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on
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Edited by
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Introduction

The papers included in this volume were presented at the Second Dakotas Conference on Early British Literature, which has held at Dakota State University, in Madison, South Dakota, April 28 and 29, 1994. The conference featured two keynote presentations, one by Professor C. David Benson of the University of Connecticut and the other by Professor David Miller, of Purdue University. Other presenters came from several states of the upper Midwest, and included college faculty, graduate students and even one undergraduate student.

The various papers are primarily theoretical in nature, although most take a direct approach to their texts, rather than following the modern "isms" of recent literary criticism. Many of the works discussed are mainstream canonical texts, or less popular texts by canonical authors. Some of the papers are concerned with pedagogical issues, such as how one should approach teaching Julian of Norwich in a typical Brit Lit I survey course, or how one could bring Milton's "Lycidas" alive to high school students. Others, such as "George Crabbe's women and the intimidations of feminist criticism" are more theoretical. The papers are grouped "chronologically" by period and appear more or less in the order in which they were presented.

In his keynote address, Professor C. David Benson looks at two somewhat difficult and obscure works, *The Book of Margery Kempe* and *Piers Plowman*. This comparison allows readers to see both from a popular perspective rather than from the elite perspective of the works of Aquinas or Chaucer. Although "the comparison . . . may seem absurd to many," there are many similarities. For example, both works' central characters pursue an unsatisfied quest for salvation; both show similarities of form, alternating between episodes of dreaming and waking; both authors create powerful and compelling narrative, but in neither work does this kind of narrative predominate.

Perhaps most importantly, both works "call into question our modern ideas about literature. . . . Neither work is art for art's sake, however much art they may contain, but a personal search for justification and finally salvation." At each work's center is a repentant sinner: Kempe's Margery may become favored by God, but she is not personally very likable. As such, she "provides the closest analogue . . . in Middle English to the marginal and awkward authorial self in *Piers Plowman*." Each central figure,

then, is both "alienated and alienating," placed outside the formal power structure of the established church, and the search for personal salvation is central to both works.

Both works "not only describe a devout life available to lay people beyond the control of the Church, but each also seeks nothing less than the redemption of the secular. However, each author defines secular in his or her own terms: for Langland, it is social and political, while "mediations, conversations and feelings, not social reform, are Margery's work." And since each quest is unsatisfied, each pilgrimage continues.

With the inclusion of more women writers in the *Norton Anthology*, one can certainly make a compelling case for including the religious mystic, Julian of Norwich. But "the question may be what to do with her." In his essay, "A mystic in Brit Lit I," Jay Ruud tries to provide some answers.

A major problem with using Julian is the very textual excerpts that the Norton text includes: they are not particularly engaging. Once these textual problems are overcome, there still remains the problem of how to approach Julian. Ruud's solution is to regard her as engaging in a dialogue with some of the major canonical authors, particularly Chaucer.

Julian is concerned with many religious issues central to the 14th century. For example, one issue of concern is intentionality as it relates to sin and confession, and one dialogic text is "The Pardoner's Tale." Julian also discusses free will versus determinism and a perfect companion text would be Chaucer's "Nun's Priest's Tale." For the conflict of experience versus authority one could use "The Wife of Bath's Tale." And if one would prefer to stay clear of religious controversies, Julian could be paired with the Wife to discuss the self image of women and their attempts to challenge authority. Julian, by "feminizing the image of God, in some ways deifies the image of woman."

Another 15th century writer who has been receiving increased interest is Margery Kempe (see Professor Benson's address). For Michele Morano, humor is a central characteristic of Kempe's writing which is overlooked both by readers and critics, and finding humor in her writing by no means trivializes either her writing or her piety. If Kempe arouses laughter, examining that laughter "highlights the tension between her mystical experiences and the confining physical world in which she lives." Kempe seems to use humor to "subvert the patriarchal system, to hold open the space that she has created with her physical spirituality," and sometimes the text seems to invite readers to laugh at Margery. Yet for Morano, "humor functions as part of

the mechanism that helps Margery resist being completely marginalized by her society."

Susan Butvin examines how Chaucer's Dorigen re-creates herself through her complaints in "The Franklin's Tale." In these complaints, which Butvin refers to as her "texts," Dorigen "dwells on her difficulties, constructing and discounting possibilities while determining answers for herself." Butvin argues that since readers' interpretations of texts are likely to change over time, the creators of those texts are afforded similar opportunities to (re)create and (re)vision themselves.

Because 1993 marked the four hundredth anniversary of Christopher Marlowe's death, Bruce Brandt examines fictional portrayals of Marlowe in four recent novels. The novels he considers are Anthony Burgess's *A Dead Man in Deptford*, Judith Cook's *The Slicing Edge of Death*, Stephanie Cowell's *Nicholas Cooke: Actor, Soldier, Physician, Priest*, and Lisa Goldstein's *Strange Devices of the Sun and Moon*. Brandt finds that Burgess's novel is the most self-consciously literary; that Cook's novel, while of some historical interest, "has no stylistic rewards"; that Goldstein's work is "fantasy rather than historical fiction"; and that Marlowe is not the central character of Cowell's book. Brandt then discusses the various aspects of the historical Marlowe which all four novels portray: his homosexuality, his government service (and spying), and his mysterious death.

In "*Measure for Measure* and the Duke's dark deeds," Mary Mokris examines the duke's behavior in his dual roles as duke and friar. She begins with the legal term *assumpsit* and its meaning in the context of Renaissance English law. "The idea of *assumpsit* has to do not only with making a promise, but with actually undertaking to perform some action," and that *assumpsit* actions "involve nearly all the kinds of promises made in *Measure for Measure*." In his two roles as duke and friar, Vincentio should combine earthly and heavenly authority; "yet as either Duke or Friar he lacks something which is completed by the other personality, a fact that he realizes by the end of the play." One may change both morals (heavenly) and laws (earthly) but only through a combination of justice and mercy. Vincentio's failings in both roles come from his approaching them in an "either/or" rather than a "both/and" mode. "It is only in deference to the mercy of the law that true mercy may emerge through the person of the Duke."

In "Elizabeth's new Aracdia: *The Lady of May*," Bill Clemente looks at the larger issues that Sydney's entertainment embraces. Although Sydney's work contains elements of political and social

allegory, Clemente focuses on the May Lady's choice of suitor. Therion is wealthy but prone to violence; Espilus is a poor shepherd but is kind. In this choice Clemente sees a much larger issue. "Therion's intemperate conduct towards the shepherdess must be viewed as an affront to the Queen and the more positive attributes of nature she wishes to nurture by her rule." The May Lady is not merely choosing between two suitors, but between two different and conflicting ways of life.

Robert DeSmith examines the critical crux of Gascoigne's "Adventures of Master FJ": is the work autobiography or misunderstood fiction? DeSmith argues that while Gascoigne takes great pains to make his work appear factual, "disguising fiction as fact created a witty and suggestive context for reading the poems." Indeed, this interplay between fact and fiction urged Gascoigne's readers to search for truth both within the work and within their own lives.

Gascoigne expends a great deal of effort to make his work appear "real": the introductory letters, the realistic social details, and biographical data. But DeSmith argues that Gascoigne also undercuts the reliability he works so hard to establish and even provides, in Frances, a corrective to literal, biographical reading. Gascoigne's ultimate purpose may be to teach his readers how to read this text and any text figuratively, and that "they would discover the fictional basis of the work and consequently the work's underlying usefulness."

In his keynote address, Professor David Miller takes a somewhat playful look at new critical theories as we follow Lady Alice through the modern library. While these theories have invigorated Milton studies for the mature reader, they can be frustrating and dangerous ground for less sophisticated readers of Milton's texts.

Modern literary criticism may be counter-productive, especially for undergraduates, as it tends to problematize, rather than to explain, Milton's texts. It tends to use Milton's texts to argue "something" rather than using "something" to illuminate Milton's texts.

As a "corrective" Professor Miller offers his own look at two discourses which work side by side in Milton's English sonnets — ceremony and ritual. "In that 'perfect universe,' social power (whose commerce is ceremony) would reflect and embody spiritual power (whose commerce is ritual)." While "ceremony is the formal, assertive contract of social, political authority, . . . ritual evokes a timeless pattern." Miller uses these kinds of discourse to search for a middle ground. While admitting that modern criti-

cism can help illuminate the discourse of ceremony, "these same tools can be nihilistic or procrustian when applied to ritual."

Milton's "Lycidas" has always seemed difficult, especially for younger readers; however, Sheree Kornkven presents a methodology for making Milton's elegy approachable. If teachers of Milton can tap into young people's sense of loss, they "would benefit from studying "Lycidas," Milton's depiction of "one man's sorrow that illustrates the universal phenomenon of bereavement." Kornkven suggests using recent deaths of popular music figures such as Kurt Cobain and using lyrics from popular songs that speak of despair and grief. Kornkven also uses Kübler-Ross's stages of grief as another approach to the poem and shows how these stages can be found in Milton's work. Kornkven's well documented paper gives teachers a variety of tools which they can use to make "Lycidas" understandable for a variety of readers.

