliac fantasy, as the erotically charged description of dead Maria suggests:

a moon ray
Whose flickering light falls on the gloomy figure,
Casts such a wild tenderness in her squinted eyes
As a succubus has when she sees a lover.
……...…
In what terrible movements her body is breaking!
Not with the graceful lightness that is not a burden
But with the weight of freshly fallen ruins,
Limp arms, the head hung down, legs already stiff
Make her an awful object, still dear to him. (II, xvi)

Like Ligea, who returns to kill Rowena, dead Maria becomes a demon in Waclaw's eyes, a vampiric lover whose embrace poisons his mind with perverse desire.

Arguably, while in Poe the female characters must die because their sensual carnality constitutes a menace to his narrators, and the life force of Eros they represent threatens to break the Thanatotic unity of the melancholy mood, in Malczewski it is the dead world which poisons, absorbs, and destroys the living woman. Yet the death of a woman is also necessary to Poe's and Malczewski's narrative economy because it actualizes the intangible, primitive loss of melancholia which governs their worlds. Roderick feigns Madeline's death just to suffer the loss; Maria's death, like that of Ligeia, fills the unbearable void with specific, object-related pain.

According to Kristeva, depressed persons

> nostalgically fall back on the real object (the Thing) of their loss, which is just what they do not manage to lose, to which they remain painfully riveted. The *denial (Verleugnung) of negation* would thus be the exercise of an impossible mourning, the setting up of a fundamental sadness and an artificial, unbelievable language, cut out of the painful background that is not accessible to any signifier and that intonation alone, intermittently, succeeds in inflecting. (43-44)

Driven by impossible mourning, Poe's and Malczewski's texts of melancholia also use a language that is artificial, hyperbolic, tormented and stiff, its sensationalism verging on the ridiculous, as in the description of Egaeus' blood-stained garments or Maria's dead body. Discontinuous, it replaces markers of syntactic relations with dashes; it has a preference for very long sentences, perhaps postponing closure because of the association of the latter with death, which is both longed for and feared. Overwrought, inversive, and repetitive, it fails to communicate the original loss. Bell rightly observes that "The Poe

reader, whatever meanings he may find in the language of the tales, must first confront that language itself: a language – including the symbolic discourse of image, character, and plot – apparently drained of significant relation [to the known world]" (103).

The effect of artificiality is heightened by allegory, which in both writers functions as a shield against the immediacy of experience. *Maria* is fraught with allegorical personifications: Pride and Hope, Loneliness and Despair, Virtue and Deception, even Breeze and Dew. Poe's allegories work in the opposite direction as rather than personify abstract concepts he endows living creatures and natural objects with abstract meanings. However, they serve a similar purpose: that of introducing distance, a barrier of indeterminacy and artifice. Thus, the black cat becomes an allegory of reason; Ligeia, the Lady Philosophia, an allegory of wisdom and knowledge; Rowena's bridal chamber, an allegory of the narrator's diseased mind; William Wilson's double, an allegory of conscience; Fortunato, an allegory of guilt. By recourse to convention, allegory prevents direct, unpredictable and therefore threatening contact with real-life persons of flesh and blood. According to David Leverenz, sensationalism serves a similar purpose.[13] Immediate contact which involves affection is unbearable in a world infected by death, a world which reflects the unredeemable meaninglessness of human life and cherishes its overwhelming vacuity, sadness, and melancholy prostration.

Significantly, the only actions that take place in Poe's and Malczewski's works are acts of destruction: the Voivode's deception of his son; the heroic but futile bloodshed of Wacław and the Sword-Bearer's fight against the Tatars; the Tatars' burning down of a Ukrainian village; the masks' murder of Maria. The actions and events in Poe are of similar character: the stagnation in his worlds is shaken only by fatal illness, death, and murder. Prostration finally leads to absolute stasis, the stasis of death in life. Expectedly enough, Poe's tales often end with the image of the tomb: "Against the new masonry I re-erected the old rampart of bones. For the half of a century no mortal has disturbed them. *In pace requiescat!*" (854). "But she died; and with my own hands I bore her to the tomb; and I laughed with a long and bitter laugh as I found no traces of the first, in the charnel where I laid the second – Morella" (239). The last words of the narrator fleeing after Roderick and Madeleine's death are, "the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the *'House of Usher'*" (336), another version of the grave burying the remains of the house and the family. In a similar vein, the final lines of *Maria* read,

[13] "Sensation in Poe becomes a male defense against the danger of sentiment…. [It] becomes a narcissistic way of feeling real, by magnifying the mind-body split while reducing intimate relations – with the wife in "The Black Cat," the father in "Imp of the Perverse" – to nobodyhood" (Leverenz 120-21).

It's quiet – where three graves stand in a mournful team,
It's empty – sad – it's wistful in the lush Ukraine.

The grave signifies the finality of death and the silencing of the tale, as well as reinforcing the loss which pervades the whole narrative.[14] At the same time, however, it serves another, more perverse function. As the actual or figural death of characters at the end of the tale terminates mourning, it threatens to discontinue the worship of the all-demanding Thing. With the final image of the grave, Poe's and Malczewski's texts of melancholia seem to appeal to the reader to perpetuate their impossible work of mourning. In an attempt to spread the contagion of loss, as it was spread to the narrator of "The House of Usher," they strive to secure a lasting triumph of the unattainable Thing which governs their worlds.

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[14] Kennedy approaches this image differently and speaks of "Poe's representation of the tomb as an object of both repression and fixation," adding that it "curiously anticipates the theory of 'cryptonymy' elaborated by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok in their… study of Freud's Wolf-Man" (*Poe, Death* 72).

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Anna Wortman

The Roswell Myth in the FBI Files: Aliens, UFOs, and the Cold War

"The investigation of Unidentified Flying Objects is not and never has been a matter that is within the investigative jurisdiction of the FBI" (Redfern 9). Although in 1972 Director of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover, explicitly denied that FBI had ever investigated extraterrestrial beings or unidentified flying objects, recently disclosed files point to the contrary. Shortly after World War II, the FBI in corroboration with the Army Air Force, CIA, Defense Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency, and the State Department were involved in collecting evidence and interviewing witnesses who claimed to have seen or come in contact with UFOs.

In a Bureau Bulletin No. 42, Series 1947, Hoover ordered his subordinates: "You should investigate each instance which is brought to your attention of a sighting of a flying disc in order to ascertain whether or not it is a bona fide sighting, an imaginary one or a prank." Cautioning that suspects might be motivated by desire for "personal publicity, causing hysteria or playing a prank," Hoover described the procedure that had to be followed in informing Bureau top officials and the Army, should the investigation have merit. The Army Air Force guaranteed "the Bureau complete cooperation in these matters and in any instances where they fail to make information available to you or make the recovered discs available for your examination, it should promptly be brought to the attention of the Bureau" (*UFO File*, 1: 47).[1]

J. Edgar Hoover turned his collection of secret files into a source of incredible power. He created an elite force of highly professional and like-thinking detectives who would aid the local police with their scientific methods of investigation, a vast collection of fingerprints, and files containing exclusive information on both criminals and radicals. Director Hoover, taught by his early experience in the Library of Congress, where he was in a position to observe the organizational work of such a famous empire builder as Herbert Putnam, must have been aware that the very access to controversial information,

[1] The following abbreviations are used in this essay: *Hoover's File* – Federal Bureau of Investigation: Freedom of Information Act. *Official Personnel File of J. Edgar Hoover*; *Roswell File* – Federal Bureau of Investigation: Freedom of Information Act. Unusual Phenomena Listing: *Roswell*; *UFO File* – Federal Bureau of Investigation: Freedom of Information Act. *Unidentified Flying Objects.*

impossible to be obtained by others, put him in a position of authority and gave him tremendous advantage over those who desired to come in its possession (Powers 39).

Hoover's secret collection of files on criminals, political dissidents, and his own adversaries reflected his almost indiscriminate reverence for facts. In his opinion, facts were evidence in themselves. That they carried different weight to different individuals and that they could be interpreted in different ways did not matter to the man who had in his possession information most desired by Presidents, Senators and Congressmen.[2] What mattered most was the way in which he saw events and people, and since there was only one interpretation possible, that is his own, he learnt how to lend authority to his opinions by presenting them not as his own beliefs, but as truths apparent to any serious and honest intelligence. By questioning Hoover's opinions, his adversaries were exposing themselves as disloyal and skeptical about the basic principles of democratic society and American values.

The dramatic increase in Hoover's power resulted from his success in using wartime and postwar concerns about internal security threat posed by foreign-dominated fascist and Communist movements. An increased FBI presence was necessary to apprehend

[2] Here is what Hoover's close aide Cartha DeLoach writes about politicians' interest in the FBI files and about Hoover's attitude:

> In the late summer of 1964, shortly after Barry Goldwater had won the Republican presidential nomination, Walter Jenkins asked me to come to the White House and talk over a matter he didn't want to discuss on the telephone. When I heard what he had to say, I understood why.
>
> "We want whatever information you have in your files on Barry Goldwater's staff. Not just his senatorial staff, but his campaign staff as well."
>
> "Why?" I asked him, as innocently as I knew how.
>
> He shrugged his shoulders and smiled.
>
> "The Boss wants to know who he's up against."
>
> I raised my eyebrows.
>
> "I'll see what we've got and let you know."
>
> I went back over to the FBI headquarters and asked to see the director. When I told him about Jenkin's request, he was clearly upset.
>
> "This is going too far," he said. "The operation in Atlantic City involved a potential national security matter, even though we knew what the White House wanted from us. But this is pure politics."
>
> "No doubt about it," I said.
>
> Hoover shook his head.
>
> "We can't do it."
>
> I nodded in agreement.
>
> "Why don't we just tell them we don't have any of Goldwater's staff in our files?" I suggested.
>
> Hoover agreed, and after a day or two I called Walter and told him we'd drawn a blank. He thanked me for checking and said he'd pass the information along to the president. I waited for a call from Johnson himself, But it never came. Maybe he believed me, or maybe with the election all but in the bag he just didn't want to push Hoover too far. (9-10)

In this case Hoover did not yield to political pressure, but on many other occasions when he saw it as politically expedient he did not hesitate to use his files.

spies and saboteurs, and to anticipate and frustrate the efforts of enemy spy agencies and their recruits. In the process, investigating criminals became secondary and law enforcement was abandoned as the FBI efforts focused on containing "subversives" by extralegal methods, like the "Black Bag Jobs"[3] (*Hoover's File*, 3b: 47). After 1936, the FBI activities shifted from law enforcement to the collection of "intelligence." The principal target of the FBI investigations – even after the United States became a military ally of the Soviet Union against the fascist powers of Germany, Italy and Japan – became American Communists, left-wing trade unionists, and political activists. After Hoover's reports that the Communists had got control of the three major trade unions, the International Longshoremen, the United Mine Workers, and the Newspaper Guild, and that they would be able to paralyze the country, President F. D. Roosevelt requested further analysis of the situation, stressing the need for keeping the whole investigation confidential (Cox and Theoharis 152).

Partly on President Roosevelt's request, partly out of his own initiative, Hoover transformed his Bureau into an intelligence arm of the White House, informing the President on the "subversive activities" of his foreign policy critics. The espionage and sabotage cases arose little of his interest but he was more preoccupied with the plans and tactics of the isolationists who opposed the FDR's drive to amend the neutrality laws or authorize Lend-Lease. Director Hoover sought to ingratiate himself with a sympathetic President by providing detailed reports on the plans and thoughts of officials working in German, Italian, Vichy French, and Russian embassies in Washington. The information was acquired through electronic surveillance. Despite the Soviet-U.S. alliance, after 1941 the FBI continued to monitor the activities of the American Communist party leaders, acquiring information through illegal wiretaps, bugs, break-ins, mail-opening, and interception of international messages. Hoover's regular reports to the White House offered no evidence of Communist espionage on behalf of the Soviet Union but instead recounted the source and dollar amount of the Soviet funding of the U.S. Communist party as well as party officials' reactions to the President's foreign policy decisions and his policies regarding strikes and labor disputes (Powers 244).

That shift in the FBI's role after 1936 was not publicly known. Intelligence about dissident political activities was quietly disseminated to the White House, the State, Justice, and Treasury departments as well as the military intelligence agencies. Although the war effort did not benefit much from that information, it did alert senior federal officials to the political

[3] The document concerning the "Black Bag Jobs" was part of a secret filing procedure, "Do Not File," established by Hoover in 1942, which was to ensure that sensitive memoranda were kept out of the Bureau's central records system at headquarters. Single copies of such memoranda were prepared, and the FBI Director alone decided on their disposition.

plans and strategies of right wing and left wing political activists. Because the FBI had obtained much of that information illegally, even the evidence of the Soviet funding could not be used to prosecute the American Communist party leadership. But if Hoover was unable to exploit the FBI's discoveries about Communists and their left-liberal allies during the war years, the accumulated information acquired greater value after 1945, in the changed political climate of the Cold War.

Convinced that American radicals, not only the Communist party members, threatened national security, in February 1946 Hoover launched a campaign to alert the general public to the threat posed by the Communist party and by the support the Party received from liberal sources and from its connections in the labor unions. That covered program relied upon carefully prepared educational material, and aimed at influencing public opinion in such a way as to guarantee success in a future campaign against radicals. The educational campaign was launched without the knowledge and authorization of the Truman administration, and it soon expanded in scope and purpose, embracing covert, informal assistance to the House Committee on Un-American Activities, notably during its highly publicized hearings of 1947-1948 into Communist influence in Hollywood, and in the wake of Whittaker Chambers' charges against Alger Hiss. The FBI also provided assistance and advice to Senator Joseph McCarthy, dating from March 1950, and participated in a formal liaison program with the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee from February 1951. A code-named Responsibilities Program also began in 1951. Under that program information was leaked to governors and state officials as well as to carefully selected, favored reporters, columnists, and editors. The culmination of those separate but interrelated activities was the inception of a formal Mass Media program and the now infamous COINTELPROs in the 1950's. With the COINTELPROs, the FBI officials moved beyond dissemination to aggressively harass and discredit targeted radical organizations: the Communist party; the Socialist Workers party; white supremacist organizations, such as the Ku Klux Klan; black nationalist organizations, such as the Black Panthers; and the New Left (Churchill and Wall 91-230).

The FBI's various dissemination activities marked a definite shift from law enforcement to political containment. All FBI activities, such as purging suspected radicals from the federal bureaucracy under the Federal Employee Loyalty Program, persecuting Communist leaders under the Smith Act, or prosecuting the accused spies: Alger Hiss, William Remington, and Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were to alert the public to the seriousness of the Red Menace. In the process, Hoover circumvented the constitutional limitations on the FBI investigative practices. He demanded and gained confidentiality for the FBI sources in the administration of the loyalty program, and in that way he succeeded in laundering illegally obtained information, which was used to effect the dismissal of radical and Popular Front liberals from the federal bureaucracy. Federal loyalty review board hearings did not con-

form to the rules of evidence of judicial proceedings, so that defendants could not directly challenge the credibility of their accusers or question whether evidence had been illegally obtained.

The FBI did not secure the indictment of Communist leaders for espionage but for violating the vague standards of the so-called Smith Act – the participation in a conspiracy to overthrow the United States government by force or violence. Since the information that the American Communist party received funds from the Soviet Union was obtained through wiretaps, bugs and break-ins, the FBI introduced informers who offered uncorroborated testimony about the plans and purposes of their leaders. The FBI briefs were also based on a slanted analysis of Communist publications, ideological evidence, and suspect associations, sufficient to produce successful trials for the FBI in the climate of suspicion and fear of the Cold War.

In 1947, the year of the Roswell incident, the United States was preparing for a war. A year before Winston Churchill gave his famous "Iron Curtain Speech" in Fulton, and in March 1947 President Truman announced his doctrine, which became the declaration of Cold War. At the beginning of 1947, at the home front, another organization was fighting Communists and subversives, creating an atmosphere of hostility and suspicion. The House Committee for the Investigation of Un-American Activities turned to examining Communist influences in Hollywood. J. Edgar Hoover as a close collaborator to that Committee willingly provided damaging information about Communist ties of his political enemies. Americans were deeply convinced that the responsibility for keeping America safe from hostile foreign influences rested on the Director of the FBI.

Not surprisingly, once the news of the crash of a "flying saucer" near Roswell broke out on July 22, 1947, Hoover received the following communication:

> Flying disc. Information concerning. Eighth Air Force, telephonically advised this office that an object purporting to be a flying disc was recovered near Roswell, New Mexico, this date. The disc is hexagonal in shape and was suspended from a balloon by cable, which balloon was approximately twenty feet in diameter. … further advised that the object found resembles a high altitude weather balloon with a radar reflector, but that telephonic conversation between their office and right field had not borne out this belief. Disc and balloon being transported to right field by special plane for examination. Information provided this office because of national interest in case and fact that National Broadcasting Company, Associated Press, and other attempting to break story of location of disc today. … advised would request right field to advise Cincinnati office results of examination. No further investigation being conducted. (*Roswell File* 1)

Throughout the years the Roswell incident grew into a myth. What in fact was a crash of a balloon carrying high altitude radar equipment for detecting Russian atomic bomb experiments started to be perceived by many as a crash landing of extraterrestrial beings on Earth. Since 1947, the government has conducted extensive investigation of the incident, and more than one-quarter of American adults have become convinced that aliens have visited the Earth. Countless film productions have told and retold the story of Roswell basing their plots on historical facts and pure fantasy. However, what is interesting is not the viability of UFO allegations, but rather what the Roswell myth or other UFO sightings can tell us about American society in the context of its Cold War experience as seen through FBI files.

Although the FBI was not involved in the investigation of the Roswell incident, in fact Hoover received a number of letters from concerned citizens and memoranda from his own field officers reporting on various sightings of flying discs in terms of national security. One such citizen wrote[4]:

> Doesn't it seem wisest for you to forbid papers – (No not forbid – but ask the cooperation of all papers) to keep all news of those discs out of the news until you are sure just what they are & where from.
>
> Seems to us with all the enemies we have, even within our borders, it could be something far more important than may seem at first. I had two sons in this war & another who overdid for his America & we do want it really protected from danger from now on. Enough are dead and maimed without losing out now as it easily could be. Why have the papers carried that story if reporters were made to see how much more sensible not to report it except to the FBI.
>
> There is too much of danger ahead anyway. (*UFO File*, 1: 67)

The letter was clearly prompted by patriotism, the feeling of insecurity, and fear of another military involvement. Yet, the author also assumes that the Director of the FBI has the power to regulate the press and suspend the rights granted by the first Amendment, power equal to that given to the President in a time of war. A few years later, another President, a friend of Hoover's, Richard Nixon, cited "executive privilege" and "national security" as reasons for withholding documents in court proceedings. It was precisely this atmosphere of secrecy and suspicion that dominated the years of the Cold War and the activities of the FBI.

[4] The names of the authors of the letters are deleted in the FBI file.

However, the letter also points to another important phenomenon. The first sightings of the "flying saucers" were not thought to be of alien origin, but rather were associated with a new weapon used by the treacherous Russians to spy on Americans. Such incidents were not without precedent. During World War I, the United States developed the first unmanned "balloon bombers," which were small, cheap, wind-driven balloons carrying incendiary bombs. They were to be launched in enormous numbers from bases in France to destroy forests and croplands in Germany. The armistice prevented their deployment, but in World War II they were used by the British to bomb German-occupied Europe and by the Japanese to set forest fires in the western United States. More than 9,000 transpacific balloons were launched from bases in Japan to drop incendiaries on North America. It was people's reports that awakened intelligence analysts to the fact that the United States was being attacked with a hitherto unsuspected enemy weapon (Saler, Ziegler, and Moore 56).

The following letter received by the FBI might be an example of a balloon bomber sighting:

> Recently I have heard and read about reports of disc-shaped aircraft or whatever they are, in our western regions. They reminded me of a nearly forgotten incident in Germany, after the war. I report this to you because I feel this may be of international scope.
>
> My buddy and I went on pass to see a friend of his. One evening the three of us were driving along some back roads when I sighted a strange looking object in the sky from eight to ten miles to our front and approximately 5,000 feet high.
>
> I immediately stopped the jeep for a better look. The object rapidly came toward us, descending slowly. About a mile away it stopped its horizontal motion but continued a slow oscillating descent, similar to a descending parachute. Then suddenly it dropped in a spiral motion.
>
> Immediately I drove over to where it had dropped. It took almost five minutes to reach the place but we saw nothing. After ten minutes of cruising around the area it became too dark to see so we went back to town. (*UFO File*, 1: 32)

Despite the fact that the "flying saucers" were not originally thought to be of celestial nature, and it was only later that the myth of the alien landing in Roswell was created, in 1947 a few people began to voice what later became part of the Roswell tradition. On July 8, 1947, the FBI office in San Diego, California, received a memorandum sent by a concerned citizen, a holder of "several university degrees and former university department head" to "certain scientists of distinction, important aeronautical and military au-

thorities, to a number of public officials and to a few publications." After expressing his disbelief that this letter could accomplish anything of consequence, since the information included in it has been acquired by "supernatural means," the writer proceeds to warn that an attack on the "flying saucers" might have disastrous consequences for the attacker. The destruction of the attacking side might create "near panic and international suspicion." Risking to be ridiculed, as the author says, he decides to mention the principal facts concerning those craft. According to him, some of the disks carry crews and some are under remote control. The alien mission is peaceful and they are contemplating settling on Earth. He also describes the aliens as "human-like but much larger in size." They do not come from any particular planet, but "from an etheric planet which interpenetrates with our own and is not perceptible to us." Their bodies and aircraft materialize at will and they possess "a type of radiant energy, or ray, which will easily disintegrate any attacking ship." The only way to communicate with them is by radar or other complicated signal system. He ends his letter by asking that the aliens be "treated with every kindness" stressing "the responsibility that rests upon the few in authority who are able to understand this matter" (*UFO File*, 1: 22).

One of the latest versions of the myth accounts for the incident in Roswell in the following way: During the first week of July 1947, a descending Mogul balloon, the weather balloon, and the attached instrument array struck the ground near Roswell on the Foster ranch operated by William Brazel. Meanwhile, an alien spaceship crashed either because it malfunctioned or because it had a catastrophic encounter with the Mogul Balloon. The main portion of the spacecraft, along with its crew, struck the ground at a site removed from the site of the debris on the Foster ranch (Saler, Ziegler, and Moore 27).

Sometime before July 5, Brazel found the scattered wreckage, and on July 7 he went into Roswell and reported his discovery to Sheriff George Wilcox. Wilcox notified authorities at the Roswell Army Air Field, and the base intelligence officer, Major Jesse Marcel, accompanied by another officer, visited the ranch with Brazel to collect the wreckage. The debris they found on the ranch was imprinted with purple-like symbols. Part of the debris consisted of metallic sheets which exhibited greater hardness than any terrestrial metal. Marcel returned to the base with the wreckage and reported to his superiors that it could not be identified. Marcel's superior, Colonel William Blanchard, reported the discovery of the unidentified wreckage to the officers at Strategic Air Command (SAC). Shortly afterwards, he found out that the main body of the spaceship and the bodies of three of its crew had been discovered (Saler, Ziegler, and Moore 28).

The military secured the area by placing a cordon of troops around the debris field on the Foster ranch, and the site was cleared of wreckage. The small humanoid alien bodies and some of the wreckage were temporarily taken to the Roswell Army Air Field hospi-

tal, where a civilian witness was ejected by military police and told not to reveal what he had seen. He was threatened with reprisals by a black sergeant and a redheaded captain if he failed to comply. All three bodies "showed signs of exposure to the elements and the ravages of scavengers." The wreckage and the bodies were flown to other locations for analysis.

Colonel Blanchard ordered the base publicity officer to issue a statement about the wreckage found by Brazel. The press release, which appeared on July 8, announced the recovery of the remains of a flying disc that had been sent on to higher headquarters. Subsequently to the release, Blanchard notified authorities at SAC that a crashed alien spaceship and alien bodies had been discovered. However, the authorities at SAC, General Roger Ramsey repudiated the official press release by announcing in a radio broadcast that the wreckage of the alleged flying disk was merely the remains of a downed weather balloon. The dual cover stories represent "excesses committed in the name of national security," and the government's sustained efforts to keep hidden the true events at Roswell deny us "proof at last that we are not alone in the universe" (Saler, Ziegler, and Moore 28).

The two accounts of the Roswell incident seem to share a few features. First, there is the basic assumption that Earth has been visited by extraterrestrial beings superior to humans. Their superiority manifests itself either in their ability to materialize themselves at will and their possession of a weapon capable of destroying any attacker, or, in the Roswell version, in the fact that their ships are constructed of a special unearthly alloy. The aliens' intentions are peaceful, although if attacked they can return the fire. Knowledge about the extraterrestrials is restricted. People acquire it by "supernatural means" or, in the case of the Roswell myth, the government guards the secret fearing that if the truth is revealed, global panic will ensue.

In fact, the alien landing is unverifiable since either it is a matter of belief and supernatural abilities or it is protected by a government conspiracy. In the Roswell incident, the government is presented as a secretive organization and oppressor involved in covering the true story. As in every story, there is a grain of truth in this one, too. The military authorities were unwilling to disclose the true nature of the weather balloon's operation and it was years later that the two events were related to each other and the debris on the Foster ranch was identified as that of the Mogul balloons. On the other hand, Congress investigation of all government agencies involved in the Roswell incident, which was initiated by a Senator from New Mexico at the beginning of the 1990s, only confirmed what the believers of the Roswell myth have always suspected. The investigation revealed that the Roswell incident was not an instance of an alien landing on Earth and that the government was not in possession of any alien bodies or artifacts. However, as the

advocates of UFO stress, since the investigation was carried out by the government, its results cannot be trusted. The government is not in the position to provide conclusive evidence because it has been involved in the conspiracy itself.

The creation of the myth of an alien landing in Roswell is another example of people's hostility toward government authority. It is a manifestation of the fear and rebellion inspired by the secrecy and suspicion of the Cold War years, the activities of the FBI and its Director Hoover, as well as the decline of government authority during the years of the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal, and the Irangate in the 1980s. In addition to the financial motives, which undoubtedly drive those who spread the myth of Roswell, there is probably the ever-present pleasure of telling a story and entertaining listeners. Besides, the form of the myth, that is, a pseudo-scientific report designed to disclose a true story, has misled many historians about the purpose of the Roswell literature. All those popular sentiments are bound to keep the myth alive for future generations, which will certainly enrich the story with elements of popular culture and technological revolution.

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Affirmative Action and Modern Utopian Egalitarianism

Modernity is sometimes described as the era of utopias. It is true that the visions of a perfect society long preceded the seventeenth century. One could mention such classics as Plato's *Republic*, St. Augustine's *Civitas Dei*, or Thomas More's *Utopia*. However, modern utopias differ in a substantial way from their pre-modern predecessors. While the latter were simply ideal visions to which real societies could only approximate to a greater or lesser degree, the former have usually been comprehensive blueprints for the radical remaking not only of the social order but also of individual human beings. While the latter were the products of philosophy, theology, or literature, the former have been ideological and political projects pursued with utmost seriousness and all available power. Finally, while the latter were built around different guiding principles and values, the former have typically been inspired by just one ideal, namely, that of equality. That is why they deserve the name of egalitarian utopias.

Such utopias have arisen from the modern radical tradition which dates back to the French Enlightenment and the subsequent revolution. Equality is understood within this tradition in a manner significantly different from the classical liberal tradition which precedes modern radicalism by over a century. There have been many radical utopian projects in the last two hundred years. Some of them, such as Nazism or Communism in all its versions, have been easy to identify and much has already been written about them. However, some, especially contemporary, utopias have drawn little attention despite their enormous influence. This is the case because they have occurred in basically liberal countries and have been wrongly perceived as having little to do with the radical tradition. Affirmative action in the United States seems to be one of them. The aim of this essay is to show affirmative action as belonging to the tradition of modern utopian egalitarianism.

In pre-modern social and political thought the concept of equality was practically non-existent. It was rather inequality which was perceived as a natural state of affairs in all spheres of human life. Hierarchies and orders in the society were believed to be indispensable and good. Their legitimacy was very often based on religious sanction and tradition. People were unequal not only in their talents and abilities, in their wealth and social status, but also in their legal and political positions. Thus, the destiny of the major-

ity was to be obedient subjects while the usually hereditary privilege of the minority was to be rulers and lawgivers. One of the most radical expressions of this way of thinking was the post-medieval doctrine of the divine rights of kings.

It is against this doctrine that modern political thought originally defined its positions. John Locke claimed that in the state of nature all people are equal in the sense that no one has either natural or supernatural right to rule over others. On the contrary, everyone enjoys the same basic natural rights to life, liberty, and property. The founding document of the world's first modern democratic republic also proclaimed the self-evident truth that "all men are created equal." For better or worse, equality has become one of the basic values and ideals of modernity. In fact, it has even overshadowed freedom in its importance and the practical influence it has exerted on the history of the last three centuries. At the same time, the concept of equality is extremely ambiguous, vague, difficult to define, and open to all kinds of interpretations. One could argue that the history of modern political thought is, to a large extent, the history of the changing understanding of equality.

Chronologically, the first concept was equality before God. Its roots are clearly in the broadly understood Judeo-Christian tradition, although its social and political implications were most clearly articulated by the classical liberals of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. When the American Declaration of Independence says that "all men are created equal" and are "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights," equality clearly means equality before God, or what Milton Friedman and Rose Friedman describe as personal equality (129). It is based on the conviction that all human beings possess certain inherent worth and dignity. This basic insight lies at the heart of Christianity.[1] However, centuries had passed before it became clear that equality before God implies an equal chance of every human being as a citizen to participate in the political life of the nation (the right to vote, hold an office, publicly express one's opinions, etc.) as well as his or her right to be treated equally with others by a system of impartial laws. Thus, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries personal equality was translated in the context of the nation and state into political equality and equality before the law. It was with the insistence on such equality as a moral claim that classical liberals attacked the *ancien régime* and especially the divine rights of kings. Political and legal equality was the foundation of the emerging liberal order in Britain and especially in the United States.[2]

[1] As Michael Novak puts it, "to the extent that the Enlightenment depends upon the principle of 'created equal,' it depends upon Jewish metaphysics and Christian faith" (81).

[2] To be precise, the classical liberals were chiefly interested in legal equality. Political equality, which is more or less synonymous with democracy, took much more time to become a standard in Western societies.

In America this original understanding of equality very soon came to be generally recognized under a different label, namely, equality of opportunity. Obviously, this has never been interpreted literally. What it essentially means is that "no arbitrary obstacles should prevent people from achieving those positions for which their talents fit them and which their values lead them to seek" (Friedman and Friedman 132). This understanding of equality is crucial for the notion of civil rights, which provide protection against arbitrary treatment of individuals by the government because of such characteristics as national origin, race, religion, or sex. As the Friedmans notice, equality of opportunity merely develops in more detail the meaning of equality before the law. Using more technical language, equality of opportunity means that outputs should be proportional to inputs in a social system. Thus, it presupposes that the vertical differentiation of a society (economic and social inequalities) is inevitable, but at the same time it insists that the channels of social mobility should be widely open. In other words, equality of opportunity is the essence of what has come to be known as meritocratism.

A meritocratic understanding of equality has remained dominant in the United States, but in Europe it has largely given way to a rather different concept of equality of condition. The Enlightenment thinkers (especially Rousseau) and their radical followers in the whole modern era have been deeply dissatisfied with the limited equality advocated by the classical liberals. Instead, they have come to believe that people should be equal in most spheres of life. Thus, economic and social inequalities have been considered as illegitimate as political and legal ones. The advocates of equality of condition have also been willing to use the coercive power of the state to redistribute resources and level whatever differences might exist among citizens or groups of citizens in terms of income, education, employment, or social status. The ideal has always been to achieve more or less equal results or outcomes in a given social system. This is, in fact, the essence of egalitarianism, a social and political principle substantially different and inherently incompatible with meritocratism, because "equality of opportunity inevitably means *in*equality of results or outcomes" (Ginsberg 696). It is this egalitarian pursuit of equality of condition that has given rise to a large number of more or less radical utopian projects in modern history. Affirmative action in the United States is one of them.

The context for the emergence of affirmative action is the American civil rights movement of the 1950s and early 1960s with its victory and culmination in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Act banned segregation and discrimination against any individual in public accommodations (Title 2), in educational institutions receiving federal funds (Title 6), and in employment (Title 7) because of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. Discrimination was unequivocally understood as intentional unequal treatment of individuals based on these categories. The consensus held that all Americans

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possessed the same rights and should be treated equally before the law. The sponsors of the Act took great pains to demonstrate that it was consonant with the traditional American values of equal individual opportunity and the color-blind principles of Justice Harlan and Martin Luther King. In other words, they invoked the meritocratic principle of social justice. Senator Humphrey declared, for example, that "Title 7 is designed to encourage hiring on the basis of ability and qualifications, not race or religion" (Graham 85). Explaining that the Act forbade quotas, the Senate floor managers for Title 7, Joseph S. Clark and Clifford P. Case, added: "It must be emphasized that discrimination is prohibited to any individual" (Graham 85). The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were enormously successful in dismantling Jim Crow laws and practices. Racial discrimination was almost entirely eliminated during three or four years. Or at least so it seemed.

The civil rights activists apparently did not agree with such conclusions. Neither did the Johnson Administration. In his commencement speech at Howard University on June 4, 1965, the president set a new course for the civil rights movement. One excerpt from this speech is especially revealing:

> Thus it is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates. This is the next and the more profound stage of the battle for civil rights. We seek not just freedom but opportunity. We seek not just legal equity but human ability, not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and *equality as a result*. (qtd. in Roberts 47, italics added)

In August 1965, The White House Conference on Equal Employment Opportunity asserted the necessity "to move beyond the letter of the law," meaning the Civil Rights Act of 1964, in order to destroy "deeply rooted patterns of discrimination" (Roberts 40). In 1965 Johnson also issued Executive Order 11246 requiring all Federal Government contractors and subcontractors to take *affirmative action* to eliminate discriminatory practices and patterns. At the same time, what Senator Dirksen feared during the debate over the Civil Rights Act of 1964 became reality: the liberal and minority constituencies captured the federal agencies responsible for civil rights, especially the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the Office of Federal Contract Compliance (OFCC) in the Department of Labor. Entrenched in their new governmental positions, they set out to redefine the meaning of discrimination, equality, and civil rights.

This process occurred in several stages and involved both the federal bureaucracy and the courts. Alfred W. Blumrosen, the EEOC's first compliance chief, was the first prominent figure who advocated a new theory of discrimination. He sought to redefine it in

terms of statistical disparity. Any measures which had what came to be known as a "disparate impact" (Roberts 46) on the races, e.g., employment tests, regardless of intent or any other considerations, amounted to discrimination. Moreover, any imbalance between whites and blacks employed in a given institution was also the evidence of discrimination. The logical inference flowing from this approach was that in order to eliminate discrimination, it was necessary to achieve a racial balance or parity of representation by means of affirmative action. What affirmative action precisely meant was specified by the subsequent sets of guidelines issued by the EEOP and the OFCC. The evolution was from "goals and timetables," "representation," "results-oriented procedures" through racial quotas (Sowell, "*Weber* and *Bakke*" 1313-14). By 1971 the prospective concept of equal opportunity had already given way to the retrospective concept of statistical parity of results. Lowi and Ginsberg put it more mildly, defining affirmative action as "an effort to introduce consideration of inequality of *results* along with inequality of opportunity" (725). Nevertheless, they still admit that "affirmative action has caused special difficulties because it conveys a sense of inconsistency with the American tradition of concern for equality of opportunity above all other definitions of equality" (725-26).

It is very important to understand fully the fundamental difference between equal opportunity and affirmative action. One of the best and shortest explanations of this difference is provided by Thomas Sowell:

> "Equal opportunity" laws and policies require that individuals be judged on their qualifications as individuals, *without regard* to race, sex, age, etc. "Affirmative action" requires that they be judged *with regard* to such group membership, receiving preferential or compensatory treatment in some cases to achieve a more proportional "representation" in various institutions and occupations (*Civil Rights* 38).

Thus, the difference is that between equal individual *opportunity* and equal group *results*, which corresponds to the two distinct and fundamentally different concepts of equality discussed earlier, namely, equality of opportunity and equality of condition, and, consequently, to the two different social and political principles: meritocratism and egalitarianism. Moreover, the adoption of the egalitarian perspective inevitably means that the meritocratic principle has to be violated so that equal outcomes could be obtained. Thus, affirmative action seems to undermine equality before the law, denying equal treatment and rights to certain individuals and, consequently, sacrificing their freedom for the advantage of others. According to its critics, affirmative action amounts to reverse discrimination,[3] and at least some of the civil rights activists seem to be aware

[3] One of the most influential critics of affirmative action, Nathan Glazer, entitled his book *Affirmative Discrimination*.

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of this, as testified by the remark made by Justice Marshall, the first African American on the Supreme Court, and reported in Justice Douglas's autobiography: "You guys have been practicing discrimination for years. Now it is our turn" (qtd. in Roberts 48).

Affirmative action is built on a certain specific vision of the world. In his *Civil Rights: Rhetoric or Reality*, Thomas Sowell undertakes to uncover its underlying premises. In this way he attempts to throw some light on what he elsewhere calls the presuppositions of affirmative action.

The first premise analyzed by Sowell concerns statistical differences between groups (ethnic, racial, sexual, etc.). It assumes that statistical disparities in incomes, education, employment, etc., on the one hand and in delinquency, drug abuse, poverty, etc., on the other represent moral inequities and are caused by "society." The key word here is discrimination. The advocates of affirmative action presuppose that large statistical differences between groups do not usually arise and persist without discrimination. If representatives of a given group do less well than representatives of another group (especially one constituting a majority) in any particular sphere of social or even personal life, it means that they are discriminated against. Especially social pathologies common among members of certain minorities are thought to be a clear indicator and result of discrimination. Thus, statistical disparities signal, imply, or even measure discrimination. Other factors which cause these differences, such as culture, history, geography, demography, or government policy are simply ignored (Sowell, *Civil Rights* 15-20; "*Weber* and *Bakke*" 1314-18).

This leads us to the second presupposition underlying affirmative action. Sowell demonstrates that the supporters of preferential treatment dichotomize potential group differences into discrimination and innate inferiority. Because the latter is rejected as racist, the former apparently becomes the only explanation for such differences. Moreover, those who merely reject discrimination as the sole explanation are automatically accused of believing in innate inferiority. Sowell indicates that, paradoxically, this approach – what he calls the "equal representation" doctrine – has a lot in common with the innate inferiority doctrine. Both presuppose that "one can go from innate ability to observed result without major concern for intervening cultural factors" (*Civil Rights* 23). Thus, the supporters of affirmative action are, in a way, "racists" as they exalt the role of race at the expense of cultural inheritance. The complexity, richness, and diversity of the social world are mechanistically reduced to simple formulas. Group behavior is believed to be "shaped" by the society through its discriminating practices. And group characteristics become nothing more than mere "stereotypes" which should be eliminated by "changing the public's 'perceptions' or raising the public's 'consciousness'" (Sowell, *Civil Rights* 29).[4]

[4] For more discussion on these points see Sowell, *Civil Rights* 20-29.

The third premise of the world vision shared by the supporters of preferential treatment logically follows from the other two. If statistical disparities are social inequities caused by the society practicing discrimination in its institutional policies and individual decisions, then political activity is the key to solving the problem. Legislatures, administrative agencies, and courts are believed to be capable not only of removing all discriminatory practices and the resulting statistical disparities but also of destroying the deeply rooted patterns of discrimination (the public's attitudes, perceptions, consciousness, and behavior). The role of the central federal government is especially important in achieving such fundamental and comprehensive goals. However, politics is defined very broadly in this case and includes also private institutional activity. The changes, after all, must be radical and deep (Sowell, *Civil Rights* 29-35).

Sowell's penetrating analysis of the presuppositions of affirmative action and its crucial difference from equal opportunity policies is primarily the work of a sociologist and economist. He subjects the premises of the civil rights/affirmative action vision of the world to empirical verification and proves that they do not stand up as general principles and fail in the face of the concrete social reality. Moreover, he shows the devastating effects that the affirmative action policies have had on their supposed beneficiaries as well as on the whole society and accuses the advocates of preferential treatment of a fundamental disregard for the truth.[5] At the same time, although he clearly shows some cultural and philosophical sensitivity, Sowell does not delve more deeply into the questions of ideology and political philosophy. And this is exactly what seems worth doing, since the specific vision of the world which he identifies and which underlies affirmative action is part of a larger ideological whole.

Affirmative action and the world vision of its advocates is, in fact, part of the modern radical tradition which dates back to Rousseau and the French Revolution. This fact should not be obscured by the supposedly limited radicalism of this utopian egalitarian project in comparison with other modern utopias, such as Soviet Marxism or the Maoist Cultural Revolution. Neither should it be obscured by the basically meritocratic political culture of the United States. Affirmative action policies are, after all, nothing less than a direct assault on traditional American meritocratism.[6] The key to understanding affirmative action is to look at this phenomenon as the contemporary embodiment of modern radicalism with its tendency to create and to implement egalitarian utopias.

[5] The bulk of Sowell's *Civil Rights* is devoted to the empirical verification of affirmative action's premises and effects. As their presentation is not relevant to my argument, these data are omitted here.

[6] Most Americans, however, still resist the infusion of radical ideas and policies based on them into their society. Public opinion polls and surveys have indicated for years that the Americans consistently distinguish between equal opportunity and preferential treatment. The former is overwhelmingly accepted while the latter is decisively rejected (McClosky 83-98; Sowell, *Civil Rights* 119; Roberts 36).

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The central belief of the modern radical tradition and utopian thinking holds that the primary causes of evil and suffering are not rooted in the nature of human existence but originate in the structure of society, in its institutions and practices, and especially in all kinds of social inequalities (Miller 97). This conviction is shared by the proponents of affirmative action. The failure of different minority groups to achieve adequate representation in highly valued economic, political, and cultural positions as well as the relatively high percentage of pathological behavior within those groups is attributed exclusively to the corrupting influence of the society. This vision depicts Americans as a nation of notorious racists and bigots who stubbornly practice discrimination both in their institutions and in private life. The extreme radicalism of this conviction consists not in pointing to the fact that discrimination has adverse effects on the achievement of those discriminated against, which to some extent is true, but in treating broadly understood discrimination as the only major factor explaining the problems of certain racial and ethnic groups. It is a typically radical way of approaching complex social reality: to find one all-explaining cause of a given problem while at the same time ignoring others, and then to proceed to eliminate it quickly and thoroughly.

The central radical belief in the natural goodness of man and the corrupting influence of society has serious and far-reaching consequences. It determines other characteristics of the radical worldview as well as, even more importantly, the crucial features of radical politics. Thus, radicalism is characterized by a gnostic hostility to the concreteness of the human being's existence. In the search for some "higher reality" of an egalitarian utopia the concrete social reality is rejected or ignored as unsatisfactory. This radical dissatisfaction with the human predicament usually leads to the demand for "instant 'liberation' from this condition, an immediate transformation of all social and economic circumstance, a prompt achievement of an altogether 'better life' in an altogether 'better world'" (Kristol 241). This in turn entails contempt for the irreducible complexity and mystery of human life in all its dimensions. Narrowing uniformity and equalitarianism are preferred instead and they are imposed on society (Kirk 43).

Gnosticism is clearly present in the whole affirmative action project. It is most obvious in its advocates' fundamental disregard for residual cultural differences between groups. The reality of group patterns that go back for centuries and transcend any given social and political institutions is totally rejected. The idea that groups might differ in terms of work habits, discipline, sobriety, or cooperative attitude is an anathema to the affirmative action ideologues. They even ignore such apparently "neutral" group characteristics as geographic distribution or demographic features. One can notice here the pervasive hostility to what Russell Kirk refers to as the "proliferating variety" of human existence which cannot be explained in simple rationalistic formulas. Extreme rational-

ism often goes together with modern gnosticism.[7] The established institutions, ways of thinking, and patterns of behavior are treated as irrational products of custom and tradition which should be rejected (Miller 98). In the affirmative action vision such traditional attitudes and behavioral habits are often dismissed as the expressions of "stereotypes,"[8] prejudice, and blind irrational thinking. What is needed instead is true knowledge which can only be discovered by reason in its capacity of abstract thinking. Social life should then be organized according to this knowledge.

In the case of the affirmative action project the abstract ideal to which institutions and practices of the society should correspond is "equal representation," or, to use more technical language, statistical parity of retrospective results. This ideal should be reached as quickly as possible because such an immoral and irrational thing as discrimination, which statistical disparities inevitably imply, must be immediately eliminated. However, the problem with affirmative action and, in fact, with radical thinking as such is that abstract utopian ideals are unattainable. Empirical data indicate that preferential treatment does not change much in the position of minorities and may even harm its supposed beneficiaries (Sowell, *Civil Rights* 48-53). In a typically gnostic fashion, the affirmative action ideologues simply ignore such data and advocate even more intensified and comprehensive preferential treatment policies. This inevitably leads to a vicious circle of radical social engineering.

This brings us to the next characteristic of radical belief systems and of affirmative action, namely, unlimited politics and centralism. Radicals typically believe that the tension characteristic of the human condition can be resolved by political action, usually through a root-and-branch change in the structure of society. In this way, practically illimitable progress can be achieved (Miller 97; Kirk 43). If classical liberals strove for the depoliticization of human life, their radical heirs do exactly the opposite, because they find the classically limited sphere of politics too confining for their ambitions (Kristol 246). Thus, a radical movement is, according to Kristol, both metapolitical and subpolitical – it is above and below politics: "Metapolitically, it is essentially a religious phenomenon, seized with the perennial promise of redemption. Subpolitically, it is an expression of the modern technological mentality, confident of its power to control and direct all human processes as we have learned to control and direct the processes of nature" (246). Hence the quasi-religious fanaticism of radicals, in whose hands politics

[7] Originally the word *gnosis*, which means knowledge, referred to a certain kind of spiritual illumination. In the modern secular version of gnosticism knowledge has become associated with reason.

[8] The way affirmative action ideologues use the word "stereotype" is a clear example of their gnosticism. "Stereotype," after all, is something which exists only in the human mind as the irrational product of a false and unjustified generalization. Thus, treating group characteristics as mere stereotypes makes them entirely insubstantial.

becomes an all-embracing ideological crusade against evil (Miller 98). This is typically accompanied by the belief in the perfectibility of human beings, which can be achieved through a politically enforced change in their way of thinking, perceptions, and behavior.

The above discussion of the presuppositions of affirmative action clearly shows that this radical utopian project is characterized by unlimited politics. It politicizes race, ethnicity, culturally determined patterns of behavior, and people's whole way of thinking. It aims to substantially affect those spheres of life in a mechanistic way through such political means as legislative acts, executive orders, and court decisions. Political action, directed from above by the federal government, is believed to be capable of solving all the racial and ethnic tensions in the United States and to eliminate discrimination, prejudice, and intolerance by raising people's consciousness and changing their perceptions of different groups. These aims are indeed pursued with quasi-religious fanaticism when almost all opposition is silenced, doubts and sound arguments are ignored or straightforwardly rejected, and opponents are publicly stigmatized as bigots, racists, or even fascists.

Affirmative action is pursued in the United Stated by the people who describe themselves as liberals. This might be one of the important reasons why it is often misinterpreted as a basically liberal phenomenon. This essay has attempted to show that actually the affirmative action project has little to do with liberal meritocratism. On the contrary, it remains wholly within the radical tradition of egalitarian utopian thinking. It shares with this tradition its understanding of equality as well as its belief that society is the chief cause of evil and suffering. It is also characterized by gnosticism, extreme rationalism, unlimited politics, centralism, belief in the perfectibility of human beings and illimitable progress, and quasi-religious fanaticism. It seems that the analysis of affirmative action from the point of view of political philosophy adds a very significant dimension to the study of this phenomenon. It shows that the mere sociological and economic analysis of the social world, although necessary, is clearly insufficient. It is in itself unable to explain many things which escape the confines of empiricism. On the other hand, culturally sensitive sociological and economic analysis of the kind Thomas Sowell conducts provides some substantial material for a more culture- and philosophy-oriented study. This kind of interdisciplinary approach has been employed in the discussion of affirmative action in this essay.

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REVIEWS

W pałacu Możliwości: O amerykańskiej poezji kobiecej [Dwelling in Possibility: American Women's Poetry]. Ed. Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich. Białystok: Trans Humana, 2003. 136 pages.

W pałacu Możliwości is a collection of essays on the work of six poets: Emily Dickinson, Laura Riding, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Audre Lorde, and Louise Erdrich. The essays, contributed by Polish scholars from several universities, are usefully supplemented with a descriptive chronology of American poetry by women from Anne Bradstreet to the present day. The goal of the book, as the editor says in her preface, is to acquaint Polish readers with the six authors as representatives of the tradition of American women's poetry. This determines both the choice of the Polish language and the predominantly expository character of the articles.

The volume begins with Agnieszka Salska's balanced essay "Emily Dickinson – poetka wciąż współczesna" [Emily Dickinson: a still contemporary poet]. Dickinson, whose work paves the way for twentieth-century developments, lived at the time of a massive cultural and spiritual crisis caused by the Civil War and its aftermath, rapid expansion of technology and development of science, and the crumbling away of Orthodox Congregationalism. Her poetry explores the resulting epistemological uncertainty by means of paradox, irony, and negation, which emphasize the momentary and inconclusive character of cognition. The continuing appeal of Dickinson's poetry can be traced to its marriage of intense emotion and probing intellect as well as its constant reexamination of commonplace truths. Contrary to critics who argue for Dickinson's modernity, Salska asserts that despite her experiments in language Dickinson is recognizably a late nineteenth-century poet whose novelty of vision is related to the changing conception of the sublime. While the Kantian model based on the final interiorization of the sublime object by the subject is still relevant to Dickinson, she often replaces the subject's domination over the object with a tenuous balance between them.

In "Milczenie wyroczni – o wierszach Laury Riding" [The silence of the oracle: on Laura Riding's poems], Julia Fiedorczuk focuses on a relatively little known representative of American modernism, addressing the possible reasons for her prolonged silence as poet and her practical sinking into oblivion. Riding's poetry, glossed with extensive authorial commentaries, explanations, and instructions, centers on the problem of selfhood, which,

as her experiments with the word "I" indicate, is largely a linguistic construct. Riding uses paradox and linguistic experiment as modes for investigating the relations between being and language; that her attitude in this investigation oscillates between essentialism and constructivism is one source of her poetry's inaccessibility. Discussing Riding's silence, Fiedorczuk compares the "truth" that is the object of Riding's quest to the Lacanian real, which cannot be approached without causing the disintegration of the self. On this view, silence would protect the self's integrity. Secondly, silence may be Riding's response to the incommunicability of truth, obscured by the relativity of meaning. Lastly – albeit this seems somewhat inconsistent with the latter point – truth is final and, once expressed, leaves nothing to be said.

The two articles that follow discuss the confessional poets Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. In "Niepokojące muzy Sylvii Plath" [Sylvia Plath's unsettling muses], Jerzy Kamionowski sets the author of "Lady Lazarus" against T. S. Eliot's principle of impersonal poetry or, more broadly, against the modernist dehumanization of life and art. The so-called confessional poetry, however, is not merely autobiographical as it involves both personal experience and self-creation. While Plath pursues the question of the woman poet's identity, she does not adopt a feminist stance. Her poetry expresses a fear of independent womanhood, represented by figures of monstrous women. Plath seems to side with the patriarchal viewpoint in treating the woman as object and thinking of creative energy as masculine. Her speakers need the male gaze and male desire and are alienated from their bodies, perceived as hindrances to their spiritual freedom. The will to destroy the body underlies the poet's obsession with death, which she conceives in the romantic vein as the Absolute and turns into a theatrical act. Kamionowski concludes that Plath actually follows Eliot's program by transcending and objectifying her private experience to articulate the anxieties of her times.

Similarly, Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich argues in "Wyznania i inspiracje w poezji Anne Sexton" [Confessions and inspirations in Anne Sexton's poetry] that reading Sexton requires both the knowledge of her biography and attention to the intellectual subtlety and linguistic ingenuity of her verse. Sexton's life and work document the process of woman's search for identity and abandonment of the traditional functions imposed on her by the patriarchal order of Western civilization. Pędich discusses Sexton's use of feminine imagery with the kitchen as a privileged setting and her explicit treatment of female sexuality. Most interestingly, she examines the intertextual elements in Sexton's poems, which include references to nursery rhymes and fairy tales, Edward Lear's nonsense poetry, Whitman's catalogues and pioneering descriptions of the body, Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Eliot's *Prufrock* with its irony and decadence, and, last but not least, Dickinson's combination of intellect and emotion. One affinity between Sexton and

Dickinson, which would merit a more detailed analysis, is the prominence of the sea image, Sexton's symbol of freedom, escape, and rebirth.

The final two essays focus on representatives of racial and ethnic minorities who return to their traditional cultures in their own engagement with contemporary reality. Jerzy Kamionowski's "W stronę Seboulisy – poezja Audre Lorde wobec czarnej tradycji" [Toward Seboulisa: the poetry of Audre Lorde and the Black tradition] provides a comprehensive discussion of the "Black lesbian feminist warrior poet," as Lorde used to describe herself. This self-definition points to the amalgam of her identities, multiply different from the dominant white patriarchal society, and to her role as political activist. The poetry of Black women is doubly marginalized as a "subvariety" of either Black (men's) poetry or (white) women's poetry. To situate Lorde in this tradition, Kamionowski outlines the history of Afro-American poetry by women from Phillis Wheatley to the Black Arts Movement. Lorde's poems draw on her anger and her West African heritage as two main sources of power; language, which expresses them both, is thus at the same time an instrument of creation and a deadly weapon. According to Kamionowski, Lorde's development as poet parallels the process of black culture's evolution "from negation to affirmation and celebration." The titular Seboulisa is a female deity of the Yoruba people and the Great Mother of Lorde's private mythology. Finding and embracing her marks the destination of the poet's quest.

Lastly, in "Drogi do wolności – kobiece podróże w wierszach Louise Erdrich" [Roads to freedom: women's journeys in Louise Erdrich's poems] Piotr Zazula presents close readings of four poems from *Jacklight* (1984), referring them on the one hand to Native American oral culture, and on the other hand to the work of U.S. modernist and postromantic male poets (T. S. Eliot, Theodore Roethke, Randall Jarrell, Robert Bly). Erdrich exemplifies the narrative turn in late twentieth-century American poetry as she chooses to tell stories rather than create a subjective poetic world. The female protagonists of her poems range from a victim of male violence to a traveling prostitute and a "Lady in the Pink Mustang" to the historical Mary Rowlandson, the author of the famous captivity narrative, whom Erdrich presents as fighting affection for her benign Indian captor. A recurrent motif in *Jacklight* is the journey, which the poet relates to women's striving for independence and, as Zazula argues, renders in a specifically feminine way, without recourse to the masculine metaphors of penetration. While the women in *Jacklight* all find ways to survive, Erdrich leaves unanswered the question of their existential victory or defeat.

Unfortunately, the book does not include a checklist of Polish editions of the six poets' work; nor do the entries in the chronology say whether any poems by a given author have ever been translated into Polish. Some of the poets discussed are well known to the

book's target readers: about a sixth of Dickinson's poems are available in translations by Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna, Stanisław Barańczak, and Ludmiła Marjańska; Plath's poetry has been translated by Teresa Truszkowska (*Poezje wybrane*, Warszawa: LSW, 1988; *Wiersze wybrane*, Kraków: Oficyna Literacka, 1992) and Maria Korusiewicz (*Ariel*, Poznań: Zysk, 1996); Sexton's, by Maria Korusiewicz (*Kochając zabójcę*, Poznań: Zysk, 1994). Others have only just been introduced to the Polish reading public: a selection of Riding's poetry and prose, mostly in Fiedorczuk's translation, appears in a recent issue of *Literatura na Świecie* (7-8, 2003), which saw print only after *W pałacu Możliwości* was published, and several poems by Lorde are included in Julia Hartwig's recent anthology of twentieth-century American women poets *Dzikie brzoskwinie* (Warszawa: Sic!, 2003). Erdrich, however, remains known in Poland only as a novelist, the author of *Love Medicine* (*Leki na miłość*, trans. Magdalena Konikowska, Warszawa: PIW, 1998); besides, a fragment of *Tracks* appeared in *Kartki* 29 (2003).

As a critical presentation of those poets and the first Polish collection of essays on the subject, *W pałacu Możliwości* is certainly an important and valuable accomplishment which will improve the knowledge of American poetry among Polish readers and will be useful in teaching American literature to Polish students from a consciously gendered perspective. For whereas the volume adopts a historical rather than theoretical approach, the arguments are conducted from a consistently feminist viewpoint insofar as the critics share the assumption that gender determines a poet's experience, perception, and language. Besides, an unquestionable merit of all the constituent articles is that they combine an overview of a given poet's work with close readings of selected poems. Kamionowski's contributions are the most successful in this respect: apart from carefully balancing the general and the particular and interpreting poems in illuminating ways, he relates Plath's and Lorde's oeuvres to the broader context of their literary traditions; he also helpfully refers to critical literature available in Polish, thus providing guidelines for further reading.

For all its value, however, the book raises certain doubts in my mind about both its overall conception and the individual essays. Firstly, some critics seem to be uncomfortable writing in Polish, a drawback which has not been remedied by the copy editor Elżbieta Kozłowska-Świątkowska. Secondly and more importantly, most articles would benefit from a stronger mark of their authors' own viewpoints and judgements on the poets and issues discussed, a perspective which would increase the book's appeal to a broader audience and thus better serve the goal of popularizing American women's poetry in Poland. My objection to this impersonal mode of argument relates to the broader question of the critical genre the essays represent. Half a century ago, in his review of the 1955 variorum edition of Dickinson's poems, Austin Warren observed: "Scholarship as such restricts a great poet to her own time, place, and empirical self. Criticism must

delicately 'clear' the poems for present use and evaluation – show what is for our time, or, more grandiosely, what is for all times" (109). The distinction might seem old-fashioned – all the more so because the historicist trend dominant in today's U.S. literary studies has rejected such universalist attitudes as naïvely utopian and dismissed the very notion of great poet as elitist – but Warren's postulate that criticism explain why a particular poet may be interesting for present-day readers (and, in this case, for readers from a different culture) certainly pertains to *W pałacu Możliwości*. For the purpose of presenting American women poets to Polish readers, a more critical, i.e., evaluative and mediatory approach would probably be more helpful, as demonstrated by Agnieszka Salska's essay, which effectively bridges the temporal and cultural distance between Dickinson and the contemporary Polish audience.

My greatest objection, however, concerns the loose structure of the book and the modest scope of the editor's preface. The latter might be expected to bring the individual contributions more closely together and/or to specifically relate them to the development of American women's poetry as suggested by the chronological arrangement of the essays. In addition, since the book has been prepared with a view to popularizing a certain body of knowledge and the gender approach to literature, the preface could provide a theoretical perspective on the subject by, e.g., outlining the basic tenets of feminist criticism and formulating the literary or poetic rather than only historical and sociological reasons for distinguishing the tradition of women's poetry. Pędich's project is less far-reaching as she limits her introduction to a brief but useful historical overview of U.S. poetry by women and a description of woman's position in a patriarchal culture. Neither does the editor make a case for the book's unity, explaining instead that the poets to be discussed were selected according to their importance in American poetry and the contributors' research interests. But while the first criterion seems far too broad, the second is too arbitrary to result in a coherent whole. My sense is that, thus conceived, the volume would need a unifying focus, such as a theme or problem (e.g., the self, the Other, the body, poetry, language, or silence, the latter a shared preoccupation of the poets discussed, combining thematic and formal concerns), which would tighten its structure without precluding its expository character.

Nevertheless, the very arrangement of the essays provokes questions about the six poets' relations to one another and about women's tradition in literature. In her recent study *Of Women, Poetry and Power*, Zofia Burr presents a critique of the status that literary studies has assigned to Dickinson: "[She] has come to serve as a mandatory point of reference for comparison and evaluation of all American women poets – not only those who have succeeded her but also her predecessors" (27). *W pałacu Możliwości* follows the assumption of Dickinson's paradigmatic status in the history of American women's

poetry and, by beginning with an essay on the Amherst poet, encourages readers to retrospectively refer the later poets to Dickinson and to construct continuities even where they may not exist. Thus, Plath's verse demonstrates clear affinities with Dickinson both at the thematic level (pain, suffering, obsession with death) and, more important, the stylistic level (conciseness, irony, understatement). The same argument can be made for Sexton, as Pędich does in her essay. But the possible relation of Riding to Dickinson is less straightforward and involves the oft-addressed problem of Dickinson's modernity: when treated as a poet of the fragmented modern self, Dickinson is certainly closer to Riding than she is in Salska's essay, which presents her as deeply grounded in late nineteenth-century New England culture. Still, even this latter Dickinson might be said to anticipate Riding in such respects as the linguistic or performative construction of the persona or the preoccupation with and use of silence. On the other hand, the difficulty or impossibility of relating either Lorde or Erdrich to Dickinson raises the question whether there exists an interracial tradition of poetry by women. Emerging on the wave of the Black Arts Movement, in her formative years as poet Lorde rejected white culture altogether, and later continued to address the Black audience and draw inspiration from Afro-American and African sources. Unless the tradition of American women's poetry is understood as an all-inclusive category determined by sheer gender and its social consequences for the individual rather than by cultural continuity, Lorde cannot be considered part of the same tradition as Sexton or Erdrich. This is another issue the editor's preface might address.

The above considerations show that besides its educational value, *W pałacu Możliwości* raises important questions which go beyond its modestly defined goal. It will certainly find readers among the general audience interested in poetry and among college students, who will appreciate its objectivity, reliability, and accessibility. The book is strongly recommended to Polish university libraries, and will be particularly welcome by smaller colleges which suffer from a shortage of materials for teaching American literature. When used as a textbook, it can serve as a good starting point for classroom discussions about the tradition of women's poetry, and about literary tradition in general.

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Wielki Gaddis: Realista postmodernistyczny [The Great Gaddis: A Postmodern Realist]. By Tomasz Basiuk. Izabelin: Świat Literacki, 2003. 168 pages.

The critical assumptions and interpretative goals of Tomasz Basiuk's book on William Gaddis are implied in its subtitle, which reads "A Postmodern Realist." Basically, Basiuk claims that Gaddis employs in his fiction a variety of narrative strategies recognized as characteristic of postmodern writing in order to achieve a mimetic effect and offer the reader illuminating insights into the complicated American reality. According to Basiuk, Gaddis develops a project of alternative realism, whose possibilities depend on the recognition of the rules of literary creation whereby the representation of reality undergoes inevitable fictionalization as well as on the creative reapplication of those rules for the sake of a more thorough probing of tangible problems known, for instance, from American media. Indeed, the media feature prominently in Gaddis's novels: on the one hand, they function as factors determining the shape of the plot, as in *A Frolic of His Own*, whose plot revolves around the plagiarism of an obscure play which, allegedly, has been reworked into a successful film script; on the other hand, they are a source of narrative solutions, as in *JR* and *Carpenter's Gothic*, where the construction of the narratorial perspective at times seems to imitate camera movement.

In the introduction to his book, Basiuk makes an interesting remark that Gaddis's acute awareness of how profoundly the reality generated by the media interferes with the reality perceived by the human observer bestows a certain prophetic quality on his fiction. The intrusion of media reality into lived experience is rendered on the level of narrative as a combination of the visual and the textual. This is only one of many tensions existing in the textual domain; in fact, Gaddis's fiction abounds in puns, paradoxes, and linguistic ambiguities, and therefore language alone emerges from it as a source of innumerable tensions. Admittedly, Gaddis's prophecies and insights are accomplished through the examination of the impact of linguistic ambivalence on narrative representation. In other words, language does not mediate reality; rather, it becomes the primary condition of its accessibility. Traditional realism, whose legacy Basiuk invokes in his discussion of *The Recognitions* and *Carpenter's Gothic*, ignores its own contingency; hence Gaddis's insistence on the need to invent an alternative realist epistemology.

Tomasz Basiuk's book consists of four chapters devoted to individual novels by Gaddis. In Chapter One, the author focuses on *The Recognitions*, analyzing the text in the light of Jean-François Lyotard's aesthetics of the sublime. For Lyotard, the sublime essentially consists in what he calls negative representation, which ascribes primary significance to the thought which is inexpressible due to the lack of an adequate means of representation as opposed to the thought which is firmly entrenched and appears in a familiar form. The latter

kind of thought can be connected with the existence of dogmas. On the thematic level of *The Recognitions*, Gaddis foregrounds at least two spheres wherein dogma reigns: religion and history. The writer's preoccupation with religion is connected with his interest in the nature of spirituality and in the relationship between the human being and God, while his interest in history manifests itself in his musings on how the history of painting substantiates a particular way of understanding the experience and legacy of modernity. In turn, in the metanarrative realm of literary creation realism functions as a dogmatic aesthetic stance that never doubts about its own imperatives. All such dogmas are characterized by the faith in origin, authenticity, and unequivocal representation. Gaddis challenges these certainties: dogmatic spirituality verges on obsession; an alternative, purely invented history of painting displaces the one that exists, with fakes supplementing original creations. Most importantly, however, Gaddis questions realism as a trustworthy mode of representation on several planes. Accordingly, the world presented in *The Recognitions* is chaotic and depends on chance; the intertextual entanglement situates the text metonymically not in relation to reality, but in relation to other texts; the personality of the protagonist is an extension of the thematic concerns of the novel and has nothing to do with extra-textual circumstances; and, finally, the fragmentary narration precludes the establishment of the epistemological authority of the narrator.

In his discussion of *JR* in Chapter Two, Basiuk emphasizes the satirical potential of Gaddis's second novel. The target of this satire is the society that has become obsessional about earning money or, more generally, about profitable exchange. Characters in *JR*, both those who identify with the predominant choices and preferences and strive for the accumulation of wealth and those who try to free themselves from this particular form of subjection, invariably relate themselves to the economic system in which they are willy-nilly involved. This system rests on various kinds of exchange, which is reflected on the level of plot and narrative as a mixture of voices, opinions, and personalities. Indeed, the thematic idea of exchange gets a powerful enhancement from Gaddis's construction of the narration, consisting, basically, of continuous dialogue with occasional narrative passages. The self-evident significance of the linguistic organization of *JR* demonstrates that the novel is much more than a satirical statement. Basiuk characterizes the intellectual project that informs *JR* through references to, on the one hand, Thomas LeClair's proposition that the novel foregrounds entropy and system simultaneously, and, on the other hand, Georges Bataille's description of the economy based on excess. In LeClair's reading of *JR*, the presence of the system precludes the finality of entropy. However, Basiuk discerns a complication that casts doubt on LeClair's conclusions: namely, *JR* imitates the system instead of offering a multilayered examination of it, which would be more typical of a system novel. Therefore, Basiuk seems to believe that Bataille's theory of the economy of excess offers a more re-

vealing interpretative clue to *JR*. Above all, Bataille's observations on the nature of economy make it possible to see *JR* as, in Basiuk's words, a kind of "waste" produced by the system it reflects. In turn, the affirmation of waste is "an expression of a profound understanding of the world" (80). The concluding part of Chapter Two deals with Gaddis's use of cinematic techniques in the narration of *JR*, thus anticipating the major narrative intricacies explored in the following chapter.

One major focus of Basiuk's discussion of the construction of the narrator in *Carpenter's Gothic* is Gaddis's resort to cinematic strategies in his depiction of the narrator's perception of the novel's heroine, Elizabeth Booth. On the one hand, the incorporation of such techniques into the overall narrative frame enhances the mimetic illusion, because film as an art is often believed to present the world in possibly the most objective way; on the other hand, the presence of such narrative techniques provides evidence of the narrator's authority and of his readiness to manipulate the characters as well as the readers, since it is the narrator who "operates" the camera, that is, decides about what is "filmed" and how. In consequence, the narrator joins the threesome of male characters in *Carpenter's Gothic* – Elizabeth's husband, brother, and lover – who sooner or later cheat or abuse her. Just as Elizabeth is a victim in the hands of the three men on whom she depends the most, she is a victim in the hands of the narrator who, for instance, decides that the heroine is of a rather poor health so that her death at the end of the book has a proper explanation. The confrontation between the narrator and the heroine is implied in the fact that Elizabeth attempts to become a writer and that the narrator undermines her talent by imitating her writing or by indicating how easily her literary pieces can be misread. In other words, the narrator claims the kind of authority that he denies Elizabeth. Basiuk points out that as far as Gaddis's novels are concerned, the narration in *Carpenter's Gothic* is the closest to the narrative norms of traditional realism. Thus, the novelist suggests that the aesthetic and ideological project of realism is not one of ultimate objectivity but, for example, one of biased objectification.

In the chapter on *A Frolic of His Own*, Basiuk first highlights the similarities between this novel and *JR*, traceable in the satirical underpinning of both works and in their preoccupation with the mechanisms of specific systems. While in *JR* the system in question is the economy based on excess, in *A Frolic of His Own* it is law. In the latter novel, the target of satire is Americans' unlimited confidence in the possibility of solving every conflict, whether real or imagined, in court. The thrust of the argument in Chapter Four concerns the correspondence between the character of literary production and the nature of legal regulations. First of all, both law and literature are varieties of linguistic practice; this convergence manifests itself at the stage of creation and at the stage of interpretation. Just as the assessment of an event or a character in a literary work depends on the limited evidence provided in the literary work, the recognition of the circumstances of a felony or a crime and the judgment

of its perpetrator can be formulated only within a limited horizon constituted, on the one hand, by the evidence gathered during investigation and, on the other hand, by the outcome of analogical previous cases. Indeed, law is anchored in a realm of intertexts, with precedents as its substance. Consequently, whereas intertextuality in literature casts doubt on the epistemological authority of the narrator, intertextual references in law reveal its limits.

Wielki Gaddis is based on Tomasz Basiuk's doctoral dissertation, written in English and focused on narrative techniques in the fiction of William Gaddis. The book, however, is not a simple translation of the background text. The author's decision to write *Wielki Gaddis* practically anew by all means deserves appreciation. The publication of the book in Polish presupposes a reader who is not necessarily an expert. Basiuk caters to the expectations of such a reader and, for example, includes detailed summaries of the novels, which help one to follow the author's critical arguments and observations. Furthermore, *Wielki Gaddis* is not thematically limited to the construction of narrators in Gaddis's works and covers many other aspects of his literary output. The theme which the Polish reader may find of greatest interest is Gaddis's critique of contemporary American reality: dependence on economic success, belief in the unquestionable power and rightness of law, suspicious spirituality bordering on obsession or bigotry, ethnic prejudice, imperial endeavors, lack of appreciation for art. Basiuk convincingly presents these elements of Gaddis's alternative realist project in the context of the debate over the ethics and aesthetics of postmodernism.

Marek Paryż

William Faulkner and Bruno Schulz: A Comparative Study. By Zbigniew Maszewski. Rozprawy habilitacyjne Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego. Łódź: Wyd. Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2003. 193 pages.

In an essay on the ever ambiguous concept and scope of comparative literature, Peter Brooks relates the dream of a fellow student at Harvard in the early 1960s: "The doorbell rang, the student stumbled from bed, opened the door, and found himself faced with Harry Levin and Renato Poggioli (the two professors in the department) dressed as plumbers, carrying pipe wrenches and acetylene torches, who announced: 'We've come to compare the literature'" (97). Brooks goes on to recall the many instances when he had to explain to non-academics that being a comparatist did not really mean comparing literatures or authors but rather working in several national literatures at the same time. This approach informed the work of the founding fathers of the discipline as practiced at American universities: Erich Auerbach with his *Mimesis*; Leo Spitzer with his studies of ideas and style in all romance literatures; René Wellek with his monumental *History of*

Modern Criticism 1750-1950, his studies of literary movements, or his postulate, in *Discriminations*, that comparative literature "will study all literature from an international perspective, with a consciousness of the unity of all literary creation and experience" and that it be "identical with the study of literature independent of linguistic, ethnic, and political boundaries" (19). Paul de Man, another émigré comparatist, followed essentially the same idea of the discipline, notwithstanding his deconstructivist stance. Thus understood, U.S. comparative literature has in recent years, in the work of Mary Pratt and others, aligned itself with cultural studies, in particular with postcolonialism, which has opened the discipline to Latin-American, Asian, and African literatures and has aimed to marginalize European literatures in a political gesture of rejecting the cultural hegemony of the Old World.

This is not to say that U.S. scholars have not conducted any source, influence, and reception studies: Wellek in his *Confrontations*, Auerbach in his "Figura," or, more recently, Robert Weisbuch in his *Atlantic Double-Cross: American Literature and British Influence in the Age of Emerson* examined definable relations between national literatures and individual authors. Overall, however, this kind of work is more typical of the European tradition, including comparative literature at Polish universities, both in Polish and in foreign languages departments. The few published studies of relationships between American and Polish literature include Marta Skwara's articles on Mickiewicz's reception of Emerson, Mirosława Ziaja-Buchholtz's book *Reflections of the Master: The Reception of Henry James in Poland 1877-2000*, my essays on nature and perception in American and Polish romantic writers, and Zbigniew Maszewski's essays on the topos of the Book, which prepared the ground for his larger project on Faulkner and Schulz.

Maszewski's newly published book is a valuable contribution to the scant body of work in the field and the first attempt to find a common denominator between the writings of the two great modernist authors. The critic does not explicitly formulate his concept of comparative literature, nor does he draw or comment upon the considerable legacy of comparative studies, but proceeds, without much ado, to conduct his well-focused inquiry into Faulkner's and Schulz's prose. Still, retrospectively, *William Faulkner and Bruno Schulz* can be said to stand at the intersection of the American and European versions of the discipline: on the one hand, by virtue of its composition, Maszewski's book displays similarities between the American and Polish writers rather than simply juxtaposing them, and the critic treats the two authors as deeply grounded in the traditions of their respective national literatures rather than approaching them from an international perspective as, say, two chosen facets of world modernism. This situates the study within the tradition of European comparative literature. On the other hand, in accordance with Peter Brooks's explanation of what his job is about, Zbigniew Maszewski *is* working in

two national literatures at once as he offers parallel discussions of selected aspects of Schulz's and Faulkner's prose rather than comparing and contrasting the two authors. One drawback of this otherwise interesting combination of approaches is that while it convincingly demonstrates the affinity, it does not account for the difference, that is, the readerly experience of Faulkner's and Schulz's writings as substantially dissimilar: the one symbolic, mythical, occasionally claustrophobic in its entrapment both in the provincial South and in the protagonists' minds, but ultimately realistic; the other also mythical, even cosmic, but dreamlike, magical, and hypnotic, drawing on Jewish mysticism and the irrational logic of the unconscious, fluid and uncanny, a symbolic expression of secret fantasies and desires.

William Faulkner and Bruno Schulz consists of an introduction and four chapters followed by a bibliography. Unfortunately, it does not contain an index. The aim of the study, defined in the introduction and strictly followed throughout the book, is "to map an area of correspondences between the imaginative worlds of William Faulkner (1897-1962) and Bruno Schulz (1892-1942)" (7). The critic's underlying assumption is that "no work by an American 20th century writer can match Faulkner's in terms of its aspirations for narrative expansiveness and visionary intensity, and that no work by a Polish 20th century writer makes a stronger claim for the fictional material to constitute an equivalent of actual reality than Schulz's" (7). Acknowledging the radical disparity in size between the two writers' oeuvres, Zbigniew Maszewski chooses to limit the Faulknerian part of his inquiry to selected works which saw print during Schulz's lifetime.

Chapter One, "The Provincial and the Universal in the Works of William Faulkner and Bruno Schulz," literally maps the territory for further discussion by focusing on the topography and character of the apocryphal Yoknapatawpha County and of the Drohobycz area as charted in the two authors' prose. The parochial, conservative nature of the Deep South and Deep Galicia; their backward-looking consciousness, obstinately rooted in the national, regional, and family past; and their imaginary and mythical potential is, according to Maszewski, what bridges the geographical and cultural distance between the two regions. Arguably, just as the cataclysm of the Civil War had wasted the Old South and undercut its identity, World War I and the death of Franz Joseph had sealed the decline of the Austro-Hungarian empire, which Galicia was part of, a process best captured in Joseph Roth's *Radetzkymarsch*. This partially accounts for the nostalgia of both Faulkner's and Schulz's fiction: Schulz's short stories, published in the 1930s, describe a childhood and adolescence still marked by the patriarchal presence of the old emperor; the plots of Faulkner's novels reach in retrospect as far back as antebellum times. One might want to add that while both authors' writings are permeated by the

poignant awareness of the Fall, they conceive of that Fall in dramatically different ways: in Faulkner's novels it is the original sin of slavery, whereas in Schulz's prose it is Joseph's discovery of sexuality, notoriously incestuous and masochistic, which entails the cosmic fall of his subjective world into matter.

Sexuality and its expression in fantasies and desires, those accepted and those tabooed, is the subject of Chapter Two, which I find the most interesting and the most specifically comparative part of Zbigniew Maszewski's study. Titled "Female Figures in Selected Works of Bruno Schulz and William Faulkner," the chapter discusses the significance of such Schulzean characters as the all-powerful housemaid Adela, a central presence in both *Cinnamon Shops* and *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*; Joseph's "immoderately fertile" Aunt Agatha; the elusive androgynous Bianca; the idiot girl Touya; and Joseph's mother, as well as the role of Faulkner's Caddy Compson and Dilsey of *The Sound and the Fury*, Lena Grove of *Light in August*, Eula Varner and… Ike's cow of *The Hamlet*. Drawing on the psychoanalytic theories of Freud, Jung, and Lacan, and on the ample body of Schulz and Faulkner criticism, Maszewski offers many valuable insights into the protagonists' relationship to those female characters, their rebellion against the Name of the Father, and their desire to return to organic unity with the mother in the space of the womb. Importantly, both writers self-consciously relate their representations of women to questions of art. "An homage to the woman is an homage to art returning to its matrix, its primordial source" (48), Maszewski proposes in his commentary on scenes of male masochism in Schulz's engravings. Faulkner, too, uses female characters to address "the unresolved questions about the meaningfulness of the writer's work and its oscillation between presence and absence, life and death, the patterned and the patterning, the controlled and the uncontrollable" (71-72). Both Faulkner and Schulz, Maszewski observes after Faulkner critics, emphasize the fascinating polarity of the female by portraying two types of women: one fragile, nymphlike, and ephemeral, the other fleshly, fecund, and motherly, of the earth and of nature.

The erudite Chapter Three, "Schulz's 'geometry of emptiness' and Faulkner's 'the shape of a ': A Matter of Correspondences," deals with the self-conscious aspect of the two authors' fiction, which is more pronounced in Schulz than in Faulkner. Schulz's writings acknowledge the inadequacy of language to express the essence of things and deliberately avoid determinacy, creating a polysemic reality in flux. Maszewski stresses the role of metaphors as pivotal elements of Schulz's language and the primary means of mythologizing reality. The quest for return to Mother, discussed in the previous chapter, is paralleled by the quest for the Book, the mythical source of all language and meaning, and the ever elusive embodiment of phallic power. The persons in control of Joseph's life and imagination are those who possess the Book: his father and the housemaid Adela. Zbigniew

Maszewski discerns affinities between Schulz's concept of the original language and the ideas of other modernists, such as Joyce, Sartre, Herman Hesse, and Stéphane Mallarmé, as well as those of Emerson and Poe. The latter analogies, the critic himself admits, may seem far-fetched: after all, as Umberto Eco reminds us, the quest for universal language in Western culture goes back as far as the Judaeo-Christian tradition and is central to gnosticism, which was a major influence on romantic writers and a basic frame of reference for Schulz's work. In the shorter Faulknerian section of the chapter, Zbigniew Maszewski speaks of "[t]he demiurgic, self-ironic gesture of Faulkner's hand shaping the contours of his work in imitation of archetypal texts" (134). Maszewski's discussion of Faulkner's language, rooted in the patterns of biblical style yet fragmented and fallen, fluid and incomplete, is revealing in itself but leaves the reader with the sense that, unlike in previous chapters, here any argument for correspondence is necessarily tenuous, of which the critic seems fully aware. While both writers use poetic language, rhythmical and incantatory, fraught with metaphors and similes, they put it to different ends. Whereas both strive to regain the original unity of word and meaning, they set themselves different goals. Firstly, Faulkner is not preoccupied with the topos of the Book, and while he constantly alludes to the Bible, *the* Book of Western culture, it is neither as an instrument of power nor as the record of the Law but as the source of Christian myth, which he reinterprets in his fiction. Secondly, his quest, both at the level of language and of plot, is a Christian quest for redemption, whereas Schulz's is a gnostic quest for knowledge. Finally, in contrast to Schulz, Faulkner does not assume the role of a gnostic demiurge creating a fallen universe, unless, in the postmodern vein, we identify any act of authorship with a godlike act of creation; rather, he is a moralist who forges a new myth out of his tragic vision of history and the human predicament.

Chapter Four, "Faulkner's and Schulz's Attitudes Towards the Question of Literary Borrowings," is the shortest in the book and aptly serves as its coda. Zbigniew Maszewski examines Schulz's indebtedness to such writers as Edgar Allan Poe, Kafka, and Thomas Mann, and Faulkner's use of Hawthorne, Melville, Shakespeare, and Joyce. The scope of the argument broadens as the critic addresses issues of literariness, authorship, and intertextuality. "Faulkner's awareness that a writer is invariably the reader of the texts of other writers, which he accepts as his own, coincided with his idea of literary anonymity" (177). Schulz harbored a similar if differently contextualized view of the author's anonymity: "An integral component of the imagery of the Book, that notion stood behind the abundance of Schulz's mythical and literary allusions, parallels, assimilations" (177). In this way Maszewski again draws our attention to the way the two writers combine the individual and the universal, this time in the very act of literary creation.

The book ends with a bibliography, which is usefully divided into primary and secondary literature, and, within the latter, into Schulzean, Faulknerian, and other criticism. Unfortunately, the publisher did not prepare the edition carefully: there are a number of typographical errors, including a misspelling of Schulz's name at the spine.

Zbigniew Maszewski's study is an ambitious attempt to relate two modernist authors who represent very different literary, intellectual, and cultural traditions, and who are usually approached in disparate terms. Maszewski creates a comprehensive context for his discussion through a wide range of references to world literature of the period and to the work of such theorists as Freud, Jung, and Eliade, Guattari and Deleuze, Blanchot, Barthes, and Derrida. Whereas in his discussion of Faulkner and Schulz the critic follows well-traveled paths as he builds upon the findings of his predecessors rather than challenging them, the original value of his project lies in juxtaposing the two authors and demonstrating their affinity against ostensible difference.

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Epiphany in American Poetry. By Jiří Flajšar. Olomouc: Palacký University, 2003. 133 pages.

The concept of epiphany is as old as the tradition of European literature; from its emergence in ancient Greece it has been connected predominantly with poetry. Nevertheless, the concept had to wait until the second half of the twentieth century to become the subject of a comprehensive aesthetic theory. Flajšar's pioneering study *Epiphany in American Poetry* outlines the history of epiphany as a cultural phenomenon and literary device, and offers a recapitulation and critical analysis of the attempts to develop the poetics of epiphany. The study does not aim at a mere summary of contemporary critical trends; rather, Flajšar aims to propose his own version of the aesthetics of epiphany and show its critical potential in detailed readings of the work of two major American poets: Richard Hugo and Philip Levine.

On the most general level, epiphany is defined as the result of "human attempts to make sense of natural and supernatural phenomena that are percived, analyzed, and responded to

by the mind" (11). The character of epiphany in ancient Greece is anthropological: as Flajšar says, paraphrasing Ashton Nichols's *The Poetics of Epiphany*, gods are a "logical psychic extension of human imagination" (13). Christianity implements the concept of epiphany into its theological framework, defining the source of epiphany as absolute and transcendental. As such it remains a literary device until the late eighteenth century, when epiphany enters lyrical poetry of the Romantics. In their poetics epiphany is secularized; it no longer means the experience of the sacred in terms of theophany but becomes a revelation of substantial meaning. By that time epiphany has become a means of structuring "lyrical narrative, which constitutes the epiphanic mode, a vital poetic strategy in first poetry and later fiction" (14). The ground-breaking aesthetic theory which introduced and established secular epiphany as a supreme structuring device of fiction was the concept of epiphany proposed by James Joyce. Joyce's theory established epiphany as an integral part of literary discourse, preparing the ground for comprehensive aesthetics of epiphany. Since Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914), epiphany in fiction is perceived as the revelation of ultimate but secular meaning in trivial everyday existence. As a result, on the conceptual level epiphany becomes a way for human mind to be elevated from chaos to meaning, whereas on the formal level it becomes, less fortunately, a stereotypical mode for introducing the existential dimension into a particular piece of fiction.

Among those who tried to formulate a theory of epiphany in both prose and fiction are such distinguished critics as John Holloway, M. H. Abrams, Morris Beja, Brian Jay Losey, Sandra Humble Johnson, and Wim Tigges. Flajšar discusses their theories in detail, paying special attention to their potential for the criticism of contemporary poetry, which seems to show a significant predominance of epiphany poems.

Drawing on the tradition of epiphany criticism, Flajšar ventures to develop a condensed epiphany and proposes his own extension of aesthetic concepts as a kind of pilosophy of eiphany, defined as a "subjectivist guide to making sense of reality" (37) and subdivided into the aesthetics, poetics and rhetoric of epiphany. This theory relies on the existence of "ideal epiphanic meaning whose form is, however, largely variable in space and time" (38). Indeed, one of Flajšar's contributions is his constant emphasis on epiphany as metamorphosis, the manifestation of the dynamic, creative relationship between the individual human being and the universe. According to Flajšar, epiphanic moments structure human lives as revelations of ideal meaning, while their re-enactment, which is an individual creative act of a writer, gives form to a particular work of art. In this way, structuring works of art means structuring the universe. This approach, drawing on Walter Pater and Ezra Pound, sees aesthetics in terms of ethics and puts it back into the moral perspective. The universe, which imposes its meaning on individual human beings, is creative; human beings are creative in the way they convey the meaning, and thus are in accordance with the nature of the uni-

verse. Epiphany, as revelation of meaning imposed by the universe on the writer, and by the aesthetic experience of a work of art on the reader, is supposed to spiritually transform the epiphanee. Epiphany suspends the meaningless, or profane, temporality and situates the individual in a meaningful, if not sacred, spiritual landscape where the metamorphosis of the epiphanee takes place.

Having defined his own philosophy of epiphany, Flajšar examines the variations of the epiphanic mode in the works of William Blake, Walt Whitman, James Wright, Gerald Stern, Charles Simic and Richard Jackson. The list of the poets discussed shows that Flajšar's concern lies mainly with contemporary American poetry, but also reveals one important feature of the tradition of epiphany criticism. The poet who is not discussed here is Ezra Pound, in spite of the fact that epiphany in *The Cantos* functions as one of the basic structuring devices. Pound's concept of epiphany is derived from the myths of ancient Greece, where epiphany is the revelation of the sacred dimension of the world. It is not a revelation of transcendent divinity or, as Ashton Nichols (Flajšar's only source on epiphany criticism in ancient Greece) puts it, "ascribing monumental meaning to natural phenomena which people could not explain" (13). The sacred and the profane in ancient Greece are two points of view from which human beings can interpret the universe; in this context, epiphany means becoming aware of the sacred as an integral element of the terrestrial world.

The fact that this latter concept of epiphany is neglected by epiphany criticism makes it useless for the interpretation of epiphany poems of ancient Greece as well as the poetry of Anglo-American modernism which tried to revive exactly the same perception of the universe. The fact that the concept of epiphany owes much to its mythic origins is reflected in epiphany criticism, which finally recognized the suspension of linear time (*chronos*) (21) and the predominance of the spatially structured image (31) as important features of any epiphany.

Overall, Flajšar's study suceeds in introducing the poetics of epiphany, a major approach of contemporary American criticism, into European literary discourse. It not only defines a comprehensive poetics but also demonstrates its merits in detailed discussions of contemporary poetry. Moreover, as a work of constructive ambitions at the time when postmodernism has been recognized as a distinctive phase, rather than the ultimate end, of philosophy and literature, Flajšar's book seems to offer a glimpse of hope for the restoration of literature and literary criticism as important elements of our lives.

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