32nd Annual Northern Plains Conference on Early British Literature

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April 11-12, 2025

Northern State University
Aberdeen, SD 57401

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The conference organizing committee consisted of Peter Ramey (Professor of English, Northern State University), conference organizer; Patrick Whiteley (Emeritus Professor of English, Northern State University), communications coordinator; and Art Marmorstein (Professor of History, Northern State University), publicity coordinator.

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Note: Nine complete papers appear below the Schedule of Events in program order. Page-number references can be found in the program below.

Schedule of Events

Thursday, April 10

6:00 pm - Early Arrivers Reception at the home of Deena Ronayne (2807 Oakwood Lane, Aberdeen SD 57401).

Friday, April 11

8:30-9:00 - Registration & Refreshments (Beaulah Williams Library Round Room)

9:00-9:15 - Welcome (Library Round Room)

9:20-10:35 - Session 1

1A. Teaching Premodern Literature in the College Classroom (Library Round Room). Chair: Kyle Moore

Kyle Robert Moore, University of North Dakota

Premodern Literature's Future: Reimaging the Early British Literature Survey

Samuel M. Amendolar, University of North Dakota

"Into a forest ful depe": Pedagogical Approaches to Teaching *The Works of the Gawain Poet* in the Ecocritical Classroom

Adam H. Kitzes, University of North Dakota

Fire and History: Alternative Chronologies in the Survey of English Literature

1B Translation and Transformation (CETL Room). Chair: Patrick Whiteley

Kristen Brown, Northern State University

"Take the law of the game": Liminal Space and Ludic Transition in *Jacob and Esau* [pp. 12–21]

Liz Fisher, Bemidji State University

Gadzooks!: Slang and Modernisms in Translation and Adaptation [pp. 22–31]

Amanda Watts, Minot State University

Pietro Torrigiano's Bronze Angels and Chapel Brawls: A Tale of Two Renaissances

10:45-Noon - Session 2

2A Shakespeare and Power (Library Round Room). Chair: Deena Ronayne

Susan Wood, Midland University

***King John* and Smart Power: A Lesson for Our Times? [pp. 32–41]**

Hannah Lewis, Bemidji State University

Shakespeare and Musical Adaptation: How *Kiss Me, Kate* Reinterprets *The Taming of the Shrew*

Elise Fladeboe, Bemidji State University

Beyond the Taming: Abuse, Identity, and Power in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*

2B. Gender in the Premodern World (CETL Pedagogy Room) Chair: Ginny Lewis

Tasrif (Aivan) Mahmud, University of North Dakota
Echoes of the Divine: The Loop of Absence and Presence as a Queer Space in *The Fire of Love* and *The Conference of the Birds*

Christopher Lozensky, Minot State University
His Body, Her Choice: Recognizing Rape and Other Deeds of Women in *Amis and Amiloun, The Wife of Bath's Prologue* and *Tale,* and *Midsommar*

Sydney Skoglund, Bemidji State University
Defining Martyrdom Stereotypes in the Works of Anne Askew, John Gerard, and Elizabeth Cary

12:00-1:00 - Lunch on your own (Campus options: Food Court, Einstein's Bagels)

(1pm: Tim Mooney Performance "Lot o' Shakespeare" for local high schools)

1:15-2:30 - Session 3

3A: Beowulf (Library Round Room) Chair: Lysbeth Benkert

Larry Swain, Bemidji State University
Beowulf the Loser and the Heroic Code

Stella Meier, Northern State University
***Beowulf* in Pop Culture [pp. 42–49]**

Peter Ramey, Northern State University

" Þæt Wæs Gōd Cyning!": Encapsulation Formulas in Old English Verse

3b: Mysticism and Poetry (Virtual) (CETL Room) Chair: Michelle Sauer

Deanna Smid, Brandon University (Virtual Presentation)

Reading for/through the Little Ice Age in Seventeenth-century English Poetry

***Jainab Tabassum Banu, North Dakota State University* (Virtual Presentation)**

Reading Blake through Burke's Screens: Dramatism in *Songs of Innocence and Experience* [pp. 50–58]

Caius Buran, University of North Dakota (Virtual Presentation)

Girlish Salvation: Julian of Norwich's Enduring, Profeminine Appeal

2:45-4pm - Session 4.

4. From Old Norse to Thomas More (Library Round Room) Chair: Pen Pearson

Michael Nagy, South Dakota State University

The Sapience of Insults in *Alvissmál*

ShyAnn Springer, South Dakota State University

The Self-Destruction of Contradiction [pp. 59–68]

Stephen Hamrick, Bemidji State University

"In perfect joy and bliss": Tracking Thomas More's Neoplatonic Lover [pp. 69–82]

4:15-5:30 pm - Session 5.

5A. Devotion and Desire (Library Round Room) Chair: Elizabeth Haller

Robert Kibler, Minot State University
One with God—17th-Century Ranters: Free, Elected, Moral, Divine

Michelle M. Sauer, University of North Dakota
The 'Scorpiun of leccherie' in Pre-Modern Devotional Thought

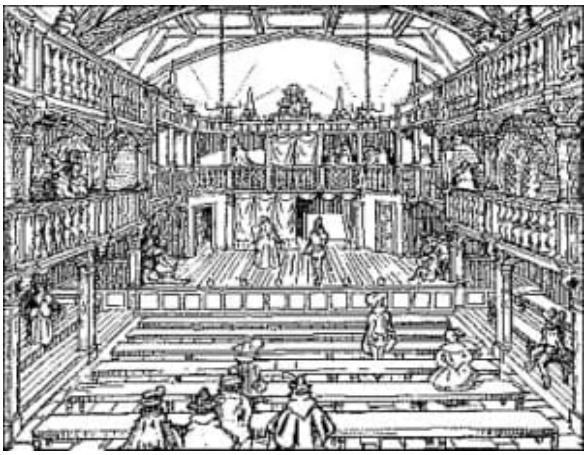
Shaun Stiemsma, Dordt University
George Herbert's Sectarian Ambiguity: "The British Church" in the Devotional Cycle of *The Temple*

5B. Early Drama (CETL Room) Chair: Liz Sills

Michael Skyles, Northern State University
The Evolution of the Masque

Cole Holmes, Northern State University
Handel's Use of Text Painting in 'The People That Walked in Darkness' Aria from *Messiah* and the Implications of a Similar Prophecy the World Faces Today

Art Marmorstein, Northern State University
The Tragedy of the Common Collaborator: Nahum Tate's Adaptations of Virgil



6:00-7:20 pm – Banquet (Johnson Fine Arts Center Lobby)

7:30 pm – Tim Mooney performance – "Breakneck *Hamlet*" (Johnson Fine Arts Center Main Stage). Q&A session following the show.

9:00 pm – Evening Gathering at Minerva's Bar and Grill (inside the Ramkota Best Western Hotel, 1400 8th Ave NW, Aberdeen, SD 57401)

Saturday, April 12

8:00-8:30am – Refreshments

8:30-9:45am - Session 6

<u>6. Shakespeare and Co.</u> (Beulah Williams Library Round Room)

Chair: Stephen Hamrick

Bob De Smith, Dordt University
" What cheer, my love?": Reading Hippolyta's Silence

Bruce Brandt, South Dakota State University
John Updike's Prequel to *Hamlet* [pp. 83–90]

Eric Furuseth, Minot State University
Reading Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*: Boundless Scholasticism

10:00-11:00 am – Saturday Morning Workshop: "Shakespeare Spaghetti" (Beulah Williams Library Round Room)

11:15-12:30 - Session 7

7. Politics and Poetry (CETL Pedagogy Room) Chair: Art Marmorstein

Jon Schaff, Northern State University
From Vindication to Irony: Critiques of Tradition in Wollstonecraft and Austen

Judith Dorn, St. Cloud State University
The Categorizing Muse: What Is Poetry about in Poems on Affairs of State? [pp. 91–107]

Coral Lumbley, Macalester College
Reading Blackness in the Poetry of Dafydd ap Gwilym" (Virtual Presentation)

12:30-1:30 - Business Lunch (The Den, in the Student Center)

FEATURED PRESENTER: TIM MOONEY

Tim Mooney, author of the "Breakneck Shakespeare" series of plays, is the featured presenter for this year's conference. Mooney will perform two one-man shows on Friday, April 11.

At 1 p.m., Mooney will give a performance for area middle school and high school students. "Lot o' Shakespeare" is a fast-paced performance featuring monologues from more than a dozen of Shakespeare's plays.

At 7:30 p.m., Mooney will perform "Breakneck Hamlet," a dynamic retelling that condenses Shakespeare's tragedy by cutting a dozen characters and three hours of introspective brooding. The result is a version of *Hamlet* that is intended to be as thrilling to modern audiences as the original was to Elizabethan theatergoers.

On Saturday morning, Mooney will host a "Shakespeare Spaghetti" workshop for conference-goers. Mooney will deconstruct a Shakespeare monologue, picking out the powerful parts and adding a little humor.

Mooney has been performing one-man-show versions of Shakespeare and Moliere for more than twenty years. For more information on Mooney, visit his website at timmooneyrep.com.

Kristen Brown
Assistant Professor of English
Northern State University
kristen.brown@northern.edu

"Take the law of the game":

Liminal Space and Ludic Transition in *Jacob and Esau*

Throughout history, societies have been persuaded to accept major transformations through various performative media. From didactic choruses to satirical stock characters to revolutionary pamphlets to today's viral social media campaigns that reshape cultural attitudes—the mechanisms of social persuasion have changed form, but their fundamental purpose remains constant: to guide communities through periods of transition. The Tudor interlude *The Historie of Jacob and Esau* represents a fascinating case study in this tradition—a theatrical work operating in a liminal moment of English history.

The author of the interlude identifies the play as not only a history, but a "newwe mery and vvitty comedie," suggesting a generic bricolage that intends to repeat (and revise), entertain, and moralize. The word *interlude* derives from the Latin *ludere*, meaning "to play." But exegetical works during the early Reformation, particularly public dramas depicting divine election, were no laughing matter for the playwright who offended the wearer of an often-tenuous crown. The precise historical context of the play's production is unclear though it was likely composed sometime during the reign of Mary. The Stationer's Register first records the existence of the play's production, however, around 1557-1558, the time that Mary's fraught reign was ending and her younger sister ascended the throne.[1] Naomi Pasachoff has suggested that the play was written "as part of a plan to overthrow Amary" (47). In a move to stabilize the nation and secure her newfound power, Elizabeth's Act of Uniformity in 1559 "forbid all manner of interludes to be played either openly or privately except the same be notified beforehand and

licensed," and further regulated content by forbidding that "matters of religion or of the governance of the estate of the commonwealth be handled or treated."[2] The only extant copy of the text is dated 1568 and includes a prayer for Elizabeth in its epilogue, wishing her "helth and welth night and day," a hyper-conscious act of obedience to the Queen Mother. The transition and securing of power, therefore, informed both the content and the context of the interlude.

The scant scholarship that exists for this play often pivots on arguments of who wrote the play, when it was initially written, and which theology it espouses.[3] Rather than reducing the play to a representation of the chosen Protestant elect's challenge to his Catholic reprobate brother, I would like to explore the liminal space created by the text's dichotomizing of tamed and untamed places in terms more socio-economic than religious. The play departs significantly from the story in Genesis by ascribing full agency to Rebecca—a likely figure for Elizabeth—and rendering Jacob a hesitant but ultimately obedient subject. During a time of enclosure movements when the landscape of labor was shifting, the internal stability of the proto-capitalist nation was determined by heterogeneous working subjects sharing a homogeneous vision of a national community. While Esau is isolated and deprived in the wilderness, Jacob is constructed and nurtured by the support of what cultural anthropologist Victor Turner has termed a *communitas.*[4] The social transition achieved through the transference of birthright requires the often-playful manipulation of materials that problematize the tamed/untamed dichotomy by inhabiting an interstitial space of domesticated production, like the smell of the garden's herbs, and the feel of the goatskin costume that allows Jacob's assumption of Esau's physical animality. These materials create new subject positions for a reconfiguring society—the interlude, as well as the Early Modern world that produced it, present a "floating world" between fixed worlds.[5]

By mapping liminal theory onto the text, I aim to nourish an appreciation of the text's serious yet playful transitional power. The text of the interlude is instructive in how to be a proper English subject, and it combines the ludic with the solemnity of scripture. Paul Whitfield White notes the Bible's rich narrative utility as "a storehouse of archetypal stories and characters which not only prefigured the temporal world but were a key to understanding and resolving its religious and political crises."[6] Neither brother is an exemplar of righteousness, though the playwright caricatures the brothers to further justify the deception; Jacob simply obeys his mother Rebecca, the authoritative elder and master of ceremonies, a near-equivalent to an absolute ruler—though her near-constant praying in the play reminds us that she is a mediator, albeit a chosen one.[7]

Within this framework of liminality, Jacob is a neophyte, "a kind of human *prima materia*—or undifferentiated raw material well-suited for transition and submission."[8] Jacob is an obedient and pliant subject to his mother who reconfigure the structures of power for the benefit of the community. This reconfiguration is achieved through the united efforts of what Turner calls "a *normative communitas*," a destructuring community that forms "under the influence of time, the need to mobilize and organize resources, and the necessity for social control among members of a group in pursuance of [these?] goals."[9] The *communitas* includes the servants, who figure dominantly in the play, and midwife, Deborah, who obey Rebecca without question and represent wise management of resources.

The concept of liminality, introduced and developed by anthropologist Arnold van Gennep (1909) has many interdisciplinary applications, particularly, for literature, as it was developed by Victor Turner. The liminal space is a "threshold," or *limen*, between different states, with the concept of a "state" usually referring to an individual's maturation, but with

broader applications to groups or even, in this case, a nation. The interlude presents a fluid space where "society becomes at once subject and direct object." Pasachoff argues that interpreting *Jacob and Esau* as a Tudor document reveals a great deal about the nature of society and politics in sixteenth century England.[10] An interpretive approach that engages the discourse of liminal theory with attention to the ways in which material culture subverts the power of birthright and calls for prudent resource management and financial governance, nourishes such a reading and appreciation of the text.

Time is an unseen agent throughout the play, and the urgent instability of time is a trope introduced from the play's opening lines, as Esau's servant, Ragau, prepares for the hunt. In the dark of night and surrounded by hunting hounds, he asks, "Now lette me see what tyme it is by the starre light?" (I.i). Within this nebulous space, Ragau directly addresses the audience with a lengthy rendition of the daily grind: "And there raunge we the wilde forest, no crumme of bread/From morning to starck night coming within our head, Sometimes Esaus selfe will faynt for drinke and meate: So that he would be glad of a dead horse to eat." He further laments that "we disease our tents and neighbors all" (I.i).These opening lines also introduce the woods-tent dichotomy that creates the liminal space, the in-between of semi-domesticated spaces that the *communitas* will employ for the transfer of birthright and transition of power.

Esau is an untamed and bestial figure associated with wilderness, isolation, and violence; he starves both body and mind while inflicting the same deprivation on his only companion, his unwilling and undernourished servant. Figured as a parody of masculinity, Esau introduces us to the character of his twin brother, Jacob, with descriptions of his effeminacy:

> Nay, he must tarrie and sucke mother's dugge at home:
> Jacob must be keepe home, I trow, vnder mother's wing,
> To be from the Tentes he loueth not of all thing.

> Jacob loueth no hunting in the wylde forest:
> And would feare if he should there see any wylde beast.
> Yea to see the game runne, Jacob would be in feare.
> (I.i)

The word "game" may be interpreted doubly, here, as the animals to be hunted and the trickery to be played upon Esau. There is irony, then, in Esau's command for Ragau to "take the law of the game." While Esau remains in the forest in search of wild game, the elaborate game being orchestrated by the *communitas* will result in the loss of his legal birthright. The game takes the law from him.

The twinship of brothers provides provocative possibilities within the conceptual framework of liminality and the establishment of divine favor. Rebecca describes the conception to Jacob: "I remember when I had you both conceiued,/ A voyce thus saying from the Lorde I receiued: Rebecca, in thy wombe are now two nations,/ On vnlike natures and contrary fashions" (I.iii). The multiple references to Rebecca's "pap" remind us of the twins' agonistic relationship. Esau and Jacob are oppositional characters presenting a structural tension, and Jacob's brief assumption of Esau's identity will provide the needed, and lasting, resolution.

Esau's character is both bestialized and bestializing. Isaac describes him as "rough of heare as any goate" (IV.ix). His speech is replete with animalistic and cannibalistic images. In contrast to his elder brother who "is gyuen to looce and leude liuyng," (I.ii), Jacob resides within the sphere of the civilized and nurtured. Within the double-figured womb of the tent in town, he is constructed through others' speech before he physically appears in the play. Jacob is wholly within a domestic and civilized space. Rebecca refers to him as "the most gentle yong man aliue" (I.iii). He is more constructed than constructing, a hesitant player thrust onto a stage who is willing to be "[God's] own vessel his will with me to do" (I.iii). Both Jacob and the tent are sites of cleanliness, vessels that are kept clean. The yonic associations can take on several

registers here, and Rebecca's command to "let no foule corner be about all the tent" (IV.iii) suggests a fear of contamination in terms of the body corporeal as well as the body politic.

Rebecca, as a mediator of the divine, instructs Jacob that he is the chosen elect and must "buie the right of eldership" (III.iii). In order for Jacob to claim Esau's birthright, he disrupts the hierarchy in two phases: 1) Esau must forfeit his birthright, and 2) their blind father Isaac must bestow the inheritance blessing on Jacob. Esau's hunger drives him to desperation and impulsivity, thereby accomplishing the first phase of transition in a scene that underscores the tamed/untamed, or—bestial and civilized—dichotomy:

> Iacob: Alack brother, I have in my little cottage,
> Nothing but a mease of grosse and homely pottage.
>
> Esau: Refreshe me therwithal, and boldly aske of me,
> The best thing that I haue, what soeuer it be.
> I were a very beast, when thou my life doest saue,
> If I should sticke with thee for the best thing I haue.
> (II.ii)

Esau's deprivation leads to his hyper-consumption, a scene not witnessed by the audience but instead recalled by the comic servant Mido, who laughs heartily as he describes it: "Since I was borne, I neuer see any man/so greedily eate rice out of a potte or pan . . .Ye never sawe a hungry dogge so slabbe potage vp" (II.iii). While spectators might appreciate the ludic double entendre in Esau's licking of "the potte," the literal outcome is that he has left his abused servant deprived while simultaneously subjecting himself to Jacob. The bitter pill, the danger of breaching the laws of inheritance, is sweetened by the folly. There is nothing to fear here.

Jacob's newfound reflexivity grants him agency—he is learning the laws of the game. In the classical structure of drama, this act of deceit is not climatic, but perhaps more accurately referred to as the *epitasis*, a necessary step toward the *catastasis* of Isaac's misdirected[11] but binding blessing. The necessity of the second phase suggests an uncertainty remains after the

accomplishment of the first. Jacob's supporting agents, especially Rebecca, provide the impetus for the radical shift and the collapse of the established order figured in both he and Issac. Though he is an obedient son in maternal terms,[12] he must dissolve Esau's power and appropriate his sensory significations to imitate wild(er)ness and deceive his blind father.

Jacob doubts his ability to play the substitute for Esau. He identifies their difference in tactile terms: "O swete and dear mother, this deuise is but vaine,/For Esau is rough, and I am smothe certaine" (IV.i). This liminal space "opens the door to a world of contingency where events and meanings—indeed 'reality' itself—can be moulded and carried in different directions" (Bjorn Thomassen).[13] Rather than offering an advantage, Isaac's blindness enacts a hyper-sensory response that renders the trickery fraught with uncertainty. Rebecca sends Mido to go "abroade vnto the flocke, and fet me kiddes twain" (IV.i) so that she can fashion a bestial suit for Jacob, a necessary stage in the transference. Mido must go abroad, away from the tents but not into the woods. The flock inhabits an interstitial space created by enclosure—separated from the wilderness and domesticated for the production of goods.

The *normative communitas* lies "beyond the structural" and consists of "concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individuals." The playwright's addition of the neighbor and servant characters further this analysis in two ways: 1) they perform the ludic, or playful, aspects of liminality, and 2) they become agents in a communal and enduring social change. Turner suggests that "liminality is a complex series of episodes in sacred space-time, and may also include subversive and ludic events."[14] These playful moments, however, are "intrinsically connected with the 'work' of the collectivity in performing symbolic actions and manipulating symbolic objects."[15] Should Isaac's auditory or olfactory senses lead him to question "what we haue thus farre begonne," Rebecca will let him "thinke it all for Esau to be done" (IV.iii). Upon

hearing the "yong kidde blea" (IV.vii), Isaac questions Mido as to the reason, and Mido manages to dissemble without explicitly lying. He is a clever player in the communal agency for the common good.

Other sensory materials instrumental in the deception of Isaac include herbs from the garden, a space that requires the female servant Abra to be away from home: "I must to the gardine as fast as I can trotte" (IV.iv). In the space that attempts to tame the flora for domesticate use, she gathers herbs in order to "make such broth, that when all things are in,/God almighty selfe may wet his finger therein./Here is time and percelie, spinache, and rosemary" (IV.v). According to Pasachoff, the maid's recitation of herbs is the first known list of garden vegetables in English verse.[16] It seems no accident that time, which up to this point has been an unrelenting abstract force and source of tension, becomes a tamed and tangible commodity in the plot to initiate Jacob's new identity as heir apparent. For Turner, liminality portrayed a "'realm of possibility' where new combinations of cultural givens could be playfully tested. Liminal situations and genres were 'seedbeds of cultural creativity.'"[17]

The repetition of the word "geare" throughout the text finds a culmination in the scene where Rebecca presents Jacob with his bestial costume, a conflation of the wild and tame. Jacob still inquires as to the purpose of the geare, to which Rebecca explains, its "fragraunt flauour shall coniure Isaac to beare thee his fauour." Though Jacob hesitates to assume the feel and scent of his elder brother, and he "love not to weare an other birdes feathers," he finally consents as Rebecca urges him on, ever aware of the insistence of time. Though Jacob's voice nearly (or perhaps, does) reveal his identity, Isaac feels the costume, tastes the herb-infused stew, and grants him his blessing. With the transfer of power accomplished, Mido delivers a soliloquy that justifies the deception of the *normative communitas*

Nay now olde maister Isaac (I warrant you)
Hath blessed Jacob in the place of Esau.
At home here with vs it is judged no small change
But a case wonderfull, and also very strange.
The yonger brother is made elder, and againe,
The elder must nowe serue the yonger as his swayne.
And from hensforth we must all make curtsie and bow,
Vnto maister Jacob, and not to Esau now:
And Esau him selfe must vnder Jacob bee,
At his commaundement euen as well as we.
But I care not I warrant you: for our householde
Loue Jacob better than Esau twenty folde.
None loueth Esau but for his father's sake:
But all good folks are glad Jacobs parte to take.
And now Esau no man wyll set a pinne,
But yonder he cometh, I will gette me in.
(V.ii)

For the remainder of the interlude, the tents are referred to as "home" and household," suggesting a full transition into the domesticated, civilized sphere. The society has moved into a new structural state.

When we read the interlude as one of transition between different states, as both "inter" and "ludic," the text becomes rich with nuanced possibility. During the chaotic instability of the Tudor line, a social drama mapping a reconfiguration of labor and renewed sense of community seems well-timed. Despite reductive tendencies to focus on the play's relation to religious doctrine, *The Historie of Jacob and Esau* provides valuable insights on the social, economic, and political forces that secured Elizabeth's throne for decades to come.

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[1] Paul Whitefield White, Introduction to *Reformation Biblical Drama in England: The Life and Repentaunce of Mary Magdalene, The History of Iacob and Esau: An Old-Spelling Critical Edition* (New York: Garland, 1992). White suggests that the play's portrayal of Jacob's seizure of power from his brother consequently echoes the doctrines of Marian exiles such as John Ponet, who justified rebellion against a legitimate ruler if it had divine sanction - a position which was diametrically opposed to the orthodoxy in England, which instructed obedience to a ruler under all circumstances (White, pp. xlii-xliii).

[2] From "An Act of Uniformity of Common Prayer and Service in the Church and Administration of the Sacraments," in *Statues of the Realm*, 11 vol. (London: G. Eyre and A. Strahan, 1810-1828), volume 4, par. 2: 365.

[3] Some critics believe the author to be Nicholas Udall (Bradner, Reston, Wilson, and Hunter); others believe the more revolutionary William Hunnis penned the play (Stopes, Bevington, Pasachoff, White). The revisionist story clearly propounds Protestant doctrine, most explicitly in its final scene, but how and to what extent is the subject of debate.

[4] Victor Turner defines *communitas* as a "model" for human interrelatedness which emerges recognizably in the liminal period . . . as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders (*The Ritual Process Structure and Anti-Structure*, 1969, 96). For the sake of this argument, Rebecca is the source of authority, or what Arpad Szacpolzai has termed the "master of ceremonies" (*Liminality and Experience: Structuring Transitory Situations and Transformative Events*, 2009, 141).

[5] Victor Tuner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Cornell UP, 1969), vii.

[6] Paul Whitfield White. Theatre and Reformation: Protestantism, Patronage, and Paling in Tudor England (Cambridge UP, 1993), 120.

[7] See note #4.

[8] Victor Turner, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage," *The Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society* (1964) Symposium of New Approaches to the Study of Religion, 49.

[9] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 132.

[10] Naomi Pasachoff, *Playwrights, Preachers, and Politicians*, 11.

[11] Bruce Herzberg, "Isaac's Blindness: A Case of Narrative Deficiency," *Narrative* 22.1 (Jan 2014): 94-109. Herzberg investigates the biblical text and argues that Isaac seems to know that he is being tricked but proceeds to bless Jacob anyways. The text of the play also leaves room for such an interpretation.

[12] Pasachoff points out significant departures from the biblical account that inform this characterization. First, Jacob, rather than Rebecca, has the idea to buy the birthright. Secondly, Jacob "harbors no such scruples" in wronging his brother, though the playwright inscribes these values into his character (*Playwrights, Preachers, and Politicians*, 1975) 30.

[13] From *Liminality and the Modern: Living Through the In-Between* Burlington (Ashgate Publishing Company, 2014):7.

[14] Victor Tuner, "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbiology" *Rice University Studies* 60.3 (1982), 59.

[15] Ibid, 64.

[16] Naomi Pasachoff, *Playwrights, Preachers, and Politicians*, 45.

[17] Kathleen Ashley, ed. *Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism* (Indiana UP, 1990), xviii.

Liz Fisher
Bemidji State University

Gadzooks!: Slang and Modernisms in Translation and Adaptation

Few Arthurian romances are as well circulated as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. For centuries we have upheld the Gawain-poet's narrative: that chivalry is an impossible expectation and therefore a farce. The poem has been translated and adapted over and over again. Just a few popular translations include Weston, Tolkien, Banks, Borroff, and Armitage. There are three film adaptations, from 1973, 1984, and 2021, as well as two TV adaptations from 1991 and 2002. There are also multiple stage and opera productions. *Gawain* continues to inspire contemporary artists and creators, with similar plot points and themes appearing in art, poetry, and other media, including an episode of Cartoon Network's *Adventure Time*. For the sake of this condensed research, I will focus on the Simon Armitage translation, the 2021 A24 film *The Green Knight*, and a poem written by Hannah Lewis and published in 2024.

Why do we take liberties with stories that are centuries old? Like language, stories are living as long as there is someone to listen, to read, to interpret. But we only continue to do so if we decide they still retain merit. We can't sell stories, literally or figuratively, if the audience can't connect, particularly if they can't access the language. One might argue that changing or translating the language reduces the original story to less than it was intended, but this excludes vast demographics from participating in the culture or message a storyteller or translator wishes to communicate. So, if we really care about the message of a story and want other people to be able to experience it, we have to make some changes. Modernisms are necessary in translation and adaptation as they allow us to maintain what we deem significant about the story, keeping it both relevant and accessible.

Modernizing the language of a text ensures that it not only remains in public circulation, but that it communicates a message in such a way that the modern audience can connect with it. During the English Reformation, translating Latin Masses into English meant

the common people could understand what was being spoken in church without completely denouncing the perceived significance of upholding the tradition of Latin Mass. Or, a more modern example, No Fear Shakespeare has for years allowed middle and high school students to more easily make connections between the original text of Shakespeare's plays and a modern, line-by-line translation. Unfortunately, sometimes when translating we sacrifice significant literary elements in the hopes that readers can, at the very least, understand what the text is literally saying.

The approach Simon Armitage has taken, however, is to take liberties that allow him to uphold, as closely as possible, the poetic style of the Gawain-poet. In his introduction, he states that "the percussive patterning of the words serves to reinforce their meaning and countersink them within the memory. So in trying to harmonize with the original rather than transcribe every last word of it, certain liberties have been taken… the intention has always been to produce a living, inclusive, and readable piece of work in its own right" (12). These "liberties" appear when maintaining the alliteration of the stressed syllables as well as the bob and wheel. Other times, the liberties occur as a result of the fact that the form cannot be perfectly imitated, and therefore whilst maintaining certain aspects of the form, others must be sacrificed in order to convey something close to the intended meaning.

Toward the beginning of the poem, right after the Green Knight's arrival, Armitage's translation says "Flustered at first, now totally foxed / were the household and the lords, both the highborn and the low" (l. 301-2). The first line upholds the alliteration of the stressed first syllable with the fs. "Flustered" and "foxed" can both be considered modernisms in this case, as neither would have been used in the language during the fourteenth century. Interestingly, fox, originating from Old English, influenced multiple Welsh and English derivatives — but a deep dive into etymology is for another research paper. Just down the page is another modernism, or even a slang phrase, though it wouldn't necessarily be considered part of

today's Gen Z slang: "No warrior worth his salt would be worried by your words" (l. 325). Again, the alliteration and stressed syllables, but also the modern phrase "worth his salt." By taking this liberty, Armitage is able to imply meaning that might be lost in a more literal modern translation, emphasizing the significance of courage and chivalry very early in the poem. Without doing so, the average modern reader might completely miss the subtext, the constant underlying pressure of the expectations of the chivalric code. Further modern phrases include "tricked out" in line 584, "rigged out" in line 1134, and "wolfed down" in line 1135, to name just a few. These simple phrases have early to modern origin, but contemporary connotations. "Tricked out" and "rigged out" suggest complete preparation, if not over-preparation, for the journey at hand. They are similar to "wolfed down" in that they suggest a masculine image or action, particularly with the voracity required to "wolf down" a meal. These modernisms allow the translator to literally translate this implicit meaning to the reader in a way he couldn't if he had chosen simply to translate, as perfectly or closely as possible, into modern English.

The alliteration of *Gawain* is not something solely upheld by translators of the text. A student, Hannah Lewis, wrote a poem inspired by the original, and similarly chose to imitate the strong use of alliteration as one of her more prominent literary devices. *Pentangles* was published in Bemidji State University's student literary magazine in the Spring of 2024. It reads:

> The knight grew weary under his girdle of green
> when stealth birthed sorrow and craft brought shame.
> He could not compose a symphony within the sham of chivalry
> for humans are much too capricious to create consonance of contradictions.
> Foolish though he was to reach for rash rewards
> More shameful still is the sin of hesitation.
> He won courage by keeping his word to wander in winter,
> yet at the falling of the blade? He flinched, faint-of-heart.
> His politeness to the Lady was pleasing and proper
> For beauty demands that he pretends passion.
> But true carnal pleasure makes a cuckold of the king, therefore
> fidelity to both the Lord and Lady is quite frankly a farce

> Kiss or be discourteous. Kiss and be killed.
> The knight warped green knows nobody can fulfill these impossible tasks of
> honor.
> Yet still Gawain must try
> To prove he is Arthur's faithful soldier
> Even if he proves valiance is a lie
> Is that something Arthur's court will ever choose to ponder?
> (*Milk Tooth* vol. 6, p. 104)

In this ekphrastic poem, or even adaptation, as we might call it, Lewis chooses to convey her interpretation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* not only through language and theme, but through form and structure. Each line is alliterative, and the bob and wheel at the end of the stanza marks the turn in the structure of the idea. The modern terms and phrases, contrasted with antiquated language, signal to the reader the centuries-old issue tackled in the original poem as well as the fact that the issue is still prevalent in contemporary society and culture. In some cases, the juxtaposition of language is part of the same alliterative phrase. In line three, "the sham of chivalry," "sham" is certainly a modernism, while "chivalry," though still part of the lexicon, is widely considered to be antiquated. Similarly, in line twelve, the phrase "frankly a farce" contains "frankly" as the modernism and "farce" as the archaism. Other modernisms include "lie" (l. 18) as opposed to "farce," "warped" (l. 14), "consonance" (l. 4), and the phrase "faint-of-heart" (l. 8). These more modern terms encourage the reader to build an image that computes with their common, daily language.

One which strikes me as particularly interesting is the use of "soldier" in line seventeen. While it does serve to rhyme with "ponder" (l. 19) in the wheel, it creates a compelling contrast with perhaps the more obvious or historically accurate choice, knight. Since knights no longer exist in a capacity even remotely similar to the time of the Arthurian legend, describing him as such would create an alienating image. "Soldier," however, allows the audience to form a contemporary image. Soldiers are drafted. Soldiers must follow orders. Soldiers are a small part of a larger system. They are expected to be brave, to be proficient, to kill. Soldiers are put on a pedestal of heroism. But if we have learned anything from the

modern and aspects of the postmodern movements, it is that soldiers often become disillusioned. They feel trapped by the system. They may not be able to live up to the expectations. Gawain was a knight, and in this adaptation, synonymous with our modern understanding of a soldier. Lewis' use of language primarily emphasizes this "impossible task" (l. 14), this "farce."

While Lewis and Armitage both modernize the language of *Gawain*, simultaneously keeping to different aspects of form and structure, this is not so simple a task when it comes to film adaptation. The language of film is only half dialogue, the rest relies on framing, visual composition, lighting, and action. For this reason, writer and director of A24's *The Green Knight*, David Lowery, also chose to take creative liberties. The dialogue is a sort-of "elevated" English, a storybook-esque style of language that gives the impression of antiquity while using mostly modern language. As listeners or viewers, we associate this style of speaking with "old" language, even though we can understand all of what is being said, and if not, the context clues are generally sufficient to fill in the gaps. This excerpt of the Green Knight's challenge, as the Queen, under a trance, reads his letter, is a distinct example.

> Oh, greatest of kings, indulge me in this friendly Christmas game. Let whichever of your knights is boldest of blood and wildest of hearts step forth, take up arms and try with honor to land a blow against me. Whomsoever nicks me shall lay claim to this my arm. Its glory and riches shall be thine. But... thy champ must bind himself to this: should he land a blow, then one year and Yuletide hence, he must seek me out yonder to the Green Chapel six nights to the north. He shall find me there and bend a knee and let me strike him in return, be it a scratch on the cheek or a cut in the throat. I will return what was given me, and then in trust and friendship, we shall part. Who, then, who is willing to engage with me? (IMDb.com)

Multiple contributing factors make this dialogue feel more archaic than it really is. It starts off strong with the vocative case, "Oh, greatest of kings," a formal greeting we do not often use unironically nowadays. Obviously, archaisms such as "thy" and "thine," "whomsoever," "hence," and "yonder" will stand out to the viewer, but other aspects are less noticeable. Dramatic phrases like "boldest of blood and wildest of hearts" elevate the language to the

storybook style. Additionally, deviations in syntax from our modern structure are obvious on the page, but when spoken, pass by so quickly the listener may not notice the impact on their perception of the language. Phrases like “try with honor to land a blow,” “be it a scratch on the cheek or a cut in the throat,” and “then in trust and friendship, we shall part,” also serve to create an illusion of antiquity. But the cleverness of Lowery’s writing is just that, the illusion. Presumably, every word in the quote is familiar to the modern English speaker; it only feels “old” because of certain sneaky linguistic tactics.

Now, with language out of the way, we can look at how these modern adaptations deal with different themes and images in *Gawain*. Much of Lowery’s *The Green Knight* focuses on Gawain’s actual journey to the chapel, whereas in the poem we are instead given summary, or the equivalent of montage. There is a montage of images as the year before Gawain’s journey passes. We are given two stanzas of the seasons changing, and when Gawain sets out, we are given three and a half stanzas summarizing his travels. In Armitage’s translation, “So momentous are his travels among the mountains / to tell just a tenth would be a tall order” (l. 718-19). Such a tall order that the Gawain-poet chose to summarize, prioritizing instead the “less mobile” days of Gawain’s story. Luckily for Lowery, a medieval romance relies on the journey, so he can spend something close to two thirds of the two hour and ten minute runtime focusing on Gawain’s actual travels before reaching Lord Bertilak’s castle.

This is a deviation, yes, but one of the many subjects the film highlights is time, or its passage and our perception of it. When Gawain first leaves Arthur’s castle, the camera follows him on the road and employs the longshot technique, notably without musical accompaniment, making the start of his journey feel endless. Another instance employing the longshot is when Gawain reaches the abandoned battlefield. The camera follows him as he avoids corpses and then pans out to encompass the entire scene, before returning to focus on

the hero when he meets a scavenger. Later, in the woods, after being beaten and tied up by a gang of thieves, a different technique is used. While Gawain is passed out, the camera pans in a circle. Grass and undergrowth sprout up and we land on Gawain's body completely decomposed, a percussive ticking sound underlying the birdsong. Looking up, the crowns of the trees surrounding the clearing form an almost perfect circular frame of the sky. The camera then turns in the opposite direction to return to Gawain in real-time. Perhaps Gawain's perception of his lost time in the liminal space of his journey, perhaps a mystical glimpse into a future in which Gawain does not decide to free himself of his bonds. Certainly a visual representation of the cyclical nature of time, of life and death and rebirth.

Either way, there is a mystical quality to the passing of time in Lowery's interpretation. In Bertilak's castle, rather than showing scenes of the Lord's hunt, Gawain instead scrutinizes a tapestry depicting a hunt. His time with the Lord and Lady feels much shorter than his journey, the opposite of the Gawain-poet's technique. The castle, in contrast to Arthur's, is mostly empty of other commonfolk but is brightly lit with natural light and, of course, much green decor. Finally, when Gawain confronts the Green Knight, the audience is presented with a full fifteen-minute flashforward scene in which he runs away from the Green Knight, returns home, becomes king, and commits numerous atrocities — essentially sacrificing goodness, morality, and happiness for the sake of chivalry. In the flashforward, Gawain is beheaded, and we suddenly return to a closeup of his face as he kneels for the Green Knight's death blow. Perhaps Gawain's perception of time prolonged before his impending death, perhaps a mystical glimpse into a future in which Gawain does try to evade his fate. In this way, the A24 film adaptation presents time to the audience as cyclical. Before Gawain's departure, we watch a puppet show in which the backdrop for the seasons passing is a circle, ending with the Green Knight chopping off Gawain's head. We move forward and return to the present multiple times. We linger where the poem does not, we insert montage or

shortened scene where the poem lingers. In short, to emphasize already-existing themes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Lowery has taken liberties.

There are, of course, other conspicuous deviations from the original poem which also serve to highlight the themes of *Gawain*. One such deviation is the addition of the character Essel, Gawain's lover. She represents reason, emotional guidance, and grounding. Essel is the first to suggest, to Gawain and in the film, that Gawain's desire, or even the social demand, to prove his honor and loyalty is ludicrous, that there are more important things in life than a dubious code. She asks "Why greatness? Why is goodness not enough?" But Gawain does not believe her. He has grown up surrounded by a social ideology which has hammered into him the significance of this code, that he is only worth something if he is completely without fear. Later, the fox, who, rather than being hunted and killed, becomes Gawain's companion, also urges Gawain to reject the code and his unavoidable death. These characters explicitly state that chivalry is a farce and that Gawain is a fool for buying into it.

Further character deviations stand out as significant in Lowery's adaptation. Lord Bertilak is not the Green Knight and Lady Bertilak is not Morgan Le Fay. In fact, the Lord and Lady are never even named as the Bertilaks. Rather, Gawain's mother acts as the representation of Morgan — she orchestrates the journey and predicts the future; significantly, she also weaves the girdle and gives it to Gawain. But, rather than presenting these rituals as negative, the film presents paganism as positive. The journey orchestrated by his mother urges Gawain to change the trajectory of his life, to reconsider his priorities, to learn true bravery. Without her hand in the matter, Gawain likely would have been doomed to a life eerily similar to the one in his pre-death vision.

In *The Green Knight*, we get to see the foes the poem only alludes to. One such trial is Gawain's meeting with St. Winifred. In the Armitage translation, this is only mentioned in passing as Gawain's "crossing at Holy Head" (l. 700), otherwise known as St. Winifred's

Well. In Welsh tradition, St. Winifred decided to become a nun, refusing the advances of her suitor, who, in response, cut off her head. A healing spring appeared where her head fell, and eventually her head rejoined her body, resulting in her reanimation. In the film, Gawain stumbles upon Winifred's spring and, further, stumbles into her seemingly abandoned cottage. She appears to him as a ghost, requesting that he help her retrieve her head from the bottom of the spring. Gawain asks, "What will you give me in return?" to which Winifred responds "Why would you ask me that?" This dialogue reinforces the idea proposed first by Essel, and later by the scavenger, that kindness — true chivalry — is not an exchange. Gawain cannot and should not expect favors or wealth in return if he truly values goodness.

And finally (though obviously not comprehensive), Lowery presents us with an ambiguous ending. Rather than the ending we are familiar with — returning home and wearing his scar and his girdle as symbols of his shame and failure — Gawain breaks free of his supposed vision of the future and asks the Green Knight to wait. He removes his girdle and states simply, "I'm ready now." Two hours of building tension release here, when Gawain, after failing to be chivalrous for his entire journey, chooses courage in the form of honesty, in the form of acceptance and responsibility. The Green Knight replies, "Well done, my brave knight. Now, off with your head." He smiles, and the film ends there. After all that, will Gawain actually die? Or did he pass the test and perhaps gain a chance to live? Or, did he pass the test and still have to face his death? Maybe, after two hours of symbolizing cycles and rebirth, he will be reanimated as St. Winifred was. Gawain recognized the impossibility of chivalry, the farce, as it were, but will the cycle continue for everyone else for centuries to come?

This is a question confronted in all the adaptations I have examined. In the ending of the original poem and Armitage's translation, and similarly in Lewis' poem, ending with the question "Is that something Arthur's court will ever choose to ponder?" (l. 19). We could

probably safely answer with yes, we have pondered it. But has it really changed? Can it change if we still rely on violence to uphold ideals of courage and bravery? Fortunately, that is not within the scope of my research. However, we can ponder it thanks to the modern translations and adaptations of a narrative posing such a question. By expressing the question through slang terms, phrases, and modernisms, translators and adapters have ensured that the language of *Sir Gawain* is accessible, entrenching and communicating its continued relevance even in contemporary culture.

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Susan H. Wood
Professor of English
Midland University

King John and Smart Power: A Lesson for Our Times?

During the Fall of 2023, I taught the play *King John*, by Shakespeare. I used, as part of my course materials, the Royal Shakespeare Company version on DVD. The RSC version was quite avant-garde, casting King John as a female actor (Rosie Sheehy; Pandulph also was cast as a female actor). Using a boxing scene for the standoff between the various royals at Angiers and a food fight wedding banquet for Blanche and Lewis the Dauphin certainly drew attention to some of the play's oddities (RSC "King John Review"). This campy production might lead one to assume the only way to add interest was to go avant-garde. On an earlier occasion, I witnessed an entire row of elderly patrons walk out of a student production of the play, fuming, "This is the worst thing Shakespeare ever wrote!"

King John in a lot of historical accounts is a bad king, someone who does not deserve to be king, or indeed, is not sure how to be king, as he might just be a puppet of his powerful mother, Eleanor of Acquitaine, and maybe does not even deserve to be a protagonist. However, I have been reading some criticism that suggests this is not always the way the play came across. According to at least 2 of my articles, he is an admirable character until he decides to kill Arthur, in which case, he becomes Macbeth-like and ruins himself (Bonjeur; Calderwood). Several critics are more fond of the play due to the characters of Constance, Arthur, and the Bastard—and I would have to say, they did catch my attention more at first (Malone; Hazlitt; Campbell; Swinburne; Furnivall; Corson; Lewes). However, I do not agree that the play is really about how the Bastard is the most legitimate king (Calderwood). In fact, Arthur, according to this play, is the most legitimate king, but Arthur IS a tragic figure, a rabbit in a trap, forced to live out the role his mother has composed for him, and which is the historical accident of his birth.

If that young Arthur sounds like King John, that is no surprise, for I see Arthur as a double to King John. Where King John attempts to use different kinds of power in order to solidify his position, Arthur tries to take the Cincinnatus route, and deny that he wants any power at all. Unfortunately, power has to do as much with what other people think of you as it does your own motives.

This concept is present in the idea of "soft power." Political theorist Joseph Nye coined the term in his "leadership" articles of the 1980s. I have consulted *The Power to Lead*, Nye's book, where he says, in the opening to the chapter, "Leadership and Power, "The dictionary tells us that power is the ability to affect the behavior of others to get the outcomes you want. You can do that in three main ways: you can coerce them with threats, you can induce them with payments, or you can attract or co-opt them" (27). Furthermore, Nye writes that "Contextual intelligence" includes bringing the right skills to the job and adapting to that workplace, as well as "sensitivity to the needs of others" (89). Many critics, seemingly worried over King John's lack of heroic stature, fuss about how he doesn't seem to know how to use his power, or that he deploys it at the wrong time. In fact, this is the point of the entire play: the audience is supposed to be able to analyze the problem of power through the interactions of King John and others.

King John has a problem: his right to the throne is a bit dubious (even his mother says so (I, I, 6)), and also, he is not Richard the Lionhearted, who would manage to wrangle a success out of this messy politics, and probably impress, rather than annoy, Pandulph. The power of kings, the power that the Bastard is so eager to exercise, is the violence of direct physical action, epitomized by beheading the Austrian (III, ii). However, the Bastard, for all his zeal and perhaps actual fitness to be the ruler, is quite happy, also, to agree to the divine right of kings that puts King John in charge (or DOES it?) In history, King John is known as one who lacks experience in the military, and might be a coward. By making John a female,

the RSC has allied King John with this idea of what he represents. It seems clear that Eleanor of Aquitaine and Constance have a different view of ruthless and direct power than the male characters. Women never get to kill people in battle (well, maybe Joan of Arc—another paper in the making!), so what they do is ally themselves with winners. In this way, Eleanor has used herself to parlay a long reign of her own with her various husbands and sons in the leading roles. Constance, who might as well be the Queen's double, is using her Arthur to claim the throne of England and challenge King John, her son Arthur's cousin. Neither the King of France nor King John really has the stomach for battle that the Bastard does. Both of them are eager to accept the alliance marriage between Lady Blanche of England and Lewis the Dauphin of France. This solution uses Blanche to bolster King John, but she acquiesces to this expansion of her own indirect power. Constance is absolutely livid, for this solution takes the sponsorship of the King of France away from her son, Arthur, and places it on the King's own son, Lewis. It basically takes Arthur out of the equation. Arthur does not care, and maybe is glad to be less a pawn (except this makes him not valuable at all). The Bastard is extremely angry, for he was spoiling for a fight. Is he looking for preferment? I think not. He is just a person that likes things clear and direct. The French are the enemy, so he wants to kill some. In this set of interactions, does King John worry about Angiers or Lady Blanche? Does he concern himself with the deaths that will occur in a battle? Yes, he does. Do Blanche and Lewis desire NOT to marry? No. All of this goes well, but only arises because Hubert suggests it. Hubert has more emotional intelligence than the king, who has the good sense to listen to him here, and use the "soft power."

Constance is in a way correct to be so upset, for without being a claimant to the throne, Arthur is waiting to be someone else's puppet, a situation that can and does put him in danger. King John fears the claims of the mild-mannered boy, and tells Hubert he absolutely must kill Arthur—or at least leads Hubert to believe that is his desire. We next hear that the

Prince has been abducted, and is in King John's control. These examples are an attempt to follow up the soft power (being friendly to Arthur) with coercion and force. King John no longer needs to use soft power on Arthur (though he can pretend to) because Arthur now has no status—it is safe to kill him now, or at least that is how King John seems to see it. Maybe King John sees Arthur as the more legitimate or likable heir, and thus, he must be deleted. Clearly, this is a major part of the deaths of the Princes in the Tower in *Richard III*. The circumstance has a similar overall reason, as well.

If we look to some much later plays, there are also odd similarities to *Coriolanus* and *King Lear*. Coriolanus' young son, Martius, is exactly like Coriolanus, trained to be a Roman soldier, he has been brainwashed to make Volumnia's (and thereby Rome's) will his own. As her son serves as an extension of her, Coriolanus' son (and Coriolanus himself) has no existence beyond what he can sacrifice himself for. The relationship compares to Arthur and Constance (though the spirited Arthur is not so keen to act out her will) as well as that of King John and Eleanor of Aquitaine. A woman uses power to make someone her proxy—this seems to be the co-opting game, and to me seems like Nye's description of soft power. It is this same scenario we see repeated in Eleanor and John, Constance and Arthur, and King John and Hubert. I think it important that John has traded places—he recognizes his mother's way is the safest way. Perhaps Kings are not supposed to use soft power, and women are not to use "hard" power? In *King Lear,* Goneril suggests plucking out Gloucester's eyes, and Regin verbally assaults Gloucester, but it is Cornwall who commits the actual violence. However, when a servant offers to aid Gloucester, Regin stabs him with a sword, killing him. In this case, I can say Regin has turned to hard power, and her additional taunt, that Gloucester's own son, Edmund, "hates thee" (III, vii, 89), seems designed to demonstrate her superior ability in using others, and his total failure. Co-opting, then, might mean someone likes you, or it MIGHT MEAN that person is afraid to defy you. Or, perhaps, you are allied,

at least temporarily, by self-interest. Similarly, it is Lady Macbeth who goads Macbeth to further violence when he would rather hang back. Exercising hard power may change people's views of one, and prevent one from using soft power again: this happens when Albany realizes what his wife has conspired to do, and, in fact, this is what happens to King John.

In King John, Arthur is not as brainwashed as Martius in Coriolanus, and Hubert is not as violent or angry as Regin and Cornwall. Arthur manipulates the basically devoted but moralistic Hubert into NOT blinding him or killing him. Arthur is seen as a threat, and he knows it, but he is just a boy. He is tired of being used by his mother. Hubert is being pushed by King John to kill Arthur, but the very visceral and cruel action of blinding requires he use force and makes him the purveyor of hard power, while King John uses the coercion, the way his mother and Constance have done everything. At the crisis point, Hubert may feel used--why is he stuck doing the morally repugnant act? He does not—he demonstrates disloyalty to King John, just as John's barons are about to do.

Coercion is still hard power. Soft power depends upon people liking you, upon people liking your culture and wanting to be like you. One example of this is the city of Angiers—claimed by both England and France, they claim to be English subjects, but are threatened with destruction by both kingdoms for the crime of not committing themselves to Arthur or John. The use of hard power in this case is silly and unproductive. The marriage solution is a fine solution, but it happens to not allow the powers that be to conduct their revenge and manipulation. It is fitting, in a way, that Pandulph comes in to disallow it. By styling King John as a heretic, the Catholic church can use its own brand of coercion to ensure that temporal rulers do not slip out of the noose of complete church control. Appealing to Lewis' greed, the Catholic Church (as Pandulph) tries to make a deal with him to destroy John and take the place of Arthur, owing allegiance to the powerful Catholic

church. In effect, the Catholic church is using Lewis to conduct "hard power" in their stead. Angiers runs the risk of being decimated, just like the barons of King John who present the Magna Carta take a risk, but as long as they remain unified, they have a possibility of defeating the powers against them.

Lewis's innocence, ironically, has been tempted and used by the church. This is why the church is portrayed by a woman in the RSC production, I believe. Lewis does not realize his potential to claim the throne of England until Pandulph suggests it. Again, someone who can use power and at the same time be more likable means that your soft power can be envied, and thus undermine you. This is essentially what happens when King John and the marriage of Lewis and Blanch impedes the plans of Constance for Arthur.

Even King John's fans are horrified that he might have ordered the death of the noble young Arthur. The Bastard, despite his desire to kill people, thinks that killing young boys, especially young boys of royal blood, is not sporting at all. Some want the Bastard to be the hero, but I am afraid he lacks emotional intelligence. In this matter, King John has miscalculated: no one approves of young princes being killed. In fact, it does not even matter that Arthur dies by accident. The orders to kill him were still signed by King John.

King John is not resolutely ruthless, but neither is he skillful in getting his way by getting people to like him. At the end of the play, only the Bastard seems to be loyal, and one really wonders why. John further irritates his nobles by crowning himself a second time and patching things up with Pandulph, which appears weakness.

When King John ends up dying, his own son, Prince Henry, takes over. The play reports John's death to be the plot of unhappy monks that poisoned him; however, the historical record suggests he died merely of a fever (Williamson 34). The church as murderers comes out of nowhere, though we know King John's irreligious attitude towards Pandulph and the Catholic church was--while understandable to the Elizabethan audience--

not a popular point of view in the play's own time period, as is evidenced by the King of France realizing that Pandulph is blackmailing him, and though he REALLY wants to support John, he would prefer not to be excommunicated. I think John defies the church because he lacks imagination—he doesn't want to accept their rules, and only goes back to their good graces as he weakens in other areas. My interpretation says King Philip wants to be friends with King John. That would support the idea of someone liking your culture and wanting to build similarity. France and England, in most of the history plays, are at odds. But in this case, Shakespeare makes them ready to be allies. I think this is Shakespeare taking a bit of an anti-war, anti-Catholic stance—this alliance could have worked well had the Catholic Church stayed away, and King John had not let his paranoia control him.

In the annals of political science, soft power is the attraction we may have to another culture, allowing us to ally with it, or at least not snuff it out of existence or be motivated to extinguish its badness through armed conflict or coercion, such as an embargo. Most people do not think of marriage as "soft power," but in the world of 13th century England, I would say it is! A marriage of Blanche and the Dauphin is a "diplomatic" solution that allows the war plans to be suspended. The Catholic church's inconvenient excommunication matter is not so much to start a war as to assert control over BOTH France and England and maintain its ascendancy over both monarchs. The RSC version of the play toys with this idea of "popularity" and cultural exchange through the modes of music, fashion, sport, and the pageantry of weddings and the re-crowning of King John (which is theatre, more than anything. It reminds me of the Miss America pageant.) Is there any real meaningful difference between France and England? It would appear the only difference is the failure of King John to support the Catholic church, and thus be facing ex-communication. This seems horrifying on one level, and on another (the level of Protestant Elizabethans), maybe an admirable focus upon principle. Admirable or not, King John has already sinned (by ordering

the death of Arthur—and the Prince's name itself is prescient as to his meaning within the English-ness of the play), and already John's nobles are traitorous, looking to speak to Lewis about some double-dealing.

Modern political science concludes that a successful regime will deploy "smart power"—a winning combination of hard and soft power to hold the tentacles of potential allies in a comfortable distant and undeadly stasis. King John fails to maintain Smart Power, and this causes his downfall, but perhaps this is because soft power really does not exist. Repeatedly, the scenario is that getting people to "like" you and ally with you is fake, and that what women and King John do is get someone else to deploy the hard power. This is also seen in King Lear. King John is a play about the power the king does not have. King John is not a good king. Neither is he a good man. He wanted his way. Lewis and Arthur suffered something of the same fate, and even the King of France sort of sympathized with him (he likely had the same complex of issues). The real power, as depicted in the odd female roles of the play, is behind the thrones in the women and the church, where soft power and indirect means are the only power. The play is a lesson to us all that hard and soft power may cancel one another out, and become NO POWER. It also highlights the problem with concentrating power in oneself—it is much safer to be a woman who uses others, or an institution that people are afraid to defy, such as the Catholic church. King John's poor use of power is what caused the barons to demand he sign the Magna Carta, thus ironically co-opting him and making the British monarchy a system in which power must be shared.

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Stella Meier
Northern State University
stella.meier@wolves.northern.edu

Beowulf in Pop Culture: An Analysis

Part 1: Introduction

Since the time of Tolkien, Beowulf has been criticized for being something that it is not. First-time readers often begin the text with a certain idea of what they believe it "should" be – a pagan text filled to the brim with deadly battles, bloody oaths, runes, and old gods. Others expect a factual retelling of real tribes, historical figures, and documented wars. And while the poem certainly includes some of those features, *Beowulf* does not attempt to disguise itself as something other than what it really is – a tragedy full of mystery, death, and loss. Its digressions and inset stories are essential in order to understand Beowulf's place in the Anglo-Saxon world, but when the poem is read in classrooms, those inset stories are often omitted. The poem's spiritual themes, often missing in action movie adaptations of *Beowulf*, help audiences understand the values of the author and of the time period. Characters like Hrothgar, who in the poem, are pious heroes that pray, honor oaths, and care for their compatriots, are reimagined as hypermasculine caricatures in modern translations. As such, audience expectations of *Beowulf*, despite the prevalent spiritual and melancholic tones, often lean towards the versions they see in non-scholarly settings. Pop culture and academic influences serve to shape audience perceptions of *Beowulf* and Old English Literature into an expectation of an epic marked by constant action rather than an elegiac poem filled with speeches and sermons that strives to connect the Pagan past with the author's Christian present.

Part 2: Expectations/Issues

The first question that needs to be answered, then, is what are those expectations? Modern readers imagine a historical document that accurately represents the lives of 5th century

Anglo-Saxons, an epic filled with sweeping battles, bloodlust, and stereotypical brother-in-arms masculinity, or a short poem that never strays from its subject (Brown 79-81).

American and Western values also influence what the modern reader expects from the hero Beowulf. 21st century audiences want a hero that reflects not only their morals but also the things they wish they had - whether that's beauty, athletic ability, or money (Rollin 433). We want complicated heroes that have to make difficult decisions but ultimately come out victorious (Livingston 3). These desires are revealed in modern day retellings of *Beowulf*, especially the 2007 version created by Zemecki. This film, which the directors encourage to be shown in classrooms, is a great example of how classic literature is popularized for mass media (Forni 45). Several important plot points from the poem are missing from the adaptation, as well as its tone of mystery and melancholy. Kathleen Forni believes these changes are influenced by three main factors: the success of past adaptations that have also cut similar scenes, the themes of popular films in the genre the film aims to imitate, and the desires of the movie's intended audience - teenage boys (49). Forni also emphasizes the film's "projection of modern values and assumptions about heroism, sexuality, fame, and monstrosity" (56). The hero Beowulf, in the eyes of modern readers, falls short of the desired hero's overtly masculine energy (Morey 486), and his lack of a successful and happy ending doesn't translate well to movies and TV shows.

What's more, without a deeper analysis of the text, young readers struggle with the messages in *Beowulf*. What significance does a teenager take from *Beowulf*, a story filled with unhappy endings and a hero who not only doesn't come out victorious, but ultimately leaves his people worse than he found them? Kristen Randle theorizes that "teenagers want someone to tell them that they can overcome the struggles in their life and create a happy ending" (126). It's understandable that readers crave something more from their stories. They want Good to succeed, even in the face of insurmountable struggles, and they want Evil

to lose. And while Beowulf may defeat many of his monsters, the poem is not about victory – instead it is a story of loss and destruction.

The question I intend to answer in this paper then, is not why readers are uninterested in *Beowulf* – current scholarship has pointed out several ideas. It is instead, what has convinced us that *Beowulf*, as it is, does not contain answers to our modern day questions? *Beowulf* gives us the story of a hero who acts in the face of overwhelming odds and with courage when he knows he cannot win. What has taught us that these lessons do not relate to our own lives? How do these influences distort our understanding of the poem into a document that modern adaptations need to save rather than a fully-fledged, deeply meaningful poem?

Part 3: Media Influences

Beowulf (2007) is a movie adaptation written by Neil Gaiman and Roger Avary and directed by Robert Zemeckis. While almost every character and plot point is changed, Hrothgar, the noble and religious king of the *Beowulf* poem, is one of the most thematically different.

In *Beowulf*, the poem, Herot is described as the mightiest of mead-houses. A place where Hrogthar wished to "share everything with young and old / that God had given him, except for the common land and the lives of men /" (71-73). Before Hrothgar ever speaks in the poem, the audience is told that "his beloved kinsmen eagerly served him / " and that "he remembered his boast; he gave out rings, treasure at table /" (65-66, 80-81). The celebrations in the hall are joyful and a harp is said to have been played (88-89). And while the poet is certainly frugal with his sketch of the hall and its occupants, one cannot infer anything other than a Christian affair, in keeping with the five references to God in the first 80 lines of the poem. Any movie portrayal must use some imagination to bring Herot and Hrothgar to life, but it is hard to find any of the poem in Zemeckis's interpretation. .

The first difference between *Beowulf* and Zemeckis's *Beowulf* is that the movie opens onto Herot. There is no mention of Scyld Scefing, no descriptions of good kings, and no accounts of lineage. When we first meet Zemeckis's Hrothgar, it is not through a narration of his battle deeds, his honor, or generosity with what "God had given him /" (72). Rather, the scene opens with Hrothgar being carried into the room in a palanquin, calling for mead, and dressed in a toga . Zemeckis also interprets an unhappy marriage between Hrothgar and Wealhtheow, something that is not hinted at in the poem. Instead of the poet's description of the hall, Hrothgar instead speaks:

> One year ago, I, Hrothgar, your king, swore that we would celebrate our victories in a new hall, mighty and beautiful. Have I not kept my oath? In this hall, we shall divide the spoils of our conquests, the gold and the treasure. And this shall be a place of merriment, joy, and fornication. (2:00 - 2:23)

All movie adaptations take liberties with characterization, and if Zemeckis was merely trying to create an interesting action movie, there would be no problem. The issue comes when the movie is promoted to teachers as a way to teach *Beowulf* in the classroom. Before the film was even released, educators were sent study guides and copies of the movie. Zemeckis's *Beowulf* takes extreme leisure when following the poem's plot and does not even attempt to translate the poem's melancholy, inset stories, or struggle to reconcile pagan heroes with Christian values. For audiences who watch this movie without having read the poem, *Beowulf* is a pagan story, with characters who have children with monsters, disrespect their wives, keep slaves, and reflect stereotypical views on the past.

Part 4: Academic Influences

Outside of movies, many people's first literary introduction to *Beowulf* is in their high school classroom. This first introduction, however, is not entirely reliable. The text students read is incredibly shortened - some teachers remove all of the inset stories and digressions, as well as several important speeches - and divided into episodes revolving around battle.

In an example abridged version of *Beowulf*, taught by Neshaminy School District (a school in Langhorne, PA), the text is divided into eight parts: Grendel, Beowulf, The Battle With Grendel, Grendel's Mother, The Battle With Grendel's Mother, Beowulf's Last Battle, The Death of Beowulf, and Mourning Beowulf. All of the inset stories are cut out and the story starts with a description of Grendel, highlighting its focus on heroes and monsters rather than its mysteries. Hrothgar's sermon in the poem lasts for 84 lines and includes a warning for Beowulf:

> Defend yourself from wickedness, dear Beowulf, best of men, and choose better, eternal counsel; care not for pride, great champion! / The glory of your might is but a little while; too soon it will be that sickness or the sword will shatter your strength…or the light of your eyes will fail and flicker out; in one fell swoop death, o warrior, will overwhelm you. (1758-68).

His words are full of religious duty, honor to one's people, and a reminder of what makes a good king. In the abridged version, Hrothgar's sermon is missing with only a short summary in its place. "With Grendel's mother destroyed, peace is restored to the land of the Danes, and Beowulf, laden with Hrothgar's gifts, returns to the land of his own people, the Geats" (25). The exclusion of this speech means that the students reading the poem get no insight into how the characters reconcile the paganism of their time with the Christianity of the poet, and how Hrothgar, Beowulf, and their people viewed pride and greed. Instead, they receive a surface-level retelling of Beowulf's battle deeds and little else.

High school teachers have a multitude of reasons for shortening the text their students read; they may not have enough time to read the entire 3,000 line poem or they may not have

the option to, with many schools providing textbooks only containing the abridged version, and getting students interested in even the battles of *Beowulf* can prove challenging. The problem, though, is that when students read this battle-focused, abridged version of *Beowulf*, they are missing what makes the poem unique. The melancholic and mysterious tone of the poem is stripped away, leaving readers with only quickly moving fight scenes. The author's interest in the conflicts between Christianity and paganism and his attempts to reconcile the two are absent from classroom discussions. The focus of teachers and students is on heroes and monsters, instead of on what the poem tries to convey as important, bravery in the face of defeat. In short, students are exposed to the Hollywood version of *Beowulf,* and rather than questioning the mysteries of the poem, their modern day views on heroes, monsters, and victory are confirmed instead of challenged.

Part 5: Conclusion

What does it matter if pop culture adaptations of *Beowulf* portray the poem as something that it is not? People who watch the movie *Beowulf* probably don't care about literary accuracy, and unless those high school students reading *Beowulf* adaptations are planning on going to college for English, they're most likely never going pick up *Beowulf* or any Old English poem ever again, so why does it matter if they think it's an action tale?

In the 21st century, there are a thousand action movies. There are hundreds of epic poems like *The Saga of the Volsungs* or *The Odyssey*. There is only one *Beowulf*. There is only one Old English poem of the length and the scope of *Beowulf*. *Beowulf* is the only fictional Old English poem that attempts to reconcile paganism with Christianity, all while preserving dozens of other Old English myths. To smooth *Beowulf* over is to ignore the questions the poem is asking. Without the inset stories, without the characters who struggle

with their fate, and without the mysteries of both the poem and its hero, the intricacies of the poem are lost. It is no longer unique, and it is no longer worth reading.

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Jainab Tabassum Banu
PhD Candidate, Rhetoric, Theory and Culture
North Dakota State University

Reading Blake through Burke's Screens:

Dramatism in *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

William Blake (1757–1827) is an exemplary Romantic poet celebrated for his poetic brilliance and his ability to intertwine human nature with both the natural and divine realms. His poetry, though simple and rhythmic in structure, is rich with symbolism and multilayered meanings as they offer multiple possible interpretations. Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1794) is one of his most renowned works, illustrating the tensions between purity and corruption, joy and suffering, and faith and doubt. Originally published as two separate books, *Songs of Innocence* (1789) presents a pastoral, childlike, and joyful perspective, while *Songs of Experience* (1794) shifts toward a darker, more anxious tone, confronting the harsh realities of the world. By juxtaposing these contrasting poetic voices, Blake offers a more nuanced critique of the societal norms, spiritual beliefs, and the complexities of human nature. His linguistic and rhetorical choices do more than describe reality; making his work an ideal subject for rhetorical analysis.

In my paper, I have applied Kenneth Burke's rhetorical theories, particularly his concepts of terministic screens and dramatistic pentad, to analyze how Blake's poems from *Songs of Innocence and Experience* construct and mediate reality. By viewing Blake's contrasting poems "The Lamb" and "The Tyger" through Burke's theoretical lenses, I examine how Blake's poetic language functions as an instrument of perception and persuasion by revealing the intricate balance between innocence and experience. I will also highlight How language functions as an instrument of perception and persuasion.

In the exploration of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, scholars have employed a variety of theoretical frameworks to analyze the complex relationship between

language, perception, and morality. Romantic readings of Blake often highlight his focus on imagination and his critique of reason, especially within the context of the Industrial Revolution. Psychoanalytic literary critics, on the other hand, delve into the unconscious desires and psychological tensions expressed in Blake's vivid poetic imagery. For instance, Serenah Minasian explores the psychological duality in Blake's work, writing, "Part One would be the dream and Part Two would be the nightmare that is truly reality" (7).

Feminist theory has also been instrumental in examining Blake's representations of gender and his subversion of traditional patriarchal norms. Charles Moffat, for example, observes that Blake, being deeply conscious of the natural environment, recognized the ways in which gender roles were socially constructed. He writes, "Blake believed it was the ignorance of the older generation that socially conditions children to become a specific gender role. He saw this as chopping off their wings and their sexual freedom" ("William Blake's Ecofeminism"). Marxist critics have also contributed to the discussion of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* by focusing on his critique of capitalism, social inequality, and the dehumanizing effects of industrialization. Laura Ellen Rutland emphasizes this point by stating, "Blake is piecing together working-class Protestant thought and more middle-class and upper-class aesthetic forms in an attempt to protest church and state abuses without losing the imaginative richness of the religious language that he loves and knows to be familiar to people of all social classes" (10).

* * *

All these approaches offer important insights into Blake's social and political commentary but often overlook the rhetorical dimension of his work, specifically, how Blake uses language to shape the audience's perceptions and provoke critical reflection on power, creation, and morality.

In my paper, as a rhetorician, I offer a unique contribution by applying Kenneth Burke's concepts of Terministic Screens and Dramatism to "The Tyger" and "The Lamb" to explore how language, through symbols and metaphors, shape perception. Through Burkean screens, Blake's poetic vision is not merely a reflection of innocence or experience, but a deliberate act of linguistic construction, framing the world in ways that direct the reader's emotional and philosophical responses. By focusing on the rhetorical act in Blake's poems, my analysis brings new clarity to the moral and existential tensions by providing a fresh perspective on his engagement with creation, power, and human agency. I also examine how Blake dramatizes human condition by positioning divine creation and poetic voice within a rhetorical framework.

Given my purpose of exploring the rhetorical construction of innocence and experience by examining how literary language shapes perceptions of innocence in "The Lamb" and experience in "The Tyger", I argue that Kenneth Burke's concept of Terministic Screens serves as an effective theoretical framework for analyzing Blake's use of metaphorical language. Burke's concept of Terministic Screens explores how language filters and shapes human perception. As he states, "we must use terministic screens, since we cannot say anything without the use of terms" (121). By selecting specific terms, writers emphasize certain aspects of reality while simultaneously deflecting others, thereby constructing a particular perspective. By applying this framework to Blake's poems, we can see how his poetic choices guide readers to perceive innocence and experience through specific rhetorical and symbolic screens.

Additionally, while terministic screens serve as my primary analytical tool, I have also incorporated Burke's dramatistic pentad to explore the dual nature of existence in Blake's work. Burke describes Dramatism as a method of analyzing human motives and relationships by examining how individuals present themselves through language and action (135). By

using dramatistic pentad, I have investigated how Blake's use of poetic language makes meaning and shapes readers' perception, how the actions are framed through language, and how these dramatizations reveal deeper philosophical inquiries into innocence and experience.

With these theoretical lenses in place, I now turn to an analysis of "The Lamb", a poetic representation of innocence that frames divinity and creation through a gentle and nurturing perspective. "The Lamb" is one of the most widely read poems from *Songs of Innocence* which embodies Blake's exploration of innocence, creation, and divinity. Divided in two stanzas and written in a simple, childlike tone in a pastoral context, the poem poses profound questions about the nature of existence and the identity of the Creator.

Blake uses a gentle, and nurturing screen to depict the world as harmonious and innocent just like a child. As you can the first stanza on the screen,

Little Lamb who made thee
    Dost thou know who made thee
Gave thee life & bid thee feed.
By the stream & o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing wooly bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice!
    Little Lamb who made thee
    Dost thou know who made thee

The opening stanza invites readers into a seemingly simple inquiry in a childlike tone: "Little Lamb who made thee / Dost thou know who made thee". However, through a Burkean screen, this question becomes a profound act of rhetorical framing. The tone is childlike which sets the speaker as a curious and innocent child who is eager to know who creates the

“little Lamb”. By using language, Blake displays the selection of innocence and purity and deflection of complexity and doubt. The selection of such words offers the readers a screen that filters other materialistic needs out of the frame.

The repeated question in the last two lines of the first stanza emphasizes a continued curiosity of the child narrator and his urge to look for a divine creation rooted in gentleness and nurturance. This constructs a screen that filters perception through an idealized innocence and also prepares the reader to find answers in the next stanza. In the final stanza of “The Lamb”, Blake shifts from questioning to declaration,

Little Lamb I’ll tell thee,
    Little Lamb I’ll tell thee!
He is called by thy name,
For he calls himself a Lamb:
He is meek & he is mild,
He became a little child:
I a child & thou a lamb,
We are called by his name.
    Little Lamb God bless thee.
    Little Lamb God bless thee.

The transformation from inquiry to statement is interesting. This rhetorical shift can be understood through Burke’s concept of terministic screens, as the speaker’s language now actively selects innocence as a reflection of divinity while deflecting any moral ambiguity. There is no confusion, no blurriness and no ambiguity in the childlike inquiry. By drawing a parallel between the lamb and creator, the child narrator establishes a screen that frames innocence as a divine attribute. Though the child narrator does not mention Christ, Blake’s target audience, the Christian English readers in the Romantic era, perceive the creator as

Christ, the God. It also celebrates the oneness, wholeness and unity between the creator and His creations.

From the narrator's point of view, throughout the poem, analyzed through Burke's dramatistic pentad, the child narrator as the agent moves from a seeker of knowledge to a revealer of divine truth. The act of revelation occurs within a pastoral scene of nature that symbolizes simplicity, innocence, and spiritual purity. The agency of the narrator suggests authority derived from spiritual insight with the purpose of affirming the connection between innocence and divine grace. The purpose is twofold: to understand the origins of innocence and to affirm its divine connection through the symbolic image of Christian God as the Lamb.

While "The Lamb" embodies innocence and gentle divinity, "The Tyger" presents a contrasting exploration of creation, evoking a sense of awe and fear that challenges the simplicity seen in "The Lamb". One of the most anthologized English poems, "The Tyger" is also a symbolic poem. It consists of 6 stanzas and 24 lines. The tiger in "The Tyger" is the symbol of both beauty and destruction. The complexity in ideas and understanding are poetically embedded in the stanzas. Written in trochaic tetrameter, "The Tyger" carries a rhythmic quality similar to a nursery rhyme like "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star," establishing a familiar screen for Blake's readers. Unlike "The Lamb", "The Tyger" begins with an inquisitive and fearful tone. Blake writes,

> Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
> In the forests of the night;
> What immortal hand or eye,
> Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In the first stanza, Blake employs a powerful and familiar rhythm and immediately draws attention to the awe-inspiring and terrifying nature of the creature. The use of "burning bright" and "forests of the night" contrasts light and darkness, evoking the duality and

complexity of the creation. Unlike the lamb, the tiger is a complex creature which embodies both beauty and danger in it.

In the second and third stanzas, the narrator continues his inquiry as Blake deepens the sense of awe and mystery surrounding the Tyger's creation. The second stanza, "In what distant deeps or skies / Burnt the fire of thine eyes?", casts the "Tyger" as a cosmic force, linking its fiery gaze to distant, perhaps divine realms, while questioning the daring creator who seized such power. This image, shaped through a terministic screen, positions the Tyger as both magnificent and dangerous. The third stanza continues this line of inquiry, focusing on the creature's physical and emotional formation, "what shoulder, & what art / Could twist the sinews of thy heart?", blending strength and emotion to emphasize the Tyger's complexity. Together, these stanzas present the Tyger as a symbol of fearful beauty, reflecting the darker tone of *Songs of Experience*.

In the fourth and fifth stanzas, Blake intensifies the tension of the Tyger's creation by invoking industrial and cosmic imagery. Through Burke's concept of terministic screens, the forge-like language such as "hammer," "chain," "furnace" frames the Tyger as a product of industrialization, reflecting the anxieties of the Romantic era. This mechanized portrayal complicates the creature's identity, suggesting it is not purely natural but shaped by human-like force. The imagery then shifts in the fifth stanza to a cosmic register, where stars "throw down their spears" and "water heaven with their tears," introducing a divine sorrow. The final question, "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?", invites readers to view the Tyger through the lens of innocence, contrasting it with the gentle Lamb. Together, these stanzas highlight the duality of creation, emphasizing the interdependence of innocence and experience, light and dark.

As the poem ends, with the repetition of the first stanza, the questioning begins anew, suggesting that the tension between innocence and experience is an ongoing and unresolved cycle which is a fundamental part of the human condition. Živković writes, "This general idea in Blake's poem is being accomplished by means of a cyclic composition, considering the fact that the first and the last verse in Blake's poem "The Tyger" are identical.

Both "The Lamb" and "The Tyger" describe creation, but the linguistic and symbolic choices direct audience perception differently. The "lamb" is gentle, simple, pastoral whereas the "Tyger" is fiery, complex, and powerful. The metaphorical and linguistic contrast reveals how perception of the world is shaped by the terms we use. This shows a Burkean insight into language's power over reality. The rhetorical strategies employed in both poems, framed by Burke's dramatism, highlight the tension between these dualities and suggest that creation itself is a complex and multifaceted act. By engaging with these contrasting visions of the divine, Blake challenges readers to confront the inherent contradictions within existence. Through this lens, Blake's poetry emerges not just as a reflection on innocence and experience, but as an invitation to explore the complexities of creation, and the human condition.

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ShyAnn Springer
Graduate Teaching Assistant
South Dakota State University

The Self-Destruction of Contradiction

Introduction

For the Norse Pantheon, nobody is more disliked than Loki himself. The other Aesir consider him "Slanderer of the Gods, the Source of Deceit, and the Disgrace of All Gods and Men," yet they continue to travel with him, ask his opinion, and entertain his antics (Sturluson 39). To them, Loki is solely responsible for Ragnarok and the death of everyone and everything. While Loki does orchestrate Baldr's death, which ultimately leads to Ragnarok, the other Aesir are not as blameless as they make themselves out to be. Scholars have many different theories about Loki and his purpose in the myths, especially concerning the end of the world. For example, Jens Peter Schjodt considers Loki as the one who brings evil to the world and introduces "moral disintegration" (Qtd. in von Schnurbein 115). This perspective doesn't take into account the behaviors of the others as well. He could make a case that Loki corrupted them. But that still doesn't erase the other Aesir's part in the end of the world. The closest person I've seen to what I'm getting at is Mathias Moosbrugger when he says that Snorri introduced Loki to the Baldr story to be a satanic character, explaining the end of the world and drawing attention to "the breakdown of consensus among those responsible for maintaining the order of their world" and highlighting Baldr's death as a "collective incident" (113). I agree with his statement, but I think this "collective incident" goes much further than just the Baldr story. The end of the world is certainly horrible and Loki's actions do have consequences, but can the other Aesir escape blame when they clearly know the future and frequently participate in the same behaviors as Loki? Loki's antics highlight the other gods' failures and contradictory natures, ultimately leading to their mutual self-destruction. All the gods, including Loki, are equally responsible for Ragnarok.

How I Will Use Loki

First, I would like to reiterate that Loki is not blameless for the end of the world. He is a flawed character who has killed others, stolen, and gone back on his word. Loki certainly makes mistakes and causes problems, but he also fixes them. *The Prose Edda* even specifically states that he "constantly places the gods in difficulties and often solves their problems with guile" (Sturluson 39). He is not reliable, yet he is a frequent addition to most stories in *The Prose Edda*. Granted, he has gotten into trouble in a good amount of these, but sometimes he is blamed and sometimes he doesn't do anything and is simply present. He is not a perfect character by any means, but his actions provide a lens for viewing the rest of the Pantheon. Loki is considered the worst of the worst, so he provides a touchstone to examine the other gods' behavior and weaknesses. This makes it possible for readers to draw similarities between their actions and note that the other Aesir often participate in the same behaviors that they condemn Loki for. I will be organizing my paper around the description of Loki in *The Prose Edda* and breaking down how each of these epithets can be ascribed to the rest of the pantheon.

Main Point 1 – Slanderer of the Gods

First, I will tackle the accusation of "Slanderer of the Gods" (Sturluson 39). Granted, the gods aren't going to be slandering themselves, but they do participate in flyting with Loki in the *Lokasenna*. A flyting is a verbal insult fight, usually given in verse. Loki's verbal smackdown of the gods and goddesses shows a bunch of pent up tension, especially because while Loki insults the gods, they insult him right back in their defense. The instance is reminiscent of any petty fight between siblings. Every side holds a little truth, but is also inevitably complicit in

the same crime. The gods seem to want to distance themselves from Loki's behavior, yet they actively participate in it while defending themselves by taking their shots against Loki.

First, the flyting happens as a result of Loki killing a servant and getting kicked out of the family dinner. Before he has even entered the hall for the second time, Loki asks Eldir what the other Aesir are talking about over their meal. Eldir tells him "no one has a friendly word for you," which is in direct correlation to him killing a servant and getting kicked out the first time (*The Poetic Edda* 81). Obviously, Loki arrives to a less than pleasant welcome when he returns and it takes him reminding Odin that they are sworn blood brothers for him to finally get a seat because he had to force Odin to recognize the oath they made together. The gods have no problems with breaking their oaths when it suits them, but they also use them when necessary to get what they want. I'll go into more detail in the next point about oaths and the breaking of them. The big thing here is that the others have valid reasons to pick fights with Loki because he did just kill someone and uses his insults to slander them, but they do partake despite wanting Loki to stop. Beyla states that Thor will "bring peace to the one who badmouths here / all the gods and men," easily forgetting that they are also badmouthing Loki (*The Poetic Edda* 90). I'll point out one example that highlights one of the more contradictory insults they place against Loki and vice versa.

The other members of the pantheon frequently ridicule Loki for shape-changing into women or participating in womanly roles, such as when he births Odin's horse, Sleipnir. It is not surprising that the topic comes up during the flyting. Odin, his own blood brother, states "yet eight winters you were, beneath the earth, / a milchow and a woman, / and there you bore children, / and that I thought the hallmark of a pervert" (*The Poetic Edda* 84). Carol Clover discusses in her article "Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe" that manliness was often a subject in insult fights during the Middle Ages. The absolute worst insults are those that refer to a man as someone who has been penetrated

(Clover 8). Clover states that there was even a code that made it illegal to use insults like this and if someone did, they had to pay the insulted party if the insult insinuated that "he has given birth to a child . . . [or if he] compares him to a mare . . . [or] with the female of any kind of animal" (8). Odin does this by referring to Loki as a milchow, which is a milk cow. James Frankki states that Loki was milking cows and was ridiculed because it is a woman's duty (429). I believe Odin refers more to Loki's motherhood, rather than milking a cow, but both signify femininity. Therefore, this is a particularly low blow for Odin to bring out during the flyting because it is basically the worst insult someone can give another during this time. This insult goes a step further and is particularly pointed because Loki genuinely is a "penetrated man" because he gave birth to Sleipnir.

In response, Loki flings a similar insult at Odin, also intending to insult him deeply. He states "But you, they say, practiced *seid* on Samsey, / and you beat on the drum as seeresses do, / in the likeness of a wizard you journeyed over mankind, / and that I thought the hallmark of a pervert" (*The Poetic Edda* 85). Carolyne Larrington mentions in her notes that "the use of drums and cross-dressing seems to by typical of *seid*, a type of magic said to be practiced by the Vanir, especially Freyja" (295). While Odin isn't a penetrated man and doesn't bear a child like Loki, this insult does point out the contradictory nature of Odin's own insult. While Loki can physically change shape, Odin is participating in an act that is described as womanly work and through his cross-dressing. Clover quotes other scholars and discusses how accusing men of knowing witchcraft is equally offensive and illegal because they fall under a related category to the insult given to Loki (9). While their insults aren't as equal in offense, Odin is just as guilty as Loki of fulfilling a female role and being the one to instigate a highly offensive direction for the spat they have. Nobody other than Loki comments on this moment of contradiction, likely because of Odin's position as the highest god.

Main Point 2 – The Source of Deceit

Now, we'll move into the second accusation. As stated earlier, the gods refer to Loki as "the Source of Deceit," yet they are equally deceitful when it serves them to be (Sturluson 39). First, Loki is known to go back on his word, such as when he gets out of getting his head cut off by using trickery and clever word choice. Loki is probably most known for being deceitful, but he is not the only one who participates in deceitful acts. The gods also do it frequently, but their deceitful actions are pardoned because they simply get to make the rules. It is considered morally corrupt for Loki to break his promises, yet not for the other gods. This implies a double standard because oath breaking was a huge deal during this time period. As Moosbrugger states, oaths are "one of the most important instruments of social consensus in societies without central jurisdiction" (114). Therefore, breaking an oath is considered a serious offense. To highlight this, I will bring us to one of the bigger examples of deceit.

I already talked about the Sleipnir story a little bit, but let's take a look at the situation that led to his birth in the first place. The Aesir make an arrangement with a giant who offers to build a wall to protect Asgard in exchange for Freyja's hand in marriage and the sun and the moon if he finishes on time. The gods agree and allow him to use his horse, fully underestimating the role the horse will play in the completion of the wall. The Aesir clearly agree to this arrangement because they assume they will get a free wall out of it with no loss on their end, but the horse complicates things by being strong and speeding up the process. When it looks like he will finish on time, the Aesir make Loki do whatever he can to get out of this arrangement because they believe it is Loki's fault. Loki is the one who said that it was alright for the giant to use his horse, but Loki only has final say in this because they consult him. He is vilified even though they asked him to give his opinion. As a result, Loki

shape-changes into a horse and tempts the builder's horse away, resulting in a pregnancy where he births the eight-legged horse, Sleipnir. This is a double-example of deceit because not only are the Aesir breaking an oath they never intended to properly honor, but Loki also has to change his true shape to stop the building. Once the giant builder finally goes into a rage, only then do they acknowledge breaking their oath even though they had been trying to break it all along by sending Loki to stop the progress and never intending to follow through on the deal.

This example shows just how untrustworthy and corrupt the Aesir are. The other Aesir vilify Loki and others even though they make the same actions. They consistently go back on their word or never intend to keep it in the first place, which is interesting considering they are the beings all others look to. While scholars often see Loki as the moral breakpoint, perhaps they should look to the other Aesir as well. They like to present themselves as better than Loki, but they make similar choices and don't take responsibility for their actions. As Stefanie von Schnurbein states, "Here, Loki is identified as the culprit even though the suggestion to surrender the sun, the moon, and Freya as payment to the master builder had not previously been identified as Loki's advice" (121). Even if Loki were the one to suggest the payment, there is nothing stopping the other Aesir from disagreeing with the terms or even stating that the giant shouldn't use his horse. It is foolish of them to agree to surrender the sun, moon, and Freyja for something like a wall that they could have approached someone to build and offered up their own price. Perhaps the animosity felt towards Loki is more because Odin knows he will be the one to bring Ragnarok around and he is already being punished for something that hasn't happened yet.

Main Point 3 – The Disgrace of All Gods and Men

Finally, this brings us into the third accusation of "the disgrace of all gods and men" (Sturluson 39). For this one, I will primarily be discussing how the gods failed both themselves and all the other beings who perished because of Ragnarok. This one will be twofold, particularly focusing on the choices they made before Baldr's death and the immediate ones resulting in Baldr's death.

Frey in particular squanders the perfect weapon, a self-fighting sword no less, that may have turned the battle at Ragnarok in the gods' favor if he had held onto it. He states that he would die without Gerd (**Gaerd**) and he wanted her with him. Frey foolishly gives away the sword because his weakness is women. Odin states in *The Prose Edda*, "The time will come when the sons of Muspell set out on their war journey, and then Frey will find it worse to be without his sword" (Sturluson 46). If this sword wouldn't have turned the tide of the war, it may have saved Frey's life, but instead the story states that "His death will come about because he lacks the good sword, the one that he gave to Skirnir" (**Skeerneer**) (Sturluson 73). Considering that the gods know the future, one could interpret this quote to mean he actually would have survived had his weakness not gotten the better of him. Regardless, this decision is just one of the mistakes that contribute to a series leading up to Ragnarok.

Another example of how the gods make questionable choices for the future of the world comes from their decision to not kill Loki's children despite knowing the important roles they will play out in Ragnarok. There is an interesting contradiction, particularly in the case of Fenrir, where they refuse to kill the wolf because they don't want to dirty their sacred spaces with blood. The gods asked Fenrir to join them on an island called Lyngvi, a location that they have to travel to and that isn't in the immediate area of their home to make him test fetters that they don't intend to remove from him (Sturluson 41). This is another example of their deceit since Fenrir needs the consolation of Tyr's hand in his mouth as compensation if

they break their promise to remove the fetter if he can't break it, but our main focus is that they don't kill him when they have the chance just because of a sacred space. This seems contradictory, considering the instance where they kill the giant Thjazi when he is chasing Loki and Idunn. This story is definitely Loki's fault because he hits Thjazi with a stick, gets stuck to him, and promises to lure Idunn out of Asgard in exchange for being set free. When the others find out, they make Loki go and get her back, which he does by turning her into a nut and flying home as a falcon. The important part in this story is the location of Thjazi's murder. The *Prose Edda* states, "inside the gate of Asgard" (Sturluson 82). I can't think of any place more sacred than the very gates of Asgard itself, yet they burn a giant to death on their doorstep. They break their own rule because it suits them better to not accompany Loki on his punishment for losing Idunn in the first place, but also because they want her back. Arguably, killing Fenrir and Loki's other children would have been a better choice. Their hubris directly leads to their self-destruction and the death of all other creatures, especially since they already know Fenrir will be the death of them.

The final folly comes with Baldr's death. Since the Aesir know the future, they are very aware that Baldr's death will bring about Ragnarok. Despite this knowledge, they still continue to throw items at Baldr to celebrate how "fire and water, iron and all kinds of metal, stones, the earth, trees, diseases, animals, birds, poisons and snakes" have all made oaths to not harm Baldr (Sturluson 65). As discussed earlier, oaths are vital to societal functions, so the Aesir naturally trust that the oaths will stand. This is an interesting thought considering they frequently break their own oaths, as I've already covered, but nevertheless, they don't foresee others breaking oaths against them. Mistletoe is the only thing that hasn't given its oath, but that is because Frigg considers it too young to "demand its oath," as she says (Sturluson 66). The use of the word "demand" is particularly interesting, implying that there is no choice in the matter for the other things that give their oath. But regardless, surely the

Aesir, who are aware of the future, know that it is mistletoe that will kill Baldr. Loki shapeshifts into a woman and finds this information out from Frigg herself. If they want to keep Ragnarok from happening, why would she announce to some random woman the one thing that could kill Baldr? Why would the Aesir throw anything at Baldr in the first place? Why do they still fall victim to the end of the world when they know every misstep before it happens? This brings about questions that we don't have satisfactory answers for. The answer simply lies in fate. Even if they kept the sword, killed Loki's children, kept the mistletoe a secret, or just refrained from throwing items at Baldr, there is nothing to say that Ragnarok wouldn't happen in some other way. Even if it can be stopped, they also don't try. Every member of the Norse Pantheon is doomed to participate in the end of the world because actions have consequences and they did not live to the moral code they criticize Loki for not upholding. All beings die because of inaction.

Conclusion

With that, I have covered the three accusations against Loki and shown that the rest of the pantheon are just as slanderous, deceitful, and disgraceful as they state Loki is. As tricky as Loki is, the rest of the Pantheon are not much better. The world ends because of a series of decisions, which Loki is not responsible for alone. There is something symbolic in Loki guiding Hod's hand in the shot that kills Baldr during literally the most dangerous game you can play, knowing that the person will die. Loki and another member of the Pantheon kill the golden child together in the same movement. There is nothing more poetic and emblematic of shared sin than that. The gods end their own world and its time that everyone shares the blame. Thank you.

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Stephen Hamrick PhD
Bemidji State University
stephen.hamrick@bemidjistate.edu

"In perfect joy and bliss": Tracking Thomas More's Neoplatonic Lover

Thomas More's (1478-1535) "Twelve Properties or Conditions of a Lover," written in 1504, remains an underappreciated examination of both earthly and divine love.[1] Appended strategically to his creative translation of the *Life* of Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), More's 182-line poem consists of thirteen, paired septets that expand upon Pico's twelve, one-line neoplatonic statements (see Appendix); the first stanza in each of the Englishman's pairings deals with human love and the second engages the love of God in similar terms.[2] Some fifty years ago, Mary Willow observed that within the poem More views "human love as a ladder one ascends in order to reach the pinnacle of spiritual love and divine union."[3]

Critics, including Willow, however, fail to detail that neoplatonic journey or to analyze how More necessarily engages human love in his poem. As such, they readily disregard the earthly stanzas "to focus on what More had discovered with regard to the lover of God," as Frank Mitjans writes of his own work in 2023.[4] In the context of More's *Life* of

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[1] On dating the work; see Ross Dealy, *Before Utopia: The Making of Thomas More's Mind* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 70, n.75.

[2] *Commentary on a Poem of Platonic Love*, trans. Dougals Carmichael (New York: University Presses of America, 1986), xi, was written 1486-1491. Living in Italy 1492-1498, More's friend, John Colet, appears to have introduced More to Pico. See, Leland Myles, *John Colet and the Platonic Tradition* (La Salle: Open Court, 1961) 168.

[3] Willow, *An Analysis of the English Poems of St. Thomas More* (Nieuw Koop: B. De Graff, 1974), sees the poem "in the Petrarchan tradition," writing, "the entire poem . . . is an amplification of the passion of love that sways the human heart and moves it to languishing, sighing, and weeping in the absence of the beloved" (251). She also sees it in the "conventional language of love poetry" (244) and More as presenting "an experienced Platonic lover"(244). Gerard Wegemer, *Young Thomas More and the Arts of Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), asserts that the Twelve Principles envisions a Petrarchan lover and that these guidelines are part of a "fundamental motive as intimacy" with God, which require "voluntary training," 78-79, 86-87. Michael Foley, "Paradoxes of Pain: The Strategic Appropriation by Thomas More of Pico della Mirandola's Spiritual Works," *Moreana* 47.1-2 (2010), 9-22, sees More's work as a form of Horatian training to "advance in holiness and happiness," 9 but *passim*.

[4] Frank Mitjans, *Thomas More's Vocation* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2023), 110, notes the spiritual deployment of erotic discourse taken from the Church fathers and the Song of Songs. See also, Jill Kraye, "The Transformations of Platonic Love in the Italian Renaissance," eds. Anna Baldwin and Sarah Hutton, *Platonism and the English Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 76-85, at 80-81.

Pico the same disregard emerges.[5] In only noting the sublimation of human love, and in shifting critical attention to the godly septets, these critics have read the poem as a contemplative "canticle of love sung" to God.[6] However, when reading the earthly and spirtual stanzas together, the details of a neoplatonic model of mixed love emerges. Attending to this combination, and rejecting readings that see *charitas* and *cupiditas* at odds in the poem, I trace how More deploys Pico's neoplatonic ladder to structure "Twelve Properties," therein inseparably yoking the material and the spiritual.[7]

Unlike his apparent dismisal of erotic love in two of his nine painted *Pageants of Life* (1501) reconstructed in the Appendix, More never dismisses human love in "Twelve Properties." As Pico defines the neoplatonic ladder elsewhere, one ascends "by steps, starting with material beauty" and, with effort, "is lead to" "heavenly beauty."[8] More begins his poetic extrapolation of Pico's first property of the lover urging the indivdual "to love but one alone" and "for that one all other to forsake" (1.2).[9] First valorizing monogamous earthly love through such a vehement denial or repudiation, as represented in the term "forsake" (*OED* 1a, 1c), he then directs readers to a higher love. Because God engages "no parting fellows," More commands the godly lover,

Love Him therefore with all that He thee gave:

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[5] Dealy, 70-71 describes More's translation as having "much to say about heavenly values and little positive to say about worldly values." Willow, 244, writes, More "does not despise the peculiar and exaggerated features of human love."

[6] Willow, 244. See also Frank Cutright, "The Return of an Author: The Essential Works of Thomas More," *Moreana* 58.1 (2021), 4-30, at 17, writes, "*The Life of Pico*, therefore, delights readers who love God because the text encourages and instructs them how to do so." Mitjans, 119. See also, Louis Karlin, "Translation as Conversion: Thomas More's *Life of John Picus*," *Moreana* 47.1-2 (2010), 63-84 at 81; and Judith Jones, *Thomas More* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979), 46, 137. Walter Gordon, "The Path to the Ultimate in the Writings of Thomas More," *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 12.1 (1989), 5-15, at 6-7, sees More in the courtly love tradition.

[7] A.D. Cousins, *Pleasure and Gender in the Writings of Thomas More: Pursuing the Common Weal* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2010), 114, writes "the opposition between *cupiditas* and *caritas* acts as an elemental motif in More's text."

[8] Carmichael, 95-98, at 95, 96.

[9] All quotations are from Jeffrey Lehman, ed., Thomas More, *Life of Picus Earl of Mirandola*, 500th Anniversary Edition (Dallas: The Center for Thomas More Studies, 2010), and will be cited paranthetically in the text. See also, Anthony Edwards, Katherine Rodgers, and Clarence Miller, eds. *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More* (15 vols; New Haven: Yale University Press), vol. 1, 113-120.

For body, soul, wit, cunning, mind and thought,
Part will He none, but either all or naught. (11-14)

This first divine septet echoes but supplements Jesus's directive "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). Laying out terms that correspond to the rungs on Pico's ladder, More shifts from the biblical triumvirate of "heart," "soul," and "mind" to six components, consisting of "*body,* soul, and mind," adding "wit," "cunning," and "thought" (13). Mitjans reads these additions as characteristic of More's humor, but I suggest that the bold doubling of Jesus' directive presents a map for climbing the ladder, starting with the "body" rather than the original biblical "heart."[10]

With his stanzas on the Second Property, More completes Picos' first rung by using the sight of the beloved's body as preparation for the beatific vision of God. He writes,

Of his love, lo, the sight and company
To the lover so glad and pleasant is,
That whoso hath the grace to come thereby
He judgeth him in perfect joy and bliss. (15-18)

Here the paramour judges "the sight" of the beloved as "perfect," precisely as Pico defines the first rung as one "focused on the senses" where "there is first presented to the eyes the particular beauty of" some "outwardly pleasing body" (96). More's "sight and company" corresponds to the "pleasing body" in Pico's model. However, despite all the pleasure, mirth, and joy of "this world," until one has "the glorious sight" of God, one remains, for More, "void of perfect joy" and must continue moving toward "that blessed, joyful, heavenly port" (26).

Within the Third and Fourth Properties, More's lover engages what he terms "soul" to climb Pico's second neoplotinic rung. For Pico, "the second step is taken when the soul refashions in itself the image received by the eyes with its inner, but still material and

[10] See the Appendix for another image of the Neoplatonic ladder. Mitjans, 111.

fanciful, powers and makes it as much more perfect as it makes it more spiritual." More's Third Property thus harnesses the lover's concern with "speech, apparel, gesture, look or pace" to higher things, even though the earthly lover refuses to "diminish in any grace" (35). The pregnant term "grace" subsumes physical elegance, a state of mind, and a divine balm, the last two moving towards the insubustantial much as Pico stresses both the "material and fanciful." As expected, the heavenly stanza for Property Three reimagines the lover as one that "shouldst arise" and "with fair virtue adorn thy soul" rather than dress the physical body.

More's Fourth Property further centralizes the soul, depicting the lover as first suffering for the earthly beolved. The lover must be willing "all to endure" (46), even

> Though it were death, so he might therewithal
> The joyful presence of that person get
> On whom he hath his heart and love yset. (47-49)

In their psychological or internal senses, the "presence," "heart," and "set," or enduring mind again move through the beautiful body to higher order thinking. With this shift, More adapts the spirit's willingness "to die" for the beloved to religion. As he states in the heavenly stanza of the Fourth Property, one only becomes a "perfect lover" (71, 110)

> By his departing hence for to procure,
> After this valley dark, the heavenly light,
> And of his love the glorious blessed sight. (54-46)

Again, the godly lover shifts attention from the necessary and shadowy sight of earthly beauty to spiritual beauty or "the glorious blessed sight" of God as Pico's Augustinian neoplatonism offers.

For More in the Fifth and Sixth Properties, the lover deploys "wit" to mount heavenward on the third rung. As Pico instructs,

> The third step is taken when by the light of the Active Intellect, the soul, separating the form it has perceived from every particularity, considers the true nature of physical beauty and no longer pays attention to the particular image of a single body but to the universal beauty of all bodies taken together.

For Pico, the third step towards divine love "looks at beauty in itself" but only "by the light of the Active Intellect," which corresponds to More's use of "wit" or "intellect" (*OED* 1.I.2.a). Within the Fifth Property, the lover correspondingly moves from observing the specific beloved, through intellect, to a more expansive experience.

> And of his sorrow joyful is and fain,
> And happy thinketh himself that he may take
> Some misadventure for his lover's sake. (61-63)

More's application of neoplatonism here expands the scope of the lover, who thus "thinketh himself," to conceive of all "sorrow" created in love as "joyful."

The heavenly septet of More's Fifth Property vastly extends this expansive movement. Reimagining the pain of the lover as Christ's crucified pain, More encourages the divine lover,

> Thus shouldest thou, that lovest God also,
> In thine heart wish, covet and be glad
> For Him to suffer trouble, pain and woe. (64-66)

More positions the lover here as one who adores the beloved and "that lovest God also." No longer confined to individual pain, the godly lover remains cognizant of Christ's painful, salvific death. More reminds lovers that Christ's apparently individual suffering must be conceived as both beautiful and as a univesal sacrifice, thereby adjusting the concept of platonic beauty.

The earthly stanza for the Sixth Property maintains such a broad view, positioning the "perfect lover" (71) as both present and as beyond the beloved's material body because he remains "ever" (75) "conversant" with her "in mind and thought" (77). Replicating this mental breadth, More writes that, "in like manner the lover of God should"

> Be present with God and conversant always
> For certes, whoso list, he may purvey,
> Though all the world would him therefrom bereaven
> To bear his body in earth, his mind in heaven. (80-84)

More's repeated focus on the mental activity of the godly lover leads from and parallels that of the earthly paramour, moving from "his body in earth" to a broader perspective with "his mind in heaven." The accretion of the dynamic metaphors "be present," "conversant always," and "may purvey" involve the body *and* the mind in the journey.

The Seventh and Eighth Properties of More's Lover continue this integrated climb towards God, using what the young poet calls "cunning."[11] For Pico, the fourth rung of the ladder extends the soul's self-reflection, revealing that universal beauty "comes not from the sensible external object but from" the soul's "own inner light." By looking at this God-given knowledge, the soul "concentrating thus on itself," comes to see "ideal beauty," which, in turn, "reflects the perfect image of heavenly love" (97). Christian neoplatonism thus defined relies upon the biblical assertion that God both created humanity in his own image (Genesis 1:27) and embodied himself within mortal flesh. One's "inner light" reveals God's beauty in creation.

More's Seventh Property derives the spiritual application of "cunning" from the experience of the earthly lover. The mortal lover cherishes anything that has "been near" the beloved, including "trifle or conceit, / Lace, girdle, point, or proper glove strait." Here, the erotic sacralization of "precious, lief and dear" (88-91) things touched by the beloved prepares the lover to transfer the same "cunning" vision to God. A reflexive application, "cunning" must be applied to both the earthly and spiritual realms. The godly stanza of the Seventh Property indicates, in fact,

> So every relic, image or picture
> That doth pertain to God's magnificence,
> The lover of God should with all busy cure
> Have it in love, honour and reverence
> And specially give them pre-eminence
> Which daily done His blessed body wurche,

[11] Lehman, 3 n.2, follows the *OED* in defining More's use of "cunning" as "possessing learning and knowledge," but remains unsure why More stresses this aspect of Pico's character.

The quick relics, the ministers of His Church. (92-98)

Rather than solely proof of More's respect for the Church, the focus here on God's earthly abode and the "quick" or living church minsiters suggests that neoplatonic self-reflection will reframe one's perception of the world much as the earthly lover models perceptive ways to love God.

More's Eighth Property continues the cunning climb to divine union. Once the lover encounters earthly or divine beauty, the subsequently imparted knowledge prevents him from accepting lies or blasphemy. For the lover praising the beauty

> Of his love, he may in no manner
> Endure to hear that therefrom mighten vary
> Or anything sound into the contrary. (103-105)

In parallel fashion, More's godly

> Perfect lover ought by no manner ways
> To suffer the cursed words of blasphemy
> Or anything spoken of God unreverently. (110-112)

More's active faith here means that the "Active Intellect," inspired by godly knowledge, will reject insults to the beloved as well as any blasphemy because they both introduce dishonesty and degradation into the material world, degenerating sacred human being.

More's lover uses what he calls "mind" in The Ninth and Tenth Properties to climb the fifth rung of the neoplatonic ladder described by Pico. For the Italian, the soul's ascent to "its own proper Intellect is the fifth step, in which the heavenly Venus shows herself to the soul" but "not in the complete plenitude of her beauty" because "in an individual intellect there is no room" (97). As Pico continues, "Venus" or "the heavenly and ideal beauty engenders the heavenly love" defining it as "the intellectual desire for ideal beauty" (43). As the "fountain and source" (44), God first created such ideal desires, which still exist in the active human intellect.

Properties Nine and Ten corresponds almost perfectly to this kind of neoplatonic idealism, expanding the readers' focus to include the earthly and the "ideal beauty" which "engenders heavenly love." For More's earthly lover, he "believeth in his mind

> On whomsoever he hath his heart ybent,
> That in that person men may nothing find
> But honourable, worthy and excellent. (114-116)

The poet's focus here on the "mind" and the excellence of the beloved corresponds to "that beauty which engenders love" in Pico's commentary, yet the Tenth Property's earthly stanza also stages the sleepless lover, who "mindeth no[t] what men about him talk" (130), as he "burneth ever" "in the fervent heat of his desire" (132-133). The Ninth and Tenth Properties' divine septets move the lover through this beautiful fire, reminding readers that "Of God likewise so wonderful and high / All thing esteem and judge his lover ought" (120-121). Earthly delights will always fail to "remove / His ardent mind from God" (139-140) but such heavenly pleasures function "likewise" to those experienced on the material plane.

"Thought" moves the lover up to Pico's sixth neoplatonic rung in More's Eleventh and Twelfth Properties. As Pico writes, "eager and thirsty" for spiritual consummation, "the soul tries to unite its individual and particular intellect with the primal and universal one . . . the dwelling of ideal beauty" (97). This side of death, the longing for mystical union of one's "particular intellect" with the divine or "universal one," normally remains unrealized; the finite cannot encompass the infinite. For More in these septets, even reaching upward, earthly love oscillates unpredictably, making life alternately a "perfect bliss" or a "bitter sorrow." Hope and wisdom compel the mature lover

> Diligently to serve both day and night
> For very love, without any regard
> To any profit, guerdon or reward. (159-161)

Without ascent, the thirst for union flames the passions, even to the point of dedicated service; for More, the ladder propels the individual through, beyond, and back to material endeavors.

The final two heavenly septets conclude the neoplatonic journey of the earthly-divine lover that More adapted from Pico. Thought remains central to these final divine stanzas, yet, as Pico indicates, the lover of God does not ascend to union with Him. Similarly, More depicts

> God's lover in prayer and meditation:
> When that his love liketh in him rest
> With inward gladness of pleasant contemplation. (149-151)

The evidential strand of "Prayer," "meditation," "inward," and "contemplation" together position the neoplatonic lover firmly in thought. Embodied in the material world, however, even More's most "perfect lover" can only hope. He offers,

> So thou likewise that hast thine heart yset
> Upward to God, so well thyself endeavour,
> So studiously that nothing may thee let. (162-164)

Relying on the lifelong service of the earthly lover as his model, More fashions the ascent "upward to God" as an ongoing "endeavor" pursued "studiously" without hinderance or "let."

According to Pico, arrival on rung six would mean merging with the Angelic Mind and the possession of complete awareness."[12] For Pico, however, "reaching this, the sixth step in the sequence, the soul ends it's journey, and it is not allowed to move onto the seventh, the sabbath, as it were, of heavenly love" (97). Correspondingly, More's dedicated service to God also looks for no "reward or profit" (167) but trusts only in a "faithful heart and loving mind" (168) which acts in God's world.

"Twelve Properties" ends with two stanzas not labelled as "Properties" and all three sixteenth century editions print the verses as continuous with the sequence of twelve paired

[12] Carmichael, xv.

and titled stanzas as I have on your handout.[13] In these unlabeled stanzas, he restates the command to serve God selflessly and to remember Christ's death on the cross. More's deployment of neoplatonism thus concludes without the final consummation or union with the divine, yet, based within an incarnational soteriology, the material world remains a place wherein God's divine nature may be pursued and, occasionally, glimpsed as part of a larger transformative process.[14] As More's *Life* of Pico uses the Italian polymath's storied career to model Christiaan transformation for all, the inclusion of such a neoplatonic vision seems appropriate. Although More's Augustinian theology would readily support such neoplatonic movement, the Tudor humanist's distance from Pico may suggest that his Twelve Properties functions more as a tool for readers than for himself. In any case, by focusing on both the earthly and spiritual stanzas of "The Twelve Properties or Conditions of a Lover," we can accurately reconstruct the embodied, if incomplete, neoplatonic model that More adapted to serve his needs.

[13] *Here is co[n]teyned the lyfe of Johan Picus erle of Myra[n]dula*. London, 1510. STC 19897.7; printed by John Rastell. *Here is co[n]teyned the lyfe of Iohan Picus erle of Myrandula*. London, 1525. STC 19898; printed by Wynkyn de Worde. *The workes of Sir Thomas More Knyght*. London, 1557. STC 18076; printed by John Cawod, John Waly, and Richarde Tottell.

[14] L.E. Semler, "Virtue, Transformation, and Exemplarity in *The Lyfe of Johan Picus*," eds. A.D. Cousins and Damian Grace, *A Companion to Thomas More* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009), 95-113, argues that More's reshaping of Vico's text affirms that sacred transformation can occur in any chosen path of life.

Appendix

"The Pageant of Life" (1492-1501)

> Thomas More in his youth devised in his father's house in London, a goodly hanging of fine painted cloth, with nine pageants, and verses over every one of those pageants. In the third pageant, was painted the goodly young man . . . lying on the ground. And upon him stood lady Venus goddess of love, and by her upon this man stood the little god Cupid.

Cupid and Venus

Whoever knows not the strength, power and might,
Of Venus and me her little son Cupid,
Thou Manhood shall a mirror been a right,
By us subdued for all thy great pride,
My fiery dart pierces thy tender side,
Now thou that before despised children small,
Shall grow a child again and be my thrall.

Text by Thomas More
Image by Gemini AI

In the fourth pageant was painted an old sage father sitting in a chair. And lying under his feet was painted Venus & Cupid.

Age

Old Age am I, with looks, thin and hore,
Of our short life, the last and best part.
Wise and discreet: the public weal therefore,
I help to rule to my labor and smart.
Therefore Cupid withdraw thy fiery dart,
Weighty matters shall of love oppress
The childish game and idle business.

Text by Thomas More
Image by Gemini AI

Thomas More, "Twelve Properties or Conditions of a Lover" (1504)

First Property

The first point is to love but one alone,
And for that one all other to forsake:
For whoso loveth many loveth none:
The flood that is in many channels take
In each of them shall feeble streamès make:
The love that is divided among many
Uneath sufficeth that any part have any.

So thou that hast thy love set unto God
In thy remembrance this imprint and grave:
As He in sovereign dignity is odd,
So will He in love no parting fellows have:
Love Him therefore with all that He thee gave:
For body, soul, wit, cunning, mind and thought,
Part will He none, but either all or naught.

Second Property

Of his love, lo, the sight and company
To the lover so glad and pleasant is,
That whoso hath the grace to come thereby
He judgeth him in perfect joy and bliss:
And whoso of that company doth miss,
Live he in never so prosperous estate,
He thinketh him wretched and infortunate.

So should the lover of God esteem that he
Which all the pleasure hath, mirth and disport,
That in this world is possible to be,
Yet till the time that he may once resort
Unto that blessed, joyful, heavenly port
Where he of God may have the glorious sight,
Is void of perfect joy and sure delight.

Third Property

The third point of a perfect lover is
To make him fresh to see that all thing been
Appointed well and nothing set amiss
But all well fashioned, proper, goodly, clean:
That in his person there be nothing seen
In speech, apparel, gesture, look or pace
That may offend or diminish any grace.

So thou that wilt with God get into favour
Garnish thyself up in as goodly wise
As comely be, as honest in behaviour,
As it is possible for thee to devise:
I mean not hereby that thou shouldest arise
And in the glass upon thy body prowl,
But with fair virtue to adorn thy soul.

Fourth Property

If love be strong, hot, mighty and fervent,
There may no trouble, grief, or sorrow fall,
But that the lover would be well content
All to endure and think it eke too small,
Though it were death, so he might therewithal
The joyful presence of that person get
On whom he hath his heart and love yset.

Thus should of God the lover be content
Any distress or sorrow to endure,
Rather than to be from God absent,
And glad to die, so that he may be sure
By his departing hence for to procure,
After this valley dark, the heavenly light,
And of his love the glorious blessed sight.

Fifth Property

Not only a lover content is in his heart
But coveteth eke and longeth to sustain
Some labour, incommodity, or smart,
Loss, adversity, trouble, grief, or pain:
And of his sorrow joyful is and fain,
And happy thinketh himself that he may take
Some misadventure for his lover's sake.

Thus shouldest thou, that lovest God also,
In thine heart wish, covet and be glad
For Him to suffer trouble, pain and woe:
For Whom if thou be never so woe bestead,
Yet thou ne shalt sustain (be not adread)
Half the dolour, grief and aversity
That He already suffered hath for thee.

Sixth Property

The perfect lover longeth for to be
In presence of his love both night and day,
And if it haply so befall that he
May not as he would, he will yet as he may
Ever be with his love, that is to say,
Where his heavy body nil be brought
He will be conversant in mind and thought.

Lo in like manner the lover of God should,
At the least in such wise as he may,
If he may not in such wise as he would,
Be present with God and conversant alway;
For certes, whoso list, he may purvey,
Though all the world would him therefrom bereaven,
To bear his body in earth, his mind in heaven.

Seventh Property

There is no page or servant, most or least,
That doth upon his love attend and wait,
There is no little worm, no simple beast,
Ne none so small a trifle or conceit,
Lace, girdle, point, or proper glove strait,
But that if to his love it have been near,
The lover hath it precious, lief and dear.

So every relic, image or picture
That doth pertain to God's magnificence,
The lover of God should with all busy cure
Have it in love, honour and reverence
And specially give them pre-eminence
Which daily done His blessed body wurche,
The quick relics, the ministers of His Church.

Eighth Property

A very lover above all earthly thing
Coveteth and longeth evermore to hear
The honour, laud, commendation and praising,
And everything that may the fame clear
Of his love: he may in no manner
Endure to hear that therefrom mighten vary
Or anything sound into the contrary.

The lover of God should covet in like wise
To hear His honour, worship, laud and praise,
Whose sovereign goodness no heart may comprise,
Whom hell, earth, and all the heaven obeys,
Whose perfect lover ought by no manner ways
To suffer the cursed words of blasphemy
Or anything spoken of God unreverently.

Ninth Property

A very lover believeth in his mind
On whomsoever he hath his heart ybent,
That in that person men may nothing find
But honourable, worthy and excellent,
And eke surmounting far in his entent
All other that he hath known by sight or name:

And would that every man should think the same.
Of God likewise so wonderful and high
All thing esteem and judge his lover ought,
So reverence, worship, honour and magnify,
That all the creatures in this world ywrought
In comparison should he set at nought,
And glad be if he might the mean devise
That all the world would thinken in like wise.

Tenth Property

The lover is of colour dead and pale;
There will no sleep into his eyes stalk;
He favoureth neither meat, wine, nor ale;
He mindeth no what men about him talk;
But eat he, drink he, sit, lie down or walk,
He burneth ever as it were with a fire
In the fervent heat of his desire.

Here should the lover of God ensample take
To have Him continually in remembrance,
With him in prayer and meditation wake,
While other play, revel, sing, and dance:
None earthly joy, disport, or vain plesance
Should him delight, or anything remove
His ardent mind from God, his heavenly love.

Eleventh Property

Diversely passioned is the lover's heart:
Now pleasant hope, now dread and grievous fear,
Now perfect bliss, now bitter sorrow smart;
And whether his love be with him or elsewhere,
Oft from his eyes there falleth many a tear,—
For very joy, when they together be;
When they be sundered, for adversity.

Like affections feeleth eke the breast
Of God's lover in prayer and meditation:
When that his love liketh in him rest
With inward gladness of pleasant contemplation,
Out break the tears for joy and delectation;
And when his love list eft to part him fro,
Out break the tears again for pain and woe.

Twelfth Property

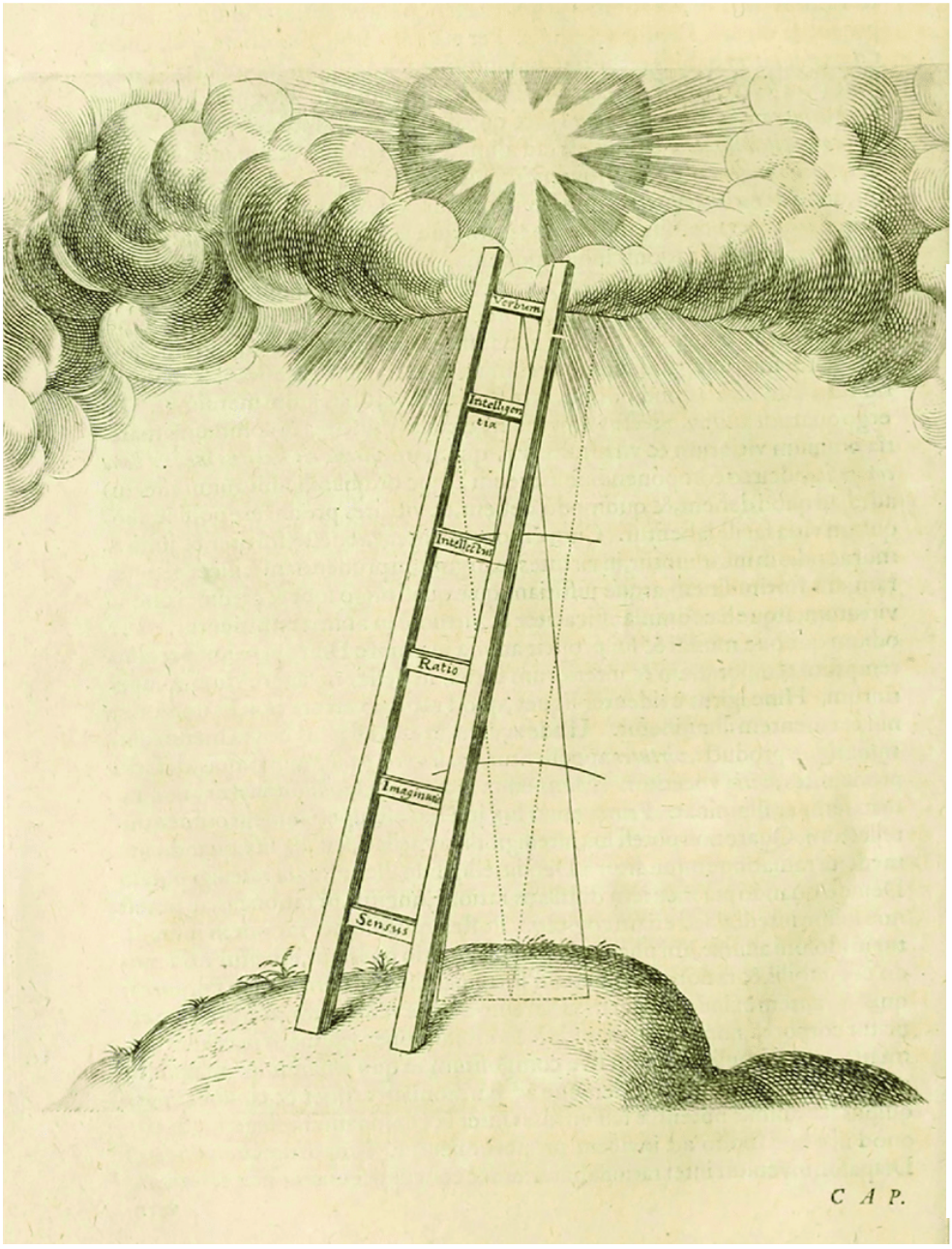
A very lover will his love obey:
His joy it is and all his appetite
To pain himself in all that ever he may,
That person in whom he set hath his delight
Diligently to serve both day and night
For very love, without any regard
To any profit, guerdon or reward.

So thou likewise that hast thine heart yset
Upward to God, so well thyself endeavour,
So studiously that nothing may thee let
Not for His service any wise dissever:
Freely look eke thou serve that thereto never
Trust of reward or profit do thee bind,
But only faithful heart and loving mind.

Wageless to serve, three things may us move:
First, if the service [it]self be desirable:
Second, if they whom that we serve and love
Be very good and very amiable:
Thirdly, of reason be we serviceable
Without the gaping after any more
To such as have done much for us before.

Serve God for love, then, not for hope of meed:
What service may so desirable be
As where all turneth to thine own speed?
Who is so good, so lovely eke as He
Who hath already done so much for thee,
As he that first thee made, and on the rood
Eft thee redeemèd with His precious blood?

Robert Fludd, *Utriusque Cosmi* (1619)



Verbum
Word of God

⬆

Intelligentia
intelligence

⬆

Intellectus
understandi
ng

⬆

Ratio
reason

⬆

Imaginatio
imagination

⬆

Sensus
sense

Pico Della Mirandola's 12 Apothegems

1. To love one alone and contemn all other for that one.
2. To think him unhappy that is not with his love.
3. To adorn himself for the pleasure of his love.
4. To suffer all thing, though it were death, to be with his love.
5. To desire also to suffer shame harm for his love, and to think that hurt sweet.
6. To be with his love ever as he may, if not in deed yet in thought.
7. To love all thing that pertaineth unto his love.
8. To covet the praise of his love, and not to suffer any dispraise.
9. To believe of his love all things excellent, & to desire that all folk should think the same.
10. To weep often with his love: in presence for joy, in absence for sorrow.
11. To languish ever and ever to burn in the desire of his love.
12. To serve his love, nothing thinking of any reward or profit.

Bruce Brandt
Emeritus Professor of English
South Dakota State University

John Updike's Prequel to *Hamlet*

John Updike's novel *Gertrude and Claudius*, written in 2000, is a prequel to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The novel tells the story of the relationship between Gertude and Claudius from shortly before Gertrude's marriage to the man who will become King Hamlet to shortly after his murder and Gertrude's marriage to Claudius. Updike's primary source for the plot of the novel is Shakespeare's play, for although the events it depicts take place almost entirely before the play begins, they prefigure actions that occur within the play. Indeed, not only is the connection between the two relatively seamless, but Updike's imaginative backstory provides plausible explanations for many aspects of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* that have intrigued or troubled readers and audiences of the play. For example, students of mine often had questions about the relationship between Gertrude and Claudius. Was it adulterous, and if so, when did it become so? Was Gertrude an accomplice in the murder of King Hamlet? Was Claudius's desire for his marriage to Gertrude primarily political, a means of solidifying his grasp on the throne, or did it spring from love? What was the nature of the mother-son relationship between Gertrude and her son Hamlet? And of perennial interest, how should we understand Hamlet's alleged madness? This is not to say that Updike provides the only possible answers to such questions, but his imaginative responses lead us to consider intriguing possibilities within the play.

We will examine these aspects of Updike's creative backstory in more depth. However, let us begin with Updike's use of Shakespeare's primary sources for *Hamlet*: Saxo Grammaticus's *Historia Danica* and François de Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques*. One of Updike's prime conceits is his use of the names used in these two histories. In Saxo

Grammaticus, Shakespeare's Hamlet is Amleth, Hamlet's father is Horwendil, his mother is Gerutha, and Claudius is Feng. In Belleforest, Amleth becomes Hamblet, Horwendil becomes Horvendil, Gerutha becomes Geruthe, and Feng becomes Fengon. Updike's *Gertrude and Claudius* is divided into three parts. Part one uses the names from Saxo, part two uses those from Belleforest, and part three returns to the familiar names from Shakespeare. In Saxo, the man who is killed eavesdropping on Amleth in his mother's chamber has no name and plays no other role but to die spying. Shakespeare has expended the role greatly, as does Updike, and part one gives him the name Corambus, which was used in the German adaptation of Hamlet, Der bestrafte Brudermord. Part two uses Corambis, which occurs in the First Quarto of Shakespeare's Hamlet. Part three tells us that Fengon chose the name Claudius at his coronation and that Corambis has simultaneously adopted the more Latinate Polonius. Other than this switch to Claudius and Polonius, the novel offers no explanation for the changes of name from part to part. The change simply occurs. The effect is to subtly defamiliarize the story of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The reader is always aware of how the actions depicted by Updike will culminate in the later actions depicted in Shakespeare's play, but Updike's use of the source names frees us to enjoy the events and ingenuity of the prequel without losing sight of this connection.

Gertrude and Claudius begins with a confrontation between sixteen-year-old Gerutha and her father King Rorik concerning his choice of Horwendil to be her husband. Gerutha's mother died when Gerutha was only three years old, and she and her father have a caring relationship. Their discussion turns on the nature of marital love, with Rorik maintaining that when two worthy people wed, love will come. Gerutha agrees to accept Horwendil as her husband. Horwendil and his brother Feng are the co-governors of Jutland and owe allegiance to Rorik. In recent years Horwendil has been doing most of the governing while his brother Feng has been

serving as a mercenary and diplomat for the Holy Roman Emperor and others in the south. Rorik judges that the people love Horwendil but not Feng. He sees him as fit to be a king and believes that he will be a good husband. Feng does not return for the wedding ceremony though he sends a fine silver platter as a present. When Gerutha asks Horwendil about his absence, he responds that "He is jousting and conniving beyond the Elbe. Denmark is too small for him, when I am in it" (23). Clearly Horwendil perceives a rivalry between himself and his brother, and Feng's jealousy over Horwendile's martial successes and his new royal alliance is stressed by both Saxo and Belleforest. In Updike's reenvisioning of the tale, however, what Horwendil fails to see is that Feng suffers as much or more from a desire for Gerutha than for power. On an extended visit home to Denmark, when he is 47 and she 35, Feng subtly reveals his feelings for her, and she becomes aware of a sadness, a lack of fulfillment in herself. Feng's behavior remains ever appropriate, but inwardly he increasingly longs for her. "Lord Christ, Feng thought, this love of her is eating me alive" (72). "Every inflection of her speech, thought, and movement seemed to him breathtakingly perfect. Even the upright little gap between her teeth was a perfection, sweet surprise when she smiled" (76). To flee the danger posed by his lovesick envy, Feng returns to his travels in the south, serving as the Emperor's emissary to Byzantium.

When Fengon returns in part two, his avowals of love for Geruthe become direct when they are alone, and she reciprocates his feelings. It is she who creates a trysting place, arranging to use a hunting lodge that Corambis (aka Polonius) has rebuilt for a retreat in his future retirement. In that Lodge, a half an hour away from Elsinore, their love affair blossoms.

All good things must end, though. Others know their secret, and Fengon's servant betrays them to the king in exchange for safe passage back to Italy, his homeland. Horvendil confronts his brother in a conversation that builds slowly but inexorably to its climax. Horvendil comments

on Fengon's visits to Elsinore, speaks about his son Hamblet, and mentions a state visit that he and Geruthe had undertaken and asks what she had said about it. He then brings up the topic of marriage, recalling that Fengon's wife had died long ago after only three years of marriage, and mentioning that the King of Scotland had a marriageable daughter and that an alliance would prove politically useful. After Fengon replies that he would not be interested in being a political pawn, he says that in fact he has no desire to marry. Horvendil then strikes. "Perhaps you do not wish a wife … because you already have a wife of sorts—another man's wife" (143). He then asks Fengon to comment on a fable about a wandering brother who returns home and seduces the Queen with the help of the old Chamberlain, who knew the King was planning to dismiss him. Fengon resists giving advice, and ultimately Horvendil gives his own answer to the alleged fable: kill the chamberlain, banish the brother rather than execute him, and retain Geruthe as Queen. Fengon begs for his brother to spare the Chamberlain's life and not to publicly disgrace the Queen, but he is told that those are not his decisions to make. Horvendil plans to pass judgment after he concludes a state meeting scheduled with the Polish ambassadors.

Leaving the audience chamber, Fengon is accosted by Corambis, who as Polonius does so often in *Hamlet*, has been hiding behind an arras and eavesdropping. Corambis begins excitedly talking, but just as in Shakespeare, it takes him a long time to get to the point, despite Fengon's repeatedly urging him to do so. The gist of what he says is that the audience with the ambassadors will most likely last over three hours, after which Horvendil will most likely take his customary afternoon nap in an enclosed orchard, where he "will sleep, alone, undefended" (152). Corambis gives Fengon a key to the passage leading from the King's chamber to the orchard and tells him that he may be able to leave the orchard through a shaft that leads out through the hostlers' latrine. Fengon warns Corambis to say nothing to the Queen, for he

understands that while she was susceptible to adultery, she would never acquiesce to an attempt on her husband's life. Updike thus brushes aside all speculation about Geruthe's being a co-conspirator in murder.

What follows is the most dramatic and action-filled sequence in the novel. Calculating that three to four hours hours will be enough time, Fengon gallops apace to his own abode, about half an hour away, and retrieves a vial of poison that had been gifted to him long ago by a Byzantine lady. She had told him that it would produce quick death, and he hopes both that she had not lied and that the poison was still potent. Swiftly returning to Elsinore and leaving his horse standing in the courtyard, he uses Corambis's key and hides in the orchard. When his brother falls asleep, he pours the cursèd hebona in his ear. Then escaping through the latrine, he reenters the castle, goes to his horse, and calls for the grooms to take care of it. Naturally, they believe he has just arrived, thus establishing his alibi. Then, in the confusion and turmoil following the discovery of the king's body, Fengon and Corambis spread the rumor that he had died from a snake bite.

Part three of the novel takes us up to the very beginning of Shakespeare's play. Concern about foreign enemies combined with the fact that Prince Hamlet has been away at Wittenburg for the last ten years has led the Danes to choose Claudius as King. His rapid marriage to Gertude is motivated primarily by his desire to be able to live openly with her without scandalizing the court. Otherwise, none of the actions shown in the play are present in Updike. What Updike provides is deeper context for the interpersonal dynamics that we encounter in Shakespeare's play. Much of deeper background revolves around the relationship between young Hamlet and his mother. We are given some insight into the mother-son bond starting in part one when Amleth is about to leave for Wittenberg for the first time. Horwendil is rebuking his wife

for being overly friendly with Feng and tells her that her son is also bothered: “The Prince has observed your tête-à-têtes, and is disturbed” (52). “I am surprised,” she retorts, “that the Prince has deigned to notice any behavior of mine. Ever since infancy he has been steadily fleeing me” (53). Earlier she has said that he even “wrinkled his nose in disgust” at her breast milk 34), and she has also revealed to Corambus that she feels “an utter failure as a mother” (41). She feels that Amleth avoids her and prefers the company of his father. Later, after Claudius is king and they are discussing the idea that Hamlet should return from Wittenberg, she again concludes that Hamlet is avoiding her. She believes that he hates her because he senses that she wished his father dead. She admits that in fact she was relieved because now their adultery will never be revealed. She adds that she is “glad the child isn’t at Elsinore. He would sulk. He would try to make me feel shallow, and stupid, and wicked” (165). When Claudius objects, “But how would he know . . . anything?” (165), she retorts, “Children just know” (166).

How good Hamlet’s powers of intuition are we never learn, since he does not appear as a character in the novel. However, Updike continually alludes to actions that occur beyond the timeline of the novel. For example, in the play we observe Hamlet insulting Polonius by saying that he is reading “words, words, words,” words that insult old men, or later toying with him, forcing him to politely concur that a certain cloud is shaped like a camel, or a weasel, or a whale. Gertrude, or Gerutha, remembers him as a “high-strung, quick-tongued child” forever quibbling “over everything, with parent, priest, and tutor.” She believes he thought of the entire world of Elsinore as a joke. The only person she remembers him approving of is “the disreputable, possibly demented jester, Yorick” (34). In the graveyard scene in the play, Hamlet does recall Yorick fondly, describing him as “a fellow of infinite jest.” In that same graveyard scene, Gertrude grieves for Ophelia, saying “I hop’d thou shouldst have been my Hamlet’s wife”

(5.1.244). In Updike, Gertude does more than hope. She strongly advocates this marriage and had done so even before her marriage to Claudius. King Hamlet had disagreed with her assessment of Ophelia, finding her "fey. Her brain holds a crack any ill circumstances might jar agape" (82). As readers of the play, we well know how prescient he is. Also, as readers of the play, we are aware that Hamlet will put on an "antic disposition," and we know the sexton's report that Hamlet has been sent to England because he is mad. Whether or not Hamlet's behavior ever goes beyond feigning has been debated, but resolving that argument lies outside of Updike's novel. He does point in its direction though. Discussing Hamlet's continual absence from Elsinore and his lack of interest in learning how to rule, Claudius confides to Gertrude that "Some whisper … that he is mad," and she responds that her son is "sane and shrewd" although as we have seen, she is not eager for his return (167). Thus, in many ways both big and small, Updike thoughtfully links the events he portrays in his prequel to their realization in Shakespeare's play. He does not change events from what we find in Shakespeare's Hamlet. Rather he provides a background to and a rationale for the things we see happening in the play.

This differs markedly from other adaptations of Shakespeare's plays. The usual procedure is for the writer to take the basic plot of a play and to create a new story that more less follows that plot. We enjoy the ingenuity of the writer in transforming incidents in the play into those in the new story. Thus, when watching the 1956 science fiction movie Forbidden Plant, we enjoy recognizing that Robbie the Robot is an avatar of Caliban, but we do not think that doing so leads us to see more deeply into the character of Caliban. Similarly, Philip Noble, the eleven-year-old protagonist of Matt Haig's *The Dead Fathers Club*, presents many clear parallels to Shakespeare's Hamlet, but our interest is in the alterations. While we applaud their cleverness, we do not feel that our understanding of the original is enhanced. Often such adaptations are

concerned not only to echo and update Shakespeare's original plot, but to explore a social concern of our own time. Thus, Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* finds an explanation of Goneril and Regan's hatred of their father Lear in his sexual abuse of his daughters. Updike's *Gertrude and Claudius* differs from these kinds of engagements with Shakespearean plots. Updike alludes to and builds on the events of Shakespeare's play, but he does not change them, as in making Caliban a robot or King Lear a farmer. His additions to the Hamlet story prompt us to think more deeply about the play.

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Judith Dorn
Professor of English, St Cloud State University
jadorn@stcloudstate.edu

The Categorizing Muse:

What Is Poetry about in *Poems on Affairs of State*?

Andrew Marvell's poem on the death of Tom May, who was a writer of historical poetry at the time of the English civil wars, can serve as a marker of seventeenth-century attention to poetry's active engagement with the course of events of its times:

> When the Sword glitters ore the Judges head,
> And fear the Coward Churchmen silenced,
> Then is the Poets time, 'tis then he draws,
> And single fights forsaken Vertues cause.
> He, when the wheel of Empire, whirleth back,
> And though the World's disjointed Axel crack,
> Sings still of *antient Rights* and better Times,
> Seeks wretched good, arraigns successful Crimes. (ll. 63-70)

While Marvell's argumentative position is as difficult to pin down in this poem as in so many of his others, he here declares for poetry as marshalling a vast vision of the world's movements, taking responsibility to weigh justice and invoke the historical rights of the English to steer towards ideals, the good.

Scholarship on the later seventeenth-century or early eighteenth-century *Poems on Affairs of State* is relatively scarce in academic databases, at least by comparison with the vast lore about all our favorite writers. That raises the question of how the analytical criteria set by literary criticism or "poetics" engage these works, especially since the later seventeenth century is

considered a “transitional” period for poetics. Into what categories have critical writers sorted the interpretation of these political poems? To what extent might these poems, many of which are satires, serve as test cases for examining the history of critical writing? This paper takes recent scholarship on the invention of literary criticism in England as a point of departure and reemphasizes the human in the humanities, pointing out the underlying political struggle between persons implicit in the critical writing. The very identities of poets as poets are at stake.

1.

The song “Lilliburlero” may be among the most demonstrably consequential poems of the seventeenth-century, spreading as it did across England with the accelerating power of its music, to which Henry Purcell may have contributed. The song first appeared in 1686 to protest England’s imposition of a governor on Ireland by the newly ascendant King James II. Thomas Wharton created a second version of the song, whose popularity apparently contributed to England’s receptivity to William of Orange during the 1688 Glorious revolution. Wharton boasted that he had "sung a deluded Prince out of three kingdoms" (*A True Relation* 5). Other alternate versions cropped up during those tumultuous days.

The song works up anti-Catholic feelings that inspirited the movement to unseat the Catholic monarch James II. The poem’s popularity rides on the pleasure and feeling of liberation of putting on a clownish mask, adopting the stereotyped voice of a despised Irishman who is expressing rage against the English. Wharton’s 1688 version exaggerates the Irish dialect:

> Pox take me, dear Teague, but I am in a rage,
>
> Poo', what impidence is in dish age?
>
> Vat if Dush should come as dey hope,
>
> To up hang us for all de dispense of de Pope?

Dey shay dat Tyrconnel's a friend to de mash,

For which he's a traitor, a pimp, and an ass. (ll.3-8)

Enlightenment-era concepts of poetic quality are not what we are witnessing illustrated here; nor can this poetry be read as direct political argument. But the song evidently exerted an influence on national historical political events through building public spirit. It therefore challenges literary critics to recognize poems as historical events in their performance.

At one eighteenth-century conference I attended, a conference-goer challenged the presenter's choice of content with the question "That poetry sounds not of particularly high quality. Are you arguing that it has poetic OR social historical significance?" That question reflects our field's traditional prioritizing of aesthetics as a category separate from the domain of the social or the historical.

That long-standing distinguishing of aesthetic values features strongly in the Introduction to the first volume of the 1960s collection of *Poems on Affairs of State*, edited by George deForest Lord, which concludes with an extended evaluation of pieces that

> fail to transmute history into poetry. On the other hand, here and there a passage or, sometimes, a whole poem will be touched by the true satiric art into poetry. … [H]as the satirist succeeded, by his masks, his indirections, his ironies and his myths, in freeing his poem from the trammels of historical circumstance and in bestowing upon it the poetic autonomy of true satire? [Some topical works are] struggling toward the condition of an art…" (lv-lvi)

A common expression for the achievement of such art, of poetry itself, during the seventeenth century would have been, of course, "wit." The titles of three books about the Earl of Rochester

demonstrate the prominence of this evaluative label: *A Profane Wit* (Johnson); *Enthusiast in Wit* (De Sola Pinto); *Spirit of Wit* (Treglown).

"Wit" is an ultimately ineffable as well as encompassing concept and is judged by reader response. Which readers, and based on what authority? Our field of literary criticism, like others of the arts, includes some rather subjective categories. To illustrate the ease with which an ineffable category can simply be dismissed, here is the Earl of Rochester's opponent, the Earl of Mulgrave, denying in "An Essay upon Satire" (1679) that Rochester even has wit:

> Rochester I despise for his mere want of wit…
>
> False are his words, affected as his wit…
>
> So often he does aim, so seldom hit;… (ll.230-36)

The positive rule for satire, trackable at least back to Aristotle's review of New Comedy's contrast with Old Comedy, is that satire ought to avoid personal attack but should instead target the vice or folly with humor and innuendo but avoiding sinking into lampoon or abuse of individuals. Mulgrave, like Rochester himself, ignores such advice and names names.

Poetry of the later seventeenth century participated in tumultuous exchanges both on account of contemporary political upheaval, even revolution, and on account of the cultural significance wielded by poetry, including especially the poetry in which plays were written and through which John Dryden became the foremost voice. Dryden's advocacy for neoclassical principles ushered in the principles articulated by Alexander Pope's "Essay on Criticism" (Gavin 20). While still invoking general, subjective categories such as "Nature," neoclassical poetics professed a degree of stability in critical expectations simply foreign to the contests of the preceding era.

If we follow Rose Zimbardo's analysis of the semiotics of later seventeenth-century poetry in James Gill's *Cutting Edges* collection (1995), we find an exposition of how satiric wit becomes a self-deconstructing poetics. Readers cannot land on any meaning in these ironic texts – there is no person behind the voice, Zimbardo writes (24); Restoration satire "exists nowhere but in language" (29).

Still, Zimbardo makes points that sound like Fredric Bogel's argument that satire provokes readers with ironies, ambiguities, and close judgment-calls so they must respond. In *The Difference Satire Makes*, Bogel looks for the satires' effects on readers precisely because their slipperiness drives judgment: less direct targeting of "repellent objects" but more demonstrating awareness of point of view, awareness of the medium of language. The satires can teach sophistication about judgment as driven by threats to clear categorization. It is when categories become less distinct that there is backlash and attack. (Bogel 41-42, 50-51)

Rose Zimbardo's deconstructive approach participated in the theoretical movement current to its times, which was succeeded by a resurgence of historicism and politics during the 1990s, the seeds of which are already latent in her chapter. It is also worth remembering that the commonly cited reason for literary study's lack of attention to satires has to do specifically with their contemporary content. Readers have to be apprised of the poetry's current references, so poems' very forcefulness in their own times potentially runs at odds with their readability as art in the eyes of later evaluation. What we are left with in the world of critical writing, however, is essentially one underlying feature of politics: the drive of person against person, man versus man. More generally, the projection of some kinds of personality or living voices as at stake is always part of the activity of readers. The term "character" had not yet developed to describe

such projections, but increasingly "character" did more of the cultural work of accounting for this mental construct (Brewer). At stake is the mystique of the poet "himself."

2.

A point of departure for considering literary criticism's categories for judgment could come from Michael Gavin's Cambridge book *The Invention of English Criticism*, which contributes a media studies approach to the topic, inspired by our ongoing digital media revolution. The categorical move that provokes reaction appears in two places where Gavin seems to deliberately overstate his scholarly point: "Criticism was thus built on a fundamental contradiction: It was a field of knowledge defined against its knowers" (2). Since this is a statement early in this book, he does refine on and transcend this reductive claim, but then at the end of the introduction he reinforces this idea with another overstatement: "The field's peculiar rallying cry has long been the same: what we do is vitally important. Everything we are doing is horribly wrong" (23). Presumably Gavin aimed at dramatic, rhetorical effect with these points since Gavin's actual introduction (and book) create a much more refined view of the way seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writers asserted their own authority.

Gavin's book does in fact glance at how other disciplines as well as critical writing build knowledge through contentiousness, so the contradiction he finds in critical writing isn't so special. He also describes writers of critical works as asserting their own authority, or that of their social circle, against the crowd of bad critics, so their assertions sound less like blanket claims that the whole field is wrong but rather more like defending their own special perceptiveness against rival "knowers."

Gavin was responding to Philip Smallwood, who wrote: "The birth of criticism out of the satire of itself is one of the founding paradoxes of its history" (Gavin 1-2). Smallwood's

formulation has the advantage because it encompasses the self-critiquing ironies and ambiguities characteristic of satire without ruling on "fields of knowledge." Both scholars conjure up an aura or mystique by invoking the idea of paradox or contradiction. Both words bear the ancient legacy of academic or scholastic disputation foregrounding the discipline of logic, which may represent mind or reason. Where Smallwood's point hints at an interesting puzzle, Gavin's overstatement appears to distinguish critical writing from other fields of knowledge, whereas it isn't clear that other fields of knowledge are convivial societies where scholars don't attack the "knowers" in their field: is that what we find among writers of history, grammarians and philologists, logicians, theologians, or professors of rhetoric? Consider Windshuttle's 1996 book *The Killing of History*, Wilson's 2005 *History in Crisis?*, or Appleby, Hunt, and Jacobs's *Telling the Truth About History* (1994). One commonality among the fields of knowledge appears to be that the practice of dialectical disputation is built into universities and public print cultures. There is always debating, point counterpoint. It is also worth remembering that the seventeenth century had not developed sharp disciplinary distinctions among fields of knowledge called history, poetry, politics, philosophy, or rhetoric either within or outside universities.

Gavin's 2015 book has already been responded to by William Russell's 2020 book Inventing the Critic in Renaissance England. Russell explores farther the problem of criticism by explaining that our legacy of ambivalence about the role of the critic is amplified by the openness of the label of "critic," in contrast to terms designating other fields of knowledge (e.g., historian, philosopher). That is, the very word "critic' carries the ambiguity of referring potentially to judgment or perception itself, of any kind, so that the word could play across the blurred boundaries among the fields of humanities, whether historical, literary, philosophical writing or any other emerging discipline. Furthermore, writers often claimed their authority as

"critic" – or true judge – on the grounds essentially of what we have been describing as ineffable wit: they possessed that indefinable perceptiveness setting them on heights apart from the crowd. John Dennis in the eighteenth century came up with a clever response to this self-authorizing move of the critics: he suggested putting a tax on calling oneself a poet, wit, or critick (Gavin 69). But as Russell emphasizes, the critics did also feel obliged to supply some kind of metadiscourse at least referring to standards or methods to justify their authority.

Fields of study even among our current disciplines build knowledge toward unreachable vanishing points around which knowing is oriented, where the categories of analysis blur into whatever you want to call it: aporias, ineffables, spaces where the human in the humanities gets projected. For example, writers of history orient their work in relation to the problem of never being able to get at the original actions or mentalities, the actualities that are ultimately unreachable through our media of knowing, as well as toward the domain of "interpretation" that all the humanities share. Similarly, there is the problem of how scholars across fields can represent "performance."

Poetics' impulse to differentiate itself could be signaled by Philip Sidney's claim in his *An Apology for Poetry* that historians and astronomers fall into the category of liars because they seek to affirm knowledge of mankind whereas a poet makes no attempt to do so. However, the seventeenth-century poets do not hold back from claiming to know individual persons, deploying their self-deconstructing wit and ironies aggressively against their rivals, often by name.

Where Gavin emphasizes the emergence of criticism through seventeenth-century discourses on the poetry of the culturally powerful dramas, our satirists do call attention to another turn of the screw beyond the forging of knowledge through disputation. These are poets writing poetics commentary on other poets <u>in poetry form</u>, so their identities and performances

as poets are at stake and in direct competition with these other poets as they write their own poems in ways that don't seem to have quite the same parallels in, say, disputes over representations among writers of history.

For one thing, from Sidney to Samuel Johnson, poets claim their art to be the highest. Always at (high) stake is the manly race for the laurels, so the very wit of ironizing the categories of evaluation makes for an ultimate competitive move. Dryden was called "Old Bays" in ironic acknowledgement of his having won the laurels, the designation of number one, poet laureate. Among poets, at least, poetry was seen as holding cultural preeminence, to be a preoccupation or even obsession for the culture. The Oxford Barber's "Verses on the Queen's Death" declare "Rhyme, the great business of the nation" (Lord, *Anthology* 541)

3.

Categories of analysis building the field of "poetics" can be extracted out of the poems and satires written during this later seventeenth-century period. That is because the poets practice as critics while writing poetry, articulating their methods and categories of analysis—often while attacking other poets. Here are some of the categories that early modern criticism or "poetics" applied in evaluating poetry, which can be picked out of satires collected in *Poems on Affairs of State*:

Performance according to Classical standards, hierarchy of genres, decorum

But also: Transcendence of the continental or Classical rules of poetry

The merits of rhyme metrics beauty wit (true vs. false wit)

OR wit as salaciousness

Aristotelian analysis mimesis, imitation of Nature consider Plato

the speed (too fast, too slow) at which a work was written

Common sense sweetness discretion clarity truth

Pedantry, sycophancy plagiarism

Moral example or moral effects Historical representation

Questionable: market success, popularity with readers; popularity among the powerful?

Character (not fully developed as a key dramatic concept): mostly negative Types

That *je ne sais quoi* that only a "true judge" (variously defined) will recognize

And the important Horatian principle: Whether satire sank from evaluating types of human error/provoking humor, to lampoon, personal attack

At the same time, the public purpose and persuasive aim of many of the *Poems on Affairs of State* is declarative and clear. Here are a few resisting the government of William and Mary, indicators of Jacobite Rebellions to come: "On Sir John Fenwick"; "A Panegyric"; "Farewell to England"; "A Satire upon the French King"; "Advice to a Painter" (on the Treaty of Ryswick).

The poets of the time often responded directly to the political positions and opinions of their rivals as well, making it clear that the domain of politics was not cordoned off from poetic criteria, so the rhetorical deployment of these performances took on agency, art with political implications.

Ashley Marshall needs to be credited for her vast survey of satires from 1658 to 1770 (she looked at 3000), which she organizes into categories, concluding that their variety defies literary criticism and traditional genre analysis familiar from the neoclassical Augustanism of the era especially Dryden and Pope. The satires resist categorization.

The *Poems on Affairs of State* can similarly be described as exposing the blurred boundaries among the humanistic disciplines and the linguistic contingencies of the categories they apply to the problem of projecting knowledge of human actions and performance.

Part of the mystique of the poet or critic is in fact his distinctiveness from general humanity, his superiority to popularity with the crowd, his scorn of marketability or sales to audiences, his transcendence of categories. The Earl of Rochester opens “An Allusion to Horace” denigrating a poet who is popularly applauded, since Rochester’s more true judgment perceives the “false Sense” that the audience is blind to:

'Tis therefore not enough, when your false Sense
Hits the false Judgment of an Audience
Of Clapping-Fooles, … (ll.12-14)

Then he later provides a list of Horatian categories for evaluation:

But within due proportions, circumscribe
What e're you write; that with a flowing Tyde,
The Stile, may rise, yet in its rise forbeare,
With uselesse Words, t'oppresse the wearyed Eare:
Here be your Language lofty, there more light,
Your Rethorick, with your Poetry, unite:
For Elegance sake, sometimes alay the force
Of Epethets; 'twill soften the discourse;
A Jest in Scorne, poynts out, and hits the thing,
More home, than the Morosest Satyrs Sting. (ll.20-29)

That last couplet refers to Horace’s steering, like Aristotle, between the direct personal attacks of Old Comedy and the sophisticated “innuendo” of New Comedy. It was a point that Rochester’s opponents found it easy to turn back against Rochester, since he in fact attacked individuals rather than types, often without jesting. But Rochester was beyond caring to obey such moral

rules. These poets reflect the participation of poetry in a court culture laced with high status political risks that outweigh considerations of its influence or effects in public print culture. Not for them was Ben Jonson's principle that a man cannot be a good poet without first being a good man. Ultimately Rochester's poem was about him versus them—but nevertheless Rochester is one of the few who has had multiple books written about him.

When the satirists invoke their categories for analysis, they do not set standards in good faith but adjust them to their personal target or deploy them to evade being nailed down themselves. As Rose Zimbardo puts it, the sophisticated ironies of seventeenth-century satire are "designed to fracture and subvert the constructs that the 'serious' and 'respectable' literary genres have written upon our consciousness. It makes chaos of genres, of conventions, of language itself" (37).

As Russell and Gavin affirm of the emerging discipline, a critic must demonstrate his authority to judge through employing metadiscourse, demonstrating the critical move of being able to apply analysis to his own analysis. But it is metadiscourse, like turtles, all the way down. And a game of talking for victory. Tellingly, the 1971 Keast collection of scholarly essays on seventeenth-century poetry includes Douglas Bush's accusation that Cleanth Brooks's interpretation of Marvell's "Horatian Ode" on Cromwell's return reveals that Brooks was biased by liberal political opinion, to which Cleanth Brooks responded with surprise.

Here is a very personal exchange featuring the Earl of Rochester, Sir Carr Scrope/Scroope, and the Earl of Mulgrave, Dryden's patron. Rochester appears to write dismissively of the knight Sir Carr Scrope in "An Allusion to Horace":

Shou'd I be troubled when the Purblind Knight

Who squints more in his Judgment, than his sight,

Picks silly faults, and Censures what I write? (ll. 115-17)

Rochester asserts that Scrope misjudges by applying the wrong criteria, perhaps the wrong or disproportionate priorities. However, a key characteristic of the satirists is their claim to transcend the categories of evaluation—which suggests that their wit can pivot to suit their strategy. Accusations of plagiarism, for example, fly back and forth among these famous poets. Rochester attacks Dryden for plagiarism in the first lines of Allusion to Horace, which are themselves presented in the language of acknowledging an opponent's point during a debate: "Well Sir, 'tis granted, I said Dryden's Rhimes,/Were stoln, unequal, nay dull many times: …" But the test of the sophisticated reader is to recognize the act of wit with which one poet transforms another's lines. The poet calls up and compliments the reader's own sophisticated memory of the original, possibly even turning the line against the original author in a move deploying critical poetics. The categorizing muse is co-opted. George Parfitt in *Seventeenth-Century Poetry* remarked that Andrew Marvell hardly wrote a line that wasn't redeploying some other poet's lines. (15)

Decorum was another category violated ad hoc in the service of wit, flagrantly by Rochester's swinging between high and low language. The highest level of sophistication resides in that hall of mirrors where the poets transform one another's wit—and any moves language can make—into their own.

To Rochester's slur, the knight Sir Carr Scrope responded quite effectively. Writing "In Defense of Satire" (1677), Scrope reviews and practices standard satiric principles, attacking negative character "types," then shifts to personal denunciation of Rochester for getting his companions into a disastrous night of riot involving a constable and the night watch and then running away, leaving one of his companions to be murdered:

My pen is dipped in no such bitter gall.

He that can rail at one he calls his friend, [Rochester had worked with Scrope in the past]

Or hear him absent wronged, and not defend,

Who for the sake of some ill-natured jest

Tells what he should conceal, invents the rest,

To fatal midnight frolics can betray

His brave companion and then run away,

Leaving him to be murdered in the street,

Then put it off with some buffoon conceit.

This, this is he you should beware of all,

Yet him a witty, pleasant man you call. (ll.47-57)

The poem refers to an actual killing blamable on Rochester, cutting through the value placed on wit without much ambiguity. The poem takes action to transform the social labels applied to his opponent by adroitly undoing Rochester's poetic "conceit." If Rochester sublimates his scandalous deed into wit, Scrope's poem can pull him down by baldly representing the "historical" fact of what happened.

Rochester's poem in reply claims to be critique of the poetry but immerses itself in extreme slander directed at Scrope's person, mostly physical features Scrope could not have changed such as his small stature and ugliness. His ill fit with the game of love is rubbed in. If satire classically has a corrective function, that purpose seems not to be the aim in "On the supposed author of 'In Defense of Satire'" (1677):

To rack and torture they unmeaning brain

In satire's praise to a low untuned strain

In thee was most impertinent and vain,

When in thy person we more clearly see

That satire's of divine authority,

For God made one on man when he made thee… (ll.1-6, *boldface added*)

[Twenty lines of personal attack emphasizing Scrope's physical ugliness follow, including:]

In thee are all those contradictions joined…

A lump deformed and shapeless wert thou born, …

And art grown up the most ungraceful wight,

Harsh to the ear and hideous to the sight;

Yet love's thy business, beauty thy delight (Lord, *Anthology* 180, ll.9-15)

Rochester forfeits his credentials as a satirist, descending below lampoon to sheer degradation of the man. One turn of wit is worth pointing out, however:

When in thy person we more clearly see

That satire's of divine authority,

For God made one on man when he made thee…

Most of these satirists had passed through Oxford or Cambridge. Recognizable here is a turn that falls into the category of university wit much admired during, for example, the dialectics of academic disputations. Rochester uses the language of demonstration while giving his satire a self-reflexive twist. In this metadiscourse on satire, he turns his opponent's satire against itself. The poetry about satire becomes a performance of satire turning Scrope's satire into an embodiment of the person of Scrope to prove its own point. The dialectical tradition may transcend the boundaries of poetry, politics, or any of the humanistic fields, but its barb is directed at the opposing man.

Studying the evaluative categories taking shape as poetics during the later seventeenth century reveals that, ultimately, our writers' real targets are one another, and their fundamental performance has to do with asserting their own poetry and themselves as poets. David Brewer has observed that "One of the most fascinating developments of the later seventeenth century is the emergence of authorial names as the principal means through which authorship was imagined and negotiated and marked" (96). Their audiences may not yet have developed the personal identification with imagining literary characters as a feature to which novels have laid claim, but audiences would also be familiar with oral performances on stage and throughout social existence. And they are mindful of the persons evasively shadowing these performances in their play of language. Readers were unlikely to imagine nothing behind the voices. In their ironical play with negative character types or direct attack on persons, the satires might qualify as more representative of political history than heroic historical poetry. In the political climate of 2025, a writer might similarly avoid the searchable term "g_nder" in order to pass an oblique argument along without comment. As the dialectics of seventeenth-century university wit indicate, the fields of knowledge in the humanities invoke and play with categories of analysis and evaluation contingent on their awareness of language as medium of knowing and also through which action is taken. It is worth taking into account the underlying projected presence of persons, much as personal competition accompanies satirists' participation in a court culture as well as in public, print culture. In the field of literary study, it is worthwhile to be mindful to what extent at stake is the ultimate projection of the poet as a category carrying mystique.

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