In "Two hearts strangely warmed," Mary Ryder looks at Samuel Johnson's attitudes about salvation by faith. In the sermons which Johnson wrote for Rev. John Taylor, we can find "Johnson's reaction to and perhaps attraction to evangelical, and specifically Wesleyan Methodist, sentiments." Johnson believed that the individual was responsible for his own salvation, a doctrine central to the evangelical movement. And Johnson believed firmly in the importance of faith, and the necessity of faith for salvation, beliefs Johnson shared with Wesley. "Just as Johnson is sometimes considered as one who would reject salvation by faith, Wesley is sometimes misunderstood as one who will admit no salvation except by faith. In fact, both men stood firm on the middle ground."

W. Andrew Alexander examines the critical commonplace that Fielding's characters are inferior to Richardson's because Fielding concentrates on his characters' exteriors. Although Fielding has been "defended" by Ian Watt, Maynard Mack and Claude Rawson, Alexander argues that their defenses are more akin to excuses for Fielding's comic muse.

Alexander turns to passages in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* to show that Fielding sometimes does depict his characters' inner lives. Indeed, Alexander argues, there are many examples of "inner debates" in Fielding's works, but they have gone largely unnoticed. "That Fielding simply replicates inside his characters the disputatious structure of his world as a whole becomes, then, a reason for overlooking the interior debates." And although Alexander is not suggesting some previously untapped level of psychological complexity for Fielding's characters, his analysis does "make some of the traditional ideas about Fielding's technique of characterization, his interest in the inner states of his

characters, and his optimism about the human condition all slightly less neat and clean."

In "George Crabbe's women and the intimidations of feminist criticism," Gladys Haunton argues that feminist criticism also creates problems for its advocates. While trying to free women from misrepresentation as characters and underrepresentation as authors and readers, "it tends to stratify its own critical approaches into a hierarchy that devalues those feminist strategies most accessible to the woman it seeks to serve." Readers will find in George Crabbe's "Tales" a range of women characters who participate fully in "the social dramas of life." This discovery will create the very kind of excitement that gave rise to feminist criticism. But these same readers may find that "feminist criticism" itself is unsatisfying because in part it invalidates the traditional tools of literary scholarship. Rather than becoming allied to any one "movement," Haunton argues that readers must find "within their own backgrounds. . . the resources and strategies that will enable them to connect with feminist criticism at a point of contact that has meaning for *them*."

And finally, A. Waller Hastings analyzes John Home's tragedy *Douglas* as patriotic mythopoeisis. When Scotland lost the final expression of its separation in 1746, Scotland could only assert its independence culturally. "Scotland's assertion of national identity included the rediscovery of a unique national folklore and romanticization of Scottish history."

Home's *Douglas* adapts material from the Scots ballad "Gil Morrice," but Home gives the tale a mythic quality unconstrained by notions of chronological history. "The play's mythologizing character lies in its deployment of complementary echoes of Scottish history, Greek myth, and Arthurian legend." But for all its myth making, *Douglas* is not an incitement to a resurgence of Scottish power; rather it acknowledges political realities and presents "along with a picture of the glories of the past, an argument why those glories should now be left behind. . . . Let us revive our national pride, . . . but let us not revive the feuds and battles that both gave us our highest glory and took away our independent state."

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The passionate pilgrimages of *Piers Plowman* and *The Book of Margery Kempe*

For the last few years I have been trying to make sense of the great fourteenth-century alliterative poem, *Piers Plowman*, a religious and social allegory whose title everyone knows, but which in this country has never been central to the English literary canon. It appears in the Norton Anthology in only a few, somewhat misleading excerpts. The length of *Piers Plowman*, its lack of a clear or consistent narrative, and its intellectual and moral intensity make the poem forbidding even to medievalists. *Piers* is the *Middlemarch* of Middle English literature: a work whose greatness everyone respects and which everyone is planning to get around to reading one of these days. Unfortunately, I don't think *Piers* has the soap opera potential that would make it a hit on Masterpiece Theater. A. C. Spearing calls *Piers* "one of the most fascinating, and also one of the most difficult, of fourteenth-century poems" (107), and a recent article is entitled, "Why is *Piers Plowman* so Hard to Read?"

One way to try to understand *Piers* is to approach it through a contemporary context: the two most popular comparisons have been with an aspect of elite, educated culture (such Thomas Aquinas, Biblical exegesis, or the *Moderns*) or with a more familiar major author, who is usually Chaucer. Both approaches have been useful, but I want to attempt something more unusual, an experiment in criticism in which I am still feeling my way. Perhaps perversely, I want to approach the poem through a work that until very recently has been even more obscure than *Piers* itself, and which has only recently appeared in the Norton Anthology (also in misleading excerpts) as a result of the interest of feminist critics: *The Book of Margery Kempe*.

One of many odd things about such a comparison is that the *Book of Margery Kempe* was written a generation or two after *Piers Plowman*, in the second quarter of the fifteenth century. The exact method of the composition of Kempe's *Book* remains a vexed question, but for our purposes today, I follow Lynne Staley Johnson in using the name Kempe for the author of the *Book* and the name Margery for its principal character. Kempe tells us something about Margery's daily life, but much more about her mystical transports, which are variously referred to as "feelings,"

"contemplations," "meditations." Often these are accompanied by extravagant weeping, especially when thinking of the Lord's Passion. At times heavenly music or odors come to Margery's senses and she even imagines herself as a servant helping the Holy family during Christ's infancy, but her most common connection with the divine is through the medium of speech (or "dalliance" as she calls it), usually with the second person of the Trinity. Here is an account from her pilgrimage to Jerusalem: "Afterwards she received communion on Mount Calvary, and then she wept, sobbed, and cried so loud that it was amazing to hear it. She was so full of holy thoughts and meditations, and holy contemplations on the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, and holy conversation in which our Lord spoke to her soul, that she could never describe them later, so high and holy were they"¹ (71-72). The extraordinary spiritual odyssey of this fifteenth-century housewife from Lynn in Norfolk offers us the opportunity to see *Piers Plowman* in a new way, from a popular rather than an elite perspective; echoing the French Annales school of history, we might call it "literary criticism from the bottom up."

The comparison between Kempe's *Book* and *Piers* will seem absurd to many. What could these two works have in common? Kempe's *Book* is in prose and is personal and mystical; *Piers* is in poetry and is didactic and allegorical. The author of *Piers*, usually identified as William Langland, is a highly educated man, probably some kind of cleric, much concerned with abstract intellectual and social problems; Margery is an illiterate woman (even if clerics read spiritual works to her) almost completely absorbed in her own experiences and often dismissed as an hysterical egotist. *Piers* survives in some 50 medieval manuscripts from throughout England and was printed in the 16th century; Kempe's *Book* in only one manuscript from Mt. Grace and was not published in any length until 1940.

As far as we know, Kempe's fifteenth-century work has no direct connection with the late fourteenth-century *Piers* (I am not arguing for source or influence), but they are both part of late medieval English spirituality. When these two texts are read together many revealing similarities as well as differences become apparent, though *Piers* remains the more demanding work. I want to use Margery's flamboyant practices to help us better understand Langland's literary form, personal engagement, and desire to find religious meaning in secular life. If, as I have suggested, these two works are out of the critical mainstream, it is precisely their marginality that attracts me. Chaucer and the *Gawain*-poet can be analyzed using the same technique we apply to modern

writers, but Langland and Kempe stubbornly resist such anachronistic readings; they remain citizens of an elusive Otherworld that by turns attracts, repels, and baffles.

Let me begin with the question of literary form. No one has succeeded in defining the genre or identifying a clear structural model for *Piers Plowman*. Other medieval dream visions contain just one dream, but *Piers* has eight separate dreams with two additional inner dreams. Although obviously not a source, Kempe's later *Book* resembles *Piers* in important ways more closely than any other Middle English work. Both are visionary dialogues that describe the autobiographical spiritual adventures of a secular English person. Kempe's *Book* alternates between episodes in the real world and her mystical experiences, especially conversations or "dalliances" with Jesus. This is probably the best analogue we have to the multiple dreams in *Piers*, which usually consist of conversations with allegorical figures, interspersed with short but significant waking moments.

As we shall see again, however, the recognition of a similarity also helps us to define fundamental differences in the two works. The visionary world in Kempe's *Book* is place of comfort and escape from the scorn and threats of ordinary life. Problems that vex Margery while awake are solved there: the difficulties with her earthly husband John disappear when Christ becomes her dream lover. Will, the dreamer in *Piers*, also experiences scorn when awake, but he is rebuked and corrected in his visions as well. The dream world of *Piers* is no escape, but rather an intensification of the real world, where the faults of individuals, groups, and the self can be explored in depth. Margery always returns to earthly life from her divine visions; *Piers* never really leaves it.

The dialogues that are central to both works reinforce these differences. Margery's long and quite repetitive mystical dialogues are most often with Jesus but also with other divine beings such as the Virgin and the apostles. These are clearly authoritative speakers, who offer Margery constant reassurance about her special relationship and favor with God. Early in the *Book*, the Virgin tells Margery that a seat is reserved for her in heaven at her son's knee (20), and a few pages later Jesus tells her, "I am in thee and thou in me. And they that hear thee hear the voice of God" (23). *Piers Plowman* also contains long dialogues, but rather than reassurance, Will is often contradicted and confronted with his faults. His interlocutors are very different from Margery's. In *Piers* Christ speaks only to the Devil. Instead of receiving divine instruction and comfort directly, Will tries to find the route to salvation from more ambiguous allegorical figures, some of

which are elements of his own psyche (as we may suspect with Margery), and whose authority, even when they are named Holy Church, is far from clear. None provides the "kynde knowing" [the natural understanding] that the Dreamer so desperately seeks.

II.

In addition to a general similarity in literary form, Kempe's *Book* and *Piers* both contain magnificent narrative moments. One of Kempe's most skillful narratives, which is included in the Norton Anthology, describes how Margery gets her husband John to agree to the chaste marriage she has long sought. The scene is vivid from the first sentence: "It befell on a Friday on Midsummer's Eve in right hot weather, as this creature was coming from York bearing a bottle of beer in her hand and her husband a cake in his bosom" (23). John suddenly and bizarrely asks Margery what she would do if he were threatened with beheading unless they again had sexual relations. Noting that they have been chaste for seven weeks, Margery says she would rather he be killed, to which John, memorably, replies, "You are no good wife." They proceed to a roadside cross where John says that he will agree to her desire that they make a vow of chastity before a bishop, if she will do three things: continue to sleep in the same bed with him; pay his debts before going on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and eat and drink with him on Fridays as before. When she refuses to give up her Friday fast, John threatens to "meddle" with her sexually. Margery is frightened and calls on Jesus, who tells her that she should agree to her husband's demands, adding "this was the reason that I ordered you to fast so that you should the sooner obtain your desire." Margery tells John that she will eat with him on Fridays if he gives up his right to the debt of her body and instead leaves it free to God. John replies, "May your body be as free to God as it has been to me." Kneeling by the cross, they both say prayers of thanks and then "they eat and drank together in great gladness of spirit. This was on Friday on Midsummer's Eve."

Events may have happened exactly like this, but the powerful sense of reality in the account comes not from its fidelity to historical truth (here as elsewhere in the *Book* we have no way of knowing), but from Kempe's ability to construct a powerful narrative with dramatic characters, dialogue, and detail. She places events at a time when the marvelous is supposed to happen (Midsummer's Eve), and her narrative is both naturalistic and symbolic. The day of the week plus the bottle of beer and cake not only effectively set the scene, but refer to the issue that prevents an accord, fasting on Friday. The subject is chastity, but

the narrative is very worldly. John wants his debts paid. Jesus turns out to be a shrewd trader (he reveals that Margery's fasting was just a bargaining chip), and the agreement is celebrated with prayers but also with the couple eating and drinking together. Kempe is the author, but the best character is John. In this scene at least, he is one of the more sympathetic males in medieval literature, who is given two splendid lines at the expense of Margery: "You are no good wife" and "May your body be as free to God as it has been to me."

As I probably do not need to demonstrate, *Piers Plowman* contains many equally splendid narrative moments. Two obvious examples, which also concern food and drink, are the confession of Gluttony in Passus 5 (the only consistent narrative in the confession of the sins) and the Dinner given by Conscience in Passus 13.² Gluttony, as you may remember, sets out for church but is waylaid by a tavern full of Runyonesque characters such as Tim the Tinker and Godfrey of Garleckhithe. The result is no happy conviviality." Gluttony drinks too much, with predictable and graphically described results, and is born home to sleep it off. Conscience's dinner in Passus 13, like Gluttony's drinking bout, is more allegorical than Margery's narrative. It contains a gluttonous Doctor of Divinity feasting on fried eggs while Will and Patience dine on Biblical texts, but Elizabeth Kirk has pointed out a shrewd observation of social interaction worthy of Jane Austen in the lines after Will has attacked the Doctor for his hypocrisy:

Thanne Conscience ful curteisly a contenance he made,
And preynte upon Pacience to preie me to be stille,
And seide hymself, "Sire doctour and it be youre wille,
What is Dowel and Dobet? Ye dyvynours knoweth"
(13.111-14).

This is Kirk's comment on these lines: "Familiar indeed is this reaction of the hostess at a precariously balanced formal occasion when things are livening up unsettlingly: the grimace of mingled complicity and rebuke to the offender, the glance at the reliable guest that says 'Do something'; and the flattering inquiry addressed to the offended party" (147).

The mystery about such accomplished narratives in *Piers* and Kempe's *Book* is not their excellence, but why there are so few of them. They are as rare as wealthy teachers of Early British Literature. If such narratives were found in greater numbers, both works would have larger selections in the Norton and be read more often in literature courses. Modern readers eager for the pleasures of good stories are often disappointed by what they are

given by Langland and Kempe. Christ's many long speeches to Margery can seem merely dull and repetitive, and more than one reader has lost heart when the middle of *Piers* is given over to extended and abstruse discourses by such as Wit, Study, and Clergy during which the dramatic action virtually ceases.

III.

Piers and Kempe's *Book* call into question our modern ideas about literature. Kempe and Langland can write splendid narratives that equal the best fiction when they chose to, but often they do not and instead pursue other interests. Neither work is art for art's sake, however much art they may contain, but a personal search for justification and finally salvation. They present themselves as visionary testimonies of their authors' experiences. But if both works have a strong autobiographical bent (Kempe's *Book* has been called the first autobiography in English), they are not complete self-portraits. Just one of Margery's 14 children is mentioned, and we get only tantalizing personal details about the narrator in *Piers* (the C-text provides the most). A modern autobiographer might well explore the effect on her of a locally prominent father, but in Kempe's *Book* only John Burnam's name appears, with no sense of his personality. Instead of her biological father, it is those she calls her "ghostly fathers," her confessors, who are described in detail. Similarly, even if the poet did have a wife and child called Kit and Calote as his narrator claims, they are no more realized as human characters than the allegorical wife and children given to the Plowman in Passus 6.

Kempe's *Book* can make us more aware of the autobiographical episodes in *Piers*, but it also makes clear that we are dealing with two very differently constructed selves: one prominent and presented at length; the other hidden, allusive, and refracted. Margery is the center of her text, at times oppressively so, even if she is usually referred to in the third person. It is constantly *her* experiences that are explained; other characters, like her husband or her accusers, who are sometimes quite vivid as we have seen, never have an independent existence but appear only in relation to her. *Piers*, by contrast, portrays a range of memorable non-authorial characters from Meed through Hunger to Christ himself. The strong sense of personal engagement in the poem is found not only in the narrative first-person (though Will's life becomes more prominent as we move from A to C), but also more indirectly through a number of surrogates, who clearly represent the author, even if we cannot always be sure to what degree. These surrogates include the portraits of the deadly sins in Passus 5,

Haukyn the Active Man, and even Piers himself in his more human moments.

Though the authors of *Piers* and Kempe's *Book* undoubtedly lived very different lives, and the selves that emerge in their books are constructed on different principles, there is much that they have in common. Kempe's *Book* and *Piers* are spiritual apologies of repentant sinners, whose most famous model is Augustine's *Confessions*. Thus the worldly wickedness of each self is stressed. At the beginning of the book, we hear of Margery's desperate early attempts to achieve success in business, and many of the accusations against her by modern readers (that she is vain, delusional, hypocritical) are first reported in her *Book*. No story is too embarrassing to relate, such as a man's invitation to adultery which she accepts only to be told when she arrives for the assignation that he would rather be cut up into mince meat than sleep with her (14-15). What Emily Hope Allen called Margery's "instinctive and zealous honesty" is less biographical completeness than the genre's required quota of sins, especially sins of vanity (lxv). The Dreamer in *Piers* likewise describes 45 years of following Fortune and the three worldly temptations (Passus 11), just as his surrogate Haukyn with his coat stained with sin confesses his pitiful desire to be thought the cleverest, strongest, handsomest, holiest, and most generous of men (13.291 ff).

Kempe means to portray a sinner who becomes the special beloved of God and perhaps a saint, but her Margery is never very lovable. She remains self-absorbed and without charm. Although always aware of the opinions others have of her, whether positive or negative, Margery repeatedly alienates those around her, from her maid to the Bishop of London. Despite the self-justifications for her actions on pilgrimages, it is not hard for the reader to conclude that she was indeed the traveling companion from Hell and to sympathize with those whose only destination soon became to be as far away from her as possible. Even Margery's admirers often find her difficult, and we may think that the Steward of Leicester is on to something when he declares, "Either you are a right good woman or else a right wicked woman" (113).

Kempe's *Book* provides the closest analogue I know in Middle English to the marginal and awkward authorial self in *Piers Plowman*. The alienation and crustiness of Will, his pure willfulness, has often been discussed. The contrast with Chaucer's affable, if sometimes muddleheaded, narrators could not be more striking. The narrator of *Piers* is introduced as a solitary pseudo-hermit unholy of works (pro.3) and described near the end of the poem as a "lorel" (a wastrel) who shows no respect to

his betters (15.5). Authorial surrogates Haukyn and Piers are similarly dissatisfied, quarrelsome figures unable to find a comfortable place in society. Feminist critics attribute Margery's marginality to following none of the proscribed roles for her sex, but relegation to the margin is also experienced by the male author-figures in *Piers Plowman*.

IV.

A key to these alienated and alienating figures is their complex relationship to the Church, the repository on earth of the holiness they so passionate seek. Both are orthodox but independent. Kempe's *Book* and *Piers* define a new spirituality firmly within the Church and dependent on clerical discourse (especially the Bible) but practiced by lay people in the world. The married Margery is the heroine of Kempe's *Book*, just as Langland's narrator and his surrogates (the sins and Haukyn) are married. The human ideal in the poem is a married agricultural worker, Piers the Plowman. Denied a formal role within the Church because of their marriages, the central figure in each work is a kind of ecclesiastical free-lancer. Margery tells the Archbishop of York that she is given money by good men to pray for them (133), just as the Dreamer in the C-text describes his monthly rounds of praying from the primer for those who provide his food (C.5.44-52).

For all her flamboyant behavior, Margery's views are always perfectly orthodox, as her examiners soon discovered when she is accused of heresy. On critical issues of the day such as the real presence and images she is anything but a Lollard. *Piers Plowman* is more skeptical of pilgrimages and images than Kempe, but its call is for radical reform, not revolution. Holy Church is a major figure at the beginning of the poem, and it is what is fought over at the end. Yet for all their allegiance to the church, each work describes a vexed relationship with clerical authority. Some clerics oppose Margery, whereas others are her strongest supporters (her learning seems largely a result of what they have read to her), and she constantly seeks reassurance about the validity of her mystical experiences from them, just as she seeks episcopal permission for her unusual way of life. But Margery is certainly not in awe of ecclesiastical power. She reproves the Archbishop of Canterbury for the behavior of his clerks (37), and when the Archbishop of York tells her that he has heard that she is a wicked woman, she replies, "Sir, I hear said that you are a wicked man, who will never get to heaven unless you amend yourself while here" (125).

Piers Plowman has a similarly intense and complex relationship with the clergy. The poet has justly been called "a clerkly maker,"

and in the C-text, the narrator describes his scholarly education. Ecclesiastical heroes appear again and again: the desert fathers, Gregory, Bernard, and Dominic, though revealingly they are all from the past. No good contemporary ecclesiastic appears in the poem; instead we find such as the arrogant priest who, mistaking the letter for the spirit, challenges Piers about the pardon from Truth at the end of the Visio and the gluttonous Doctor of Divinity at the dinner given by Conscience. Langland is not afraid to attack contemporary bishops or even the pope, and the practice of the Church is repeatedly contrasted with its claims. The friars are shown as the worst offenders, attacked by the poet with special ferocity precisely because he so admires their professed ideals.

Piers is more learned, intellectual, and austere than Kempe's *Book*, but the lay spirituality that emerges from each is remarkably similar. A powerful sense of personal sin is at the center of both. Although Margery is constantly reassured of her worthiness by Jesus and others, her *Book* opens by describing her as "a sinful wretch" (1) and she tells a young man the reason for her most striking practice, weeping, is "the great abomination she had of her sins" (246). Sin, especially in the formal scheme of the seven deadly sins, is analyzed throughout *Piers Plowman* from Meed's marriage charter in Passus 2 to Patience's discourse on poverty in Passus 14. Haukyn, the Active Man, the very symbol of a lay Christian in the world, has soiled his baptismal coat with all the sins, and wishes he had died immediately after baptism. It is miserable, he says, "to lyve and to do sin./ Synne seweth us evere" (14.322-3).

The sovereign cure for sin in both *Piers* and Kempe's *Book* is repentance. A distinguishing mark of Margery's spirituality is her frequent formal confessions, unusual for the time, and the first favor she asks from the Archbishop of Canterbury is the right to choose her own confessor (36). Repentance is a central motif in *Piers Plowman* as well, which has the ascetic, prophetic tone as well as the message of John the Baptist: "Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand." The confession of the sins is a major set-piece in the visio and *Redde quod debes* (Pay what you owe) is the repeated theme of the last two passus.

Repentance is a good example of the uneasy relationship the lay spirituality of both works has with the institutional Church. Although both *Piers* and Kempe's *Book* affirm the value of clerical confession, each also calls attention to its difficulties. After the birth of her first child, Margery attempts to confess a sin she had long concealed, but her confessor is so stern and abrupt with her

that she cannot bring herself to say what she has done and as a result suffers a severe mental breakdown (7). In *Piers* confession is marred by the opposite clerical fault: too much laxity, especially by the friars. They offer to absolve Meed and her wicked followers for money, and their corruption of confession undermines the final defense of the Church at the poem's conclusion.

Both Kempe's *Book* and *Piers* find routes to salvation that are even less institutional and more personal than those offered by the Church. Margery's most striking spiritual practice (and the source of much of the suspicion about her sincerity) is her weeping, sobbing, and even roaring in public, especially when reminded of the Passion (105), but also for her sins and the sins of others (61). Here is how Kempe describes the practice, "When she first had her cryings at Jerusalem, she had them often, and also in Rome. And when she first came home to England her cryings came seldom at first, perhaps once a month, then once a week, afterwards daily, and once she had fourteen in one day, . . . sometimes in the street, sometimes in her chamber, sometimes in the fields" (69). Christ tells Margery that tears of compunction, compassion, and devotion are his highest and most sure gifts on earth (31), and that her weeping torments the Devil more than all the fires of Hell (51).

Tears are less spectacular in *Piers*, but, made aware of them by Kempe, we may be surprised at their significance in the poem. The central character in Langland's account of the Crucifixion, the blind knight Longinus, begs for mercy and weeps when he realizes that he has pierced Christ's side. The Dreamer's surrogates also weep at significant moments: the sins do so several times during their confessions (5.185, 380, 463, 473), Piers at the end of the visio declares that henceforth his plow will be prayers and penance and that he decides to "wepen whan I sholde slepe" (7.120-21), and Haukyn is last seen weeping and wailing for his sins (14.332). Tears also mark crucial stages in Will's own pilgrimage. He weeps in response to Repentance before the confession of sins (5.61), at the onset of his first inner dream (11.4), and because of sin's power to prevent God's mercy (16.272). At the end of the poem, the barn of Unity or Holy Church is said to be protected by a moat of repentant tears (19.380), though a friar corrupts the faithful by making Contrition forget to cry and weep for his wicked works (20.370). Tears are important in both works because they are available to all, clerical and lay, men and women.

Weeping in *Piers Plowman* tends to be private in contrast to Margery's often spectacular performances before others, but the lay spirituality in both works also includes the very public role of

the holy fool. With her outlandish white clothes and emotions, Margery is often treated like a fool. She becomes a connoisseur of public scorn because everyone from Jesus to Julian of Norwich tells her that the more shame she endures, the more merit she will have from God (43). On her pilgrimage to Jerusalem, her companions cut her clothes so that "she should be considered a fool" (62) and make her sit in the lowest place at table, but despite their malice, she tells us that she received the highest honor from the good man of the house.

For all its intellectualism and austerity, *Piers Plowman* also celebrates the holy fool. Will the Dreamer is often dressed as ridiculously as Margery (both seem to belong to a religious order of one) and is accorded even less respect. Holy Church early on calls him a "doted daff," Study compares him to fools who are frantic of wit (10.6), the friars in an inner dream judge him a fool for his desire to be buried in his parish (11.68), and in a waking episode he notes that others consider him a fool raving in his folly (15.10). As in Kempe's *Book*, the real foolishness here is worldly wisdom. It is only "fools" (the word is used three times in succession) who resist Antichrist at the end of the poem (20.61, 74, 77), just as the desert fathers are called "God's fools" (15.313). In a scene that evokes Margery's experience on the way to Jerusalem, the rich are urged to replace their minstrels at revels with the poor, for they are God's minstrels and will be like a "fool sage sittynge at thi table" (13.443).

The image of the holy fool suggests St. Francis, another lay figure (he never took holy orders) who managed to balance radical reform with orthodoxy. As with Francis, the spirituality of both Kempe's *Book* and *Piers* is not only Christ-centered but Christ-saturated. Once again the Church's role is not denied (Margery is granted special permission to receive communion frequently and Will prefaces his penultimate dream by going to hear mass and receive the sacrament), but the most intense experiences of Christ in each work, though very different in form, take place beyond direct ecclesiastical control. Margery claims constant conversations with Jesus, to the annoyance and suspicion of some clergy. In the tradition of the Franciscan *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, she imaginatively participates in the life of her Savior, constantly reliving the Passion (see especially chapters 78-81) and casts herself in her visions as a maid for the infant Jesus. Christ constantly comforts Margery, not only reassuring her about his love and her standing in heaven (he insists he would have died for her alone [30]), but also giving her advice about travel, money, and how to avoid rain storms.

Nothing so intimate or affective occurs in *Piers Plowman*, but it too stresses Christ's closeness to humankind in both the Incarnation and the Passion. The humanity of God is stressed as early as Holy Church's daring metaphysical image of Christ as a plant of peace, who falls from heaven because he is so heavy with love and having eaten his full of the earth becomes as light and piercing as a needle (1.152-158). Much of the rest of the poem points to the climactic Crucifixion and Harrowing of Hell in Passus 18, during which Christ insists that humans are his blood brothers. In contrast to Margery's actual participation in the life of Jesus, the Dreamer observes it from a distance, but both works show that a close relationship with Christ is available to lay people. Christ fights in the arms of Piers, a plowman not a priest, with whom he is increasingly identified, and the Dreamer ends his Dream of the Passion in Passus 18 by going with his wife and daughter to creep to the cross on their knees and kiss it. This Holy Week ceremony occurs within a church, but the emphasis is on the ability of ordinary lay persons, man, woman, and child to experience the Redemption.

V.

Kempe's *Book* and *Piers Plowman* not only describe a devout life available to lay people beyond the control of the Church, but each also seeks nothing less than the redemption of the secular. The plowing of Piers' half acre represents an attempt to create a Christian commonwealth, and Margery constantly sees Christ in the people she passes on the street. Insisting that ordinary life can be holy, both resist the tendency in late medieval society, fully realized in modern times, to create a secular realm divorced from religious values. Although both writers condemn the corruption of society (Langland with much more energy than Kempe), the daily life of this world, rather than any monastic or mystical retreat, is finally the site of their search for salvation.

Margery offends others most deeply when she attempts to impose Christianity on everyday activities. Her husband does not want her to fast on Friday but eat with him, and her fellow pilgrims to Jerusalem are infuriated when she insists on talking about holy subjects and Scripture at meals. *Piers* similarly returns again and again, as we have already seen, to blaming those who listen to ribaldry at meals instead of paying attention to the poor, who are God's minstrels.

Early in *Piers*, Holy Church says that God has ordained three things as necessities for earthly existence: clothing, food, and drink. These three basic aspects of human life are transformed by Langland and Kempe into what might be called secular sacra-

ments. As previously noted, one of Margery's most scandalous practices is to wear white. In an example of the colloquial speech that enlivens Kempe's *Book*, the Archbishop of York upon first seeing her, says, "Why do you go in white? Art thou a maiden?" (124). The archbishop is only one of many who are startled by Margery's dress; even she had objected when Christ first ordered it because, she says, "the people will slander me. They will say I am a hypocrite" (32). In her younger days of vanity, Margery had worn showy, expensive clothes so that she should be "the more stared at by men and admired" (9), but her white clothes announce a new spiritual state, directly ordained by God, that is available to a lay married woman. Clothing is also used for religious meaning in *Piers*. Holy Church is dressed in simple linen in contrast to Meed's bejewelled extravagance. A clerk at York, grabs Margery by her gown and demands, "You wolf, what is this cloth you have on" (120), and it is very much as a wolf in sheep's or shepherd's clothing that we first see the dreamer in *Piers*. If Haukyn's soiled baptismal coat suggests the dangers of the secular life, Christ's decision to joust in Piers' arms (that is in his human body) suggests that even the humblest layman may be redeemed.

As we have already seen, food and drink are central to Kempe's *Book*. They introduce and seal the chastity agreement with her husband, and throughout the narrative, as others have noted, good people are those who invite Margery to share food and drink with them. Significant spiritual events are often marked by social dining in both Kempe's *Book* and *Piers*. Evil characters exclude the poor and pious from their feasts, as they entertain themselves with ribald stories or drivel on blasphemously over their food (10.56) rather than hearing good tales of holiness or the gospel. Margery's reconciliation with the Friar Master Alayn occurs over a dinner, one "of great joy and gladness, much more spiritual than of the body, because it was sauced and savored with tales from Holy Scripture" (170). The phrasing reminds us of the dinner that Conscience holds at which Will and Patience, in contrast to the gluttonous Doctor, dine on penitential Biblical verses. Food and drink imagery is used throughout *Piers*, whose culmination is Christ's declaration after the Redemption that he still thirsts for mankind's sake: "I that am lord of lif, love is my drynke" (18.366). As in Jesus's parables, both works find spiritual meaning in fundamentally secular events such as clothing, food and drink.

As these tangible examples of piety suggest, the relationship between the physical and spiritual in both Kempe's *Book* and *Piers*

is more complex than usually realized. Margery's holiness is frequently expressed physically. In addition to going on pilgrimages, she is reminded of Christ by the sight of babies, young men, and the beating of animals. Her accounts of the life of Christ contain precise details (such as the color of his clothing), and she is reassured by earthly tokens from the divine such as storms. Hers is, as Sarah Beckwith has said, a very material mysticism.

But in another sense, the world of her own mind, not the physical or social worlds, is the most important site for Margery. Her most intense relationships are with divine beings, and to see a young man as Christ is to deny the reality of the actual person. Thoughts *are* actions in Kempe's *Book*. More than once Jesus promises Margery that "you shall have the same reward in Heaven for your wishes [in this case to found churches] as if you had done these things in deed" (203-04). But although Margery worries about the salvation of others, the very few examples of her good works are personal and limited (as when she cares for one old woman in Rome for six weeks) or visionary (as when she sees herself as a handmaiden to the Virgin). Meditations, conversations, and feelings, not social reform, are Margery's work.

The contrast with Langland is striking. For all its allegorical elements, *Piers* is rooted in the social world and constantly asks political questions, not only about kingship, which Kempe never considers, but also about more dangerous issues such as the obligations the rich have to the poor. Perhaps because it always remains in this world, *Piers* is less optimistic and more demanding than Kempe's *Book*. Langland describes major attempts to found the ideal Christian community (on Piers' half acre in the Visio and around the Barn of Unity in the Vita), but each fails.

Richard Kieckhefer has written an exciting book on fourteenth-century spirituality entitled *Unquiet Souls*. And perhaps it is the restless, unsatisfied quest for salvation that sets Kempe's *Book* and *Piers* apart from so much other late medieval English literature. The dreamer in the contemporary alliterative poem *Pearl* is not allowed to enter the New Jerusalem, but he has been taught that the sure route is through the sacraments of the Church. Chaucer's religious poems in rhyme royal can be demanding, even harrowing, think of the *Clerk's Tale*, but Griselda, Custance, Cecile and the little clergeon achieve happy ends, often in heaven. No such comforting resolution occurs in Kempe's *Book* or *Piers*. The former peters out and the latter ends in a kind of despair. Although she awaits her promised seat in heaven, Margery's final foreign trip is a torment because of her age, and we last see her back in Lynn barely reconciled with her

confessor and friends. *Piers* concludes with Conscience's escape from the Barn of Unity or Holy Church, which is attacked from without by the Antichrist and undermined from within by corrupt friars, in pursuit once again of Piers the Plowman. The passionate pilgrimages of both works to achieve the devout life in the secular world continue.

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Notes

¹ I quote Kempe's *Book* in my translation based on that by Barry Windeatt, but the page numbers are to the EETS edition by Meech and Allen.

² Unless otherwise noted my references are to Schmidt's B-text of *Piers Plowman*. Citations of the C-text are to Pearsall's edition.

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A mystic in Brit Lit I

For literary scholars, the mystic who is most likely to be read for her literary qualities, and indeed who has most recently been recognized as a writer of literary substance by her inclusion in the new edition of the *Norton Anthology*, is Julian of Norwich, author of the late fourteenth century *Revelations of Divine Love*, which documents her series of visions during a grave illness in May of 1373. Julian, an exact contemporary of Chaucer and the first known woman author in the English language, is a lively and intelligent mystic who stands up well in a comparison with other prose writers of Middle English — indeed, Thomas Merton once called Julian, “with Newman, the greatest English theologian” (qtd. in Swanson 75). For an instructor of earlier British literature, it may be difficult to include still another writer in an already badly overcrowded curriculum, but a concerted effort to be more gender inclusive in all of our courses may compel us to include Julian. The question may be what to do with her.

The first difficulty one is likely to encounter as things now stand is the portion of Julian’s *Revelations* which has been included in the *Norton*. Indeed, one can applaud her inclusion by the *Norton*’s editors but scratch one’s head at their taste. One wonders what sort of students they teach, if they think that the selection included will spark students’ interest in this writer, let alone keep them awake. In the first place, the text is based on Colledge and Walsh’s edition of the longer version of Julian’s text, with modernized spelling. One can respect this choice, but it causes no little difficulty. There is good reason to argue that Chaucer’s Middle English should be presented to students untranslated — he writes poetry and many of the effects of that poetry are untranslatable. But unless one is interested in discussing Middle English prose style — an unlikely event in a survey course — there is no real need to have students read Julian in the original when there are many readable translations available, and students are much more likely to enjoy her on first acquaintance if they are not bogged down in her language.

Secondly, the selection from chapters 3–5, 7, and 86 of the *Revelations*, which describes Julian’s first vision of the bleeding Christ on the cross, and of the small object “the quantity of an hazelnut” which God holds in his hand and which represents “all that is made” (Abrams 295), contains a charming image and is interesting to one already versed in mysticism but it is not Julian’s

liveliest writing. To win students to Julian, a fascinating passage to include in a Brit lit survey might be that portion of chapter 66, for instance, when the devil assaults her. In Wolters’ very readable translation, the passage runs thus:

And in my sleep, in the beginning, I thought the fiend had me by the throat, putting his face very near mine. It was like a young man’s face, and long and extraordinarily lean: I never saw the like. The colour was the red of a tilestone newly fired, and there were black spots like freckles, dirtier than the tilestone. His hair was rust red, clipped in front, with sidelocks hanging over his cheeks. He grinned at me with sly grimace, thereby revealing white teeth, which made it, I thought, all the more horrible. There was no proper shape to his body or hands, but with his paws he held me by the throat and would have strangled me if he could (182).

Such a description is exciting and immediately accessible to students, and, after discussing the context of the vision — the devil’s attempt to drive Julian to despair and to doubt the validity of her own visions as “ravings” — an instructor might relate the passage to later depictions of demonic characters in British literature: the rather attractive Mephistopheles in Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* if that is on the reading list; or, of course, Milton’s Satan in *Paradise Lost* later on, perhaps in the temptation scene of Book IX itself, wherein the serpent “With tract oblique” approaches Eve, and “Curled many a wanton wreath in sight of Eve, / To lure her eye,” after which he “Fawning, . . . licked the ground whereon she trod” before beginning his “fraudulent temptation” (ll. 510-530). How instructive it might be to compare the direct frontal assault on the Christian soul apparent in Julian’s encounter with the guileful approach described in Milton’s.

All of this is to suggest that Julian may be best incorporated into Early British Literature if she is read as if engaging in a kind of dialog with the canonical authors already entrenched in the course. As the *Norton* currently stands, it encourages the instructor to assign Julian in conjunction with Margery Kempe, another fairly recent addition to the anthology. Margery, of course, is another “mystic,” though a bit more worldly than Julian, and there is a natural connection between the two in that Margery describes her visit to Julian’s cell and Julian’s support of her. This connection is encouraged in Alfred David’s *Teaching with The Norton Anthology*, wherein he puts Julian and Margery together as “women [who] exemplify a turn toward mysticism in late medieval spirituality” (16). But to teach Julian and Margery in tandem

is to isolate and marginalize them: here are two women; here are two mystics, a kind of sideline to the mainstream of English literature moving from Chaucer through Spenser and Shakespeare to Milton and beyond. It seems to me that Julian can more successfully be incorporated into the Brit Lit course if she is allowed to engage in a dialog with the big boys.

And that means, for all practical purposes, Chaucer. Here is a natural coupling — the father of English literature paired against a writer who, as the earliest known authoress in England, might have legitimate claim to be called its mother. If one begins with Julian's wrestling match with the fiend, one could quite naturally use Chaucer's "Friar's Tale" as a text to compare with Julian's. Of course, the *Norton* does not include the "Friar's Tale," but one might easily supply it to one's students. The fiend in the "Friar's Tale" is a much more congenial sort of foe, and his description is certainly less likely to inspire fear than that of Julian's fiend. He is garbed like a forester or hunter:

A gay yeman, under a forest syde.

A bowe he bar, and arwes brighte and kene;

He hadde upon a courtepy of grene,

An hat upon his heed with frenges blake (ll. 1379-83).

The Summoner protagonist of the "Friar's Tale" falls in easily as a companion to this greenclad devil, nor does he flinch when the hunter tells him point blank "I am a feend; my dwelling is in helle" (l. 1448). In the tale, the Summoner damns himself through his own will, and the devil is there merely to collect him when that occurs. Again, the contrast with Julian's picture of the devil's direct attack on her is instructive. Perhaps it implies two contrasting approaches to the characterization of the devil. Or perhaps it could illustrate two contrasting demonic approaches depending on the character or state of the soul of the person in question. In any case, this juxtaposition suggests that the areas in which Julian may most profitably engage in dialog with Chaucer are theology and philosophy.

There are a number of important theological and philosophical issues that were of great interest in the later fourteenth century which may still engage modern students, and Chaucer's familiarity with the philosophical questions of his time is well established, but scholars have not always agreed to what extent Julian may be considered to have been aware of the controversies so hotly debated in the schools of fourteenth century England, particularly since she calls herself at one point a "poor unlettered creature." However, it is now generally accepted that her writings show an awareness of a number of important thinkers (see

Colledge and Walsh's Introduction), and one should probably remember that Norwich in the fourteenth century was not only probably England's second largest city, but also a center of learning, with at least four schools run by the mendicant orders (see Courtenay 106-11). What, then, are some of these controversial questions which both Chaucer and Julian touch upon?

One subject of much interest in the later fourteenth century was the importance of contrition in the sacrament of penance. Was the performance of the sacrament itself sufficient for forgiveness, or was the inner working of the contrite soul, the "intent" of the penitent, more important? For most thinkers, "intent" was vital to contrition, and the "Friar's Tale" demonstrates Chaucer's interest in the idea: at the climactic point of the tale, the old widow consigns the Summoner's soul to the devil with all her will, she says, unless "he wol hym repente." But the Summoner's reply, ignoring the warning he has already received from his companion fiend, declares that repentance is "nat myn entente" (ll. 1630-31), thus willing his own damnation. In this exchange, and in the "Friar's Tale" generally, Chaucer shows himself to be aware of the theological debates that had been taking place over the issue of contrition and intent.

Throughout the Middle Ages, the sacrament of penance had been growing in importance, and correspondingly encouraged the internal examination of the personal soul.¹ Lee Patterson summarizes the controversy over this issue as it had developed through the fourteenth century: while a focus on intentionality was characteristic of nominalists like William of Ockham, and while even the arch-realist Thomas Bradwardine agreed that "remission flows only from contrition," Bradwardine disagreed with Ockham in insisting that contrition can take place only where there is a "divinely infused *habitus*" of grace. Realists thought that, without this *habitus*, the nominalists limited God's power and made Christians responsible for their own salvation. This could lead to feelings of unworthiness, helplessness, and despair, and Patterson cites a number of examples, including one from Julian, where contritionism leads indeed to despair (377). He concludes:

contritionism encouraged a self-scrutiny that often led to a scrupulousness and despair that preempted the confession that was the goal of the process in the first place (384).

Julian's description of her encounter with the fiend may well symbolize her inner struggle with her own sins leading to a near-despair. The whole scene with the fiend, she says, "was

calculated to drive me to despair" (179), and it is nearly successful, since Julian has a moment of doubt about her visions for which she condemns herself:

Yet on the very day that it happened, when the vision had passed I — wretch that I am! — denied it, and said quite openly that I had raved (187).

Julian was clearly aware of the theological controversy, however, and insists that for the Christian there is no reason to despair, because we are created with a "godly will." We are not condemned because there is a part of us which never consents to sin, which maintains, that is, a pure intentionality. In chapter 37 of the *Revelations*, Julian emphasizes how the elect are saved because God has given them a pure will:

In every soul to be saved is a godly will that has never consented to sin, in the past or in the future. Just as there is an animal will in our lower nature that does not will what is good, so there is a godly will in our higher part, which by its basic goodness never wills what is evil, but only what is good. This is the reason why he loves us, and why we can always do what pleases him (118).

Thus, for Julian, the intent not to sin is always present, and the intent truly to repent for sins committed is also pure in the elect.

These kinds of passages might be used to contrast with Chaucer's "Friar's Tale" and its emphasis on intent, or, perhaps more practically, with the notion of intentionality in "The Pardoner's Tale," a text much more likely to be included in an early British Literature survey. Deeply concerned with confession, "The Pardoner's Tale" may find a key contrasting text in this passage from Julian. The Pardoner's entire performance may be looked at as one long confession, but one which does not end in absolution for the Pardoner, because, although it follows the form of a confession, it fails to demonstrate the Pardoner's true contrition and intent to change. For though he sells absolution for a profit, the Pardoner knows that it is not the *form*, the giving of money, that wins the soul's justification:

... Jhesu Crist, that is oure soules leche,
So graunte yow his pardoun to receyve,

For that is best; I wol yow nat deceyve (ll. 916-18).

Yet the Pardoner is unable — and unwilling — to repent himself: the intent is not there, though he may be able to inspire that intent in the hearts of others:

Thus kan I preche agayn that same vice
Which that I use, and that is avarice.
But though myself be guilty in that synne,

Yet kan I maken oother folk to twynne
From avarice and soore to repente.

But that is nat my principal entente; (ll. 427-32).

The Pardoner does not have the "godly will" Julian proposes, that which never consented to sin and never will. The Pardoner himself, aware of his intentional responsibility for contrition, is one who might be seen as despairing, especially if one agrees with Kittredge's interpretation of the lines about "Jhesu Crist . . . oure soules leche" as "a paroxysm of agonized sincerity" (217).

This concentration of "intent" in contrition is a sidelight of a wider intellectual debate concerning the will. The question of free will vs. determinism was hotly debated in the fourteenth century, and Julian has her own views about the issue. Chaucer also considers the issue in many places, particularly in *Troilus and Criseyde*, but a passage from Julian might work well in conjunction with "The Nun's Priest's Tale" — one of those, like "The Pardoner's Tale," most likely to be taught. It should be recalled that, after Chauntecleer enters the farmyard (defying his prophetic dream as well as his wife's laxatives), a "col-fox, ful of sly iniquitee" appears. The narrator begins to wonder whether this encounter could have been prevented, since (as Chauntecleer's dream indicates) God has already foreseen the event — but the narrator gets all bogged down in the arguments and cannot reach a conclusion:

But what that God forwoot moot nedes bee,
After the opinioun of certein clerkis.
Witnesse on hym that any parfit clerk is,
That in scole is greet altercacioun
In this mateere, and greet disputioun,
And hath been of an hundred thousand men.
But I ne kan nat bulte it to the bren
As kan the hooly doctour Augustyn,
Or Boece, or the Bisshop Bradwardyn,
Wheither that Goddes worthy forwityng
Streyneth me nedely for to doon a thyng —
"Nedely" clepe I symple necessitee —
Or elles, if free choys be graunted me
To do that same thyng, or do it noght,
Though God forwoot it el that I was wroght;
Or if his wityng streyneth never a deel
But by necessitee condicionel.
I wol nat han to do of swich mateere; (ll. 3234-51).

It seems most likely that Chaucer himself would have agreed with the opinion of Boethius, his favorite philosopher, who had decided that God's foreknowledge was not the same as predestination, and that human beings' free will was in no way constrained by God. Despite the opinions of some of his characters — Troilus for instance, or even the Nun's Priest, who later, as the tale hurtles toward its conclusion, cries "O destinee, that mayst nat been eschewed!" (l. 3338) — Chaucer's tales seem to point consistently to the responsibility of human beings (or human-like roosters) for their own actions. In this, Chaucer seems to agree with the nominalist thinkers of the late fourteenth century, rather than with the extreme realists like Wyclif or the bishop Thomas Bradwardine mentioned by the Nun's Priest.²

The issue, of course, affects our views of sin and grace. Specifically as regards "The Nun's Priest's Tale," there are those who have read the text as an allegory of the Fall, and while this is an oversimplification of the tale it is encouraged by the overly scholarly narrator, and so can legitimately be explored as one aspect of the tale. And if the tale is read in this way, the dream might suggest the availability of God's grace, and Chauncleer's ignoring of it man's freedom of will to reject grace and fall into sin. A corresponding passage from Julian is her own parable of the Fall, which she offers in her long fifty-first chapter. Here, in a parable of a master and servant, a servant is sent to do his master's bidding but accidentally falls into a ditch and is injured. In the parable, the servant is both Adam and Christ:

When Adam fell, God's Son fell. Because of the true unity which had been decreed by heaven, God's Son could not be dissociated from Adam. By *Adam*, I always understand *Everyman*. Adam fell from life to death, first into the depths of this wretched world, and then into hell. God's Son fell, with Adam, but into the depth of the Virgin's womb — herself the fairest daughter of Adam — with the intent of excusing Adam from blame both in heaven and on earth. And with a mighty arm he brought him out of hell (147-48).

Thus as Adam, the servant suggests man's inability to do God's will (thus man's sin — not from an evil will but from an inability to carry out God's commands); as Christ, the servant's fall represents the incarnation, the fall into carnality. But in Julian's theology, Christ restores human nature to the Godhead through his incarnation: thus, in the parable, our fall and salvation take place simultaneously. It is as if we see from God's eternal vantage point, so that the redemption of human nature through Christ

is a fact present in the souls of God's elect from the moment of their creation. J.P.H. Clark comments that "since our predestination to salvation is grounded in God's purpose from all eternity, there is no point, from the first moment of our existence, in which the grace to which we are ordained by nature is not active" (210). For Julian, here agreeing strongly with the realist position, the elect souls are predestined absolutely for heaven. Their will may err, but grace will save them.

Finally, perhaps the most fruitful use of Julian would be in conjunction with the "Wife of Bath's Tale." Another much-debated fourteenth-century issue, the question of experience vs. authority as sources of knowledge, begins the Wife's Prologue:

Experience, thogh noon auctoritee

Were in this world, is right ynogh for me

To speke of wo that is in mariage (ll. 1-3);

and she follows with a long preamble of a tale which recounts her own experiences in a long defense of sexuality and of her own gender against the "authority" of a host of "clerks." In her case, experience is a much surer guide to truth than authority.

This is also an issue that concerned Julian, as she often trusts the experience of her visions rather than the authority of the Church. She always acknowledges the Church's authority, but when it comes to choosing between authority and experience, she follows the experience of her visions. This is most notable as she contemplates God's revelation to her that "all will be well": she is unable to reconcile God's eternal and unchanging love for his creatures with the Church doctrine that sinners will be damned, but maintains the integrity of her own visionary experience and describes how she herself sees things, as different from authority:

So from those same six words "I may make everything all right," I gain great comfort with regard to all the works that God has still to do. There still remains a deed which the blessed Trinity will do at the last day — at least so I see it — yet when and how it will be done is unknown to all God's creatures under Christ, and will remain so until it takes place.

[P]art of our . . . belief is that many creatures will be damned. . . . — all these shall be condemned to hell everlastingly, as Holy Church teaches me to believe. This being so I thought it quite impossible that everything should turn out well, as our Lord was now showing me. But I had no answer to this revelation save this: "What is

impossible to you is not impossible to me"
(Ch. 32, pp. 110-11).

Again, this issue of experiential knowledge over authority was particularly important to fourteenth-century nominalists.³ For a thinker like William of Ockham, direct experience is something different from logical terms, which exist only as mental constructs and which are the means by which philosophical and theological "authority" is promulgated. But language can only dimly shadow the reality of experience. And for Julian, as for most mystics, the direct personal experience of ultimate reality is ineffable. It is an ultimate truth which must be spiritually experienced, and cannot be reduced to the narrow confinement of language, the tool of human logic. When Julian first mentions her "spiritual sight," she declares that it is something which she "cannot, and may not, disclose as openly and fully as I should like" (Ch. 9, p. 76). The precise nature of this spiritual sight cannot be verbalized because it is beyond language, the tool of "authority":

About the spiritual sight I have already said a fair amount, but I can never describe it fully. So I am prompted to say more about it, if God will give me grace (Ch. 73, p. 192).

Julian's attitude toward language is not precisely "nominalist," but it is not inconsistent with nominalist thought, and the mystic's emphasis on direct personal experience of God is consistent with the nominalist's, and with the Wife of Bath's, emphasis on the primacy of experiential knowledge.

Finally, and perhaps of most interest to many of our students, the whole idea of the self image of women comes up in both pieces as a result of this challenge to authority: "Who peyntede the leon," the Wife asks, and the answer, of course, is that the authority of the male clerks throughout church history has created the image of women as wicked, lascivious beasts:

For trusteth wel, it is an impossible
That any clerk wol speke good of wyves,
But if it be of hooly seintes lyves,
Ne of noon oother womman never the mo.
Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?
By God, if wommen hadde written stories,
As clerkes han withinne hire oratories,
They wolde han written of men moore wikkednesse
Than al the mark of Adam may redresse.

.....
The clerk, whan he is oold, and may noght do
Of Venus werkes worth his olde sho,

Thanne sit he doun, and writ in his dotage
That wommen kan nat kepe hir mariage! (ll. 688-710).

Julian paints her own lion. Going further than Chaucer, who has the Wife argue with the authority of the likes of St. Paul and St. Jerome, while at the same time embodying many of the traits most often stereotypically assigned to women by those same authorities, Julian picks up the pen and becomes her own authority, using the experience of her visions as her justification. Her most vivid vindication of the image of woman is her feminization of the second person of the trinity. To be sure Julian does not invent the image, and Caroline Bynum can be consulted for a history of the concept.⁴ But in Julian we are presented with the most developed and radical depiction of Christ as our Mother. From him we receive our nature, both spirit and flesh, and through the agony of the crucifixion we are delivered into everlasting life and union with the godhead:

Moreover I saw that the Second Person who is our Mother with regard to our essential nature, that same dear Person who has become our Mother in the matter of our sensual nature. We are God's creation twice: essential being and sensual nature. Our being is that higher part which we have in our Father, God almighty, and the Second Person of the Trinity is Mother of this basic nature, providing the substance in which we are rooted and grounded. But he is our Mother also in mercy, since he has taken our sensual nature upon himself. Thus "our Mother" describes the different ways in which he works, ways which are separate to us, but held together in him (Ch. 58, pp. 165-66).

Thus Julian, in feminizing the image of God, in some ways deifies the image of woman. If Christ can be thought of in feminine terms, then the "authority" of the Church fathers who equated women with wickedness must be abandoned. Taught parallel with the Wife's prologue, these passages may make very compelling reading for students, especially those interested in the history of feminine consciousness.

I suppose that if one were to take all of my suggestions, most of the semester course in Early British Literature would be devoted to a comparison between Chaucer and Julian of Norwich. My intent, of course, has been to suggest a number of possible approaches, in the hope that one or more of them may prove useful. I believe that Julian of Norwich has a place in the Brit Lit survey, and that place will be more effective if she is not marginalized. Feminine expression in English begins with Mother

Julian and we will serve literature well by allowing her to speak in the beginning of our courses.⁵

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Notes

¹ Prior to the twelfth century, penance had been considered largely an external act. This older attitude was, in the twelfth century, "being challenged by a new emphasis upon self-examination," and a sense that God values inner repentance more than external penance (Morris 71). It was particularly in Abelard's *Ethics* that the "ethical value of an act" came to be located "in the actor's intention, not in the outward deed" (Bynum 86). According to Morris,

For Abelard, sin lay solely in the intention. A man could not be called a sinner because he did what was objectively wrong, nor because he felt a sinful desire; sin, purely and simply, lay in consent to sinful desire (Morris 75).

With canon twenty-one of the Fourth Lateran Council, requiring that every Christian make an individual confession at least once a year to his parish priest, this new emphasis on interior analysis and intentionality became widespread. Since sin was considered a matter of intentionality, then the effectiveness of penance — the remission of sin — also came to depend on inner contrition rather than outward confession (Bynum 86). Abelard held that "contrition is properly speaking the cause of forgiveness" (Poschmann 158). Since this diminished the role and importance of the priest in the sacrament, one finds a revised view in the thirteenth century: Aquinas united the personal and ecclesiastical factors of confession, calling personal penance the *matter* of the sacrament and absolution the *form*, insisting that "the matter and form do not produce their effect separately, but only in combination as a single cause . . . so that the personal acts of the penitent as well as the power of the keys are the cause of the forgiveness of sins (*ST* III q. 86 a. 6)" (Poschmann 168). Scotus' arguments, however, which powerfully influenced later opinions, present a more voluntaristic view, and in Chaucer and Julian's day the fourteenth century nominalists (particularly Ockham and Biel) once again stressed intention as the key to confession: Ockham (as Lee Patterson reminds us) quotes Lombard's distinction between inner and outer penance and agrees with him that it is the inner quality alone that justifies (Patterson 376).

² Fourteenth-century voluntarist doctrine was rooted in Duns Scotus. In an argument that may have interesting implications for Chaucer's using a cock and hen in his story, Scotus had contrasted human will with animal will, which he says is determined: "if two objects moved a man's appetite equally, he would be neither paralyzed nor determined to one over the other" as, presumably, the animal would be. "In contrast to the cow's will, the human will would be free to make whatever selection it liked. Scotus uses the example to dramatize the distinction between the human will, free and undetermined, and the animal will, which lacks such power of self-determination" (Lynch I.9). Building on Scotus, nominalist thinkers argued that, as Aristotle taught, "propositions referring to the future could be called neither 'true' nor 'false' and so "applied the term 'neutral' to future contingents" (Watts and Utz 158). Ockham went so far as to say that predestination (or its opposite reprobation — that is, predestined damnation) did not signify any real relationship between man and God. Man was free in this view "even to 'act contrary to the antecedent Divine will'" (Delasanta 216). Realists took the opposite approach: Bradwardine even insisted on "the unchangeability of divine will" so that "real human freedom is to be found in the readiness of men and women to accept what God has predestined" (Watts and Utz 158). God's grace, in Bradwardine's view, was "so necessitarian in its operations that it virtually overwhelmed free will" (Delasanta 215). And Wyclif claimed that "all future actions are predetermined with absolute necessity by God's foreknowledge" (Watts and Utz 158). The reason that this debate was so significant theologically was that it affected the perceived necessity of God's grace for salvation. Bradwardine called nominalists like Ockham fourteenth-century Pelagians, because their "de-emphasis on grace as a precondition of God's acceptance of a virtuous act led to a corresponding emphasis on the act of man's free will as, in Gordon Leff's words, 'the pre-condition of all merit and reprobation'" (Lynch, II.86).

³ The term "nominalism" comes from the position held by Ockham and others that universals do not exist in reality, but only as linguistic terms. This relates to the nominalist position regarding reality and empirical truth. Direct experience, not linguistically constituted abstractions, was all that could be *known*. But Robert Burlin, quoting Roger Bacon, reminds us though that there are "two kinds of experience. That which employs the bodily senses, aided by instruments and the evidence of trustworthy witnesses, should be supplemented by the experience of spiritual things, which needs grace. According to Ptolemy, 'duplex

est via deveniendi ad notitiam erum, una per experientiam philosophiae, alia per divinam inspirationem. Of the latter there are seven steps, the highest being the mystical state of rapture" (20). Heiko Oberman speaks of "the sense of divine immediacy" as one of the major characteristics of nominalist thought, and sees this as stemming directly from the epistemological stance of the nominalists:

This quest for immediacy takes the shape of hunger for reality in respect to the created world: Nominalistic epistemology attacks the wall between perception and reality which seemed to devalue reality as a reflection of the universals (Oberman 62).

This immediacy of God, and the emphasis on direct personal experience that it entails, links nominalism and mysticism in a partnership which at least called into question the "authority" of the church and its "clerks." Oberman continues

The fact that St. Paul was converted on his journey to Damascus without the media of word and sacrament proves that even the established order points beyond itself to a possible more direct relationship with God (Oberman 62).

⁴ "In a number of medieval writers from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries and even beyond, maternal imagery is a part of a new sense of God, which stresses his creative power, his love, and his presence in the physical body of Christ and in the flesh and blood of the eucharist" (Bynum 135).

⁵ Some of the material in this essay is based on other articles on Julian which I have published or are in press: "Nature and Grace in Julian of Norwich" (*Mystics Quarterly* 19 [1993]: 71-81); "Images of the Self and Self-Image in Julian of Norwich" (to be published by *Studia Mystica*); "Language of the Self in Julian of Norwich" (to be published by *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*); and "Nominalism and Mysticism" (under consideration for inclusion in *Nominalism and Late Medieval Literature*, ed. Richard J. Utz).

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'Good game' and 'good chere': humor in *The Book of Margery Kempe*

During one of her many journeys, Margery Kempe descends upon York. The clergymen of this town, having questioned her thoroughly, are unable to establish grounds for banishing her, and so she stays, weeping violently throughout Mass, which she attends regularly, and enjoying the hospitality of many people who believe she communes with God. Early on she tells a cleric that she will remain in York fourteen days, and when a fortnight has passed, a priest comes to her, his patience clearly tried. He says, "Damsel, thu seydest whan thu come first hedyr that thu woldyst abydyn her but xiiij days." Margery replies, "Ya, ser, wyth yowr leve, I seyde that I wolde abydyn her xiiij days, but I seyde not that I xulde neithyr abydyn mor her ne les. But as now, ser, I telle yow trewly I go not yet" (121).

Witty and defiant, this response amuses. Margery is a woman with a quick, sharp tongue who disregards the societal boundaries designed to prevent someone like her from doing whatever she pleases. The priest, a man of power who ultimately imprisons her for a short time, is telling Margery to leave, and her refusal to see his question for what it is, to acknowledge the power structure and accept her place within it, is patently humorous.

In fact, *The Book of Margery Kempe* often prompts laughter, an aspect of the work largely ignored by critics, perhaps for a discernible reason. In preparation for writing this paper, I queried an Internet bulletin board, seeking anyone who had laughed aloud while reading this text. The first response I received was "If the book is asking you to laugh, I'd like to know where. If you're laughing AT Margery, that's despicable." While this was by no means a common response, it points to a taboo, under which we still operate, that prevents humor from coming anywhere near true piety.

In outlining the subversive and regenerative potential of laughter, Bakhtin writes that "laughter in the Middle Ages remained outside all official spheres of ideology and outside all official strict forms of social relations. Moreover, medieval ideology was characterized by "a tone of icy petrified seriousness...supposedly the only tone fit to express the true, the good, and all that was essential and meaningful" (73). In light of this dominant tone, one can understand how discussions of humor in Margery's text might threaten to remove it from the realm of the serious, to treat

her piety as sub-standard and her visions as ravings rather than true religious experiences.

However, as Karma Lochrie argues in her chapter entitled "Fissuring the Text: Laughter in the Midst of Writing and Speech," Margery has a sense of humor. She teases, charms, and is often rebuked for "good chere," as when a steward tells her, "Holy folke xulde not lawght." Margery thinks they should and replies, "Ser, I haue gret cawse for to lawghe, for the mor schame I suffyr & despit, the meryar may I ben in owr Lord Ihesu Crist" (134-35).¹ Certainly Margery knows the "icy petrified seriousness" of "official culture"; this is the culture that tries to silence her weeping and confine her to Lynn. Official culture judges her piety on its terms; and her repeated response is to turn right around and judge *it* on *her* terms, pointing out the hypocrisy of its guardians. In the process, she makes us laugh, and an examination of that laughter, rather than detracting from the seriousness of Margery's text, highlights the tension between her mystical experiences and the confining physical world in which she lives.

Margery is a story-teller, and it is within one of her tales that Lochrie finds an appropriate metaphor for understanding her use of humor.² While in Canterbury, Margery's great weeping has caused her to be reproved "bothyn of the monkys & prestys & of seculer men ner al a day bothe a-for-noon & aftyr-noon..." (27). Even her husband has forsaken her, leaving her to defend herself alone against a group of monks, priests, and lay people. Her speech is so threatening to them that one monk says, "I wold thow wer closyd in an hows of ston that ther schuld no man speke wyth the." Fortunately, his harsh words do not silence Margery but lead her instead to tell a tale of a man whose penance involves paying people to "chyd hym & repreuyn hym for hys synnes." Deftly managing her irony, Margery nods toward the crowd: "& on a day he cam a-mong many gret men as now ben her, God saue yow alle, and stod a-mong hem as I do now a-mong yow, despysyng hym as ye do me, the man lawhyng er smylyng & hauyng good game at here wordys." When reproached for his laughter, the man replies: "I haue a gret cause to lawh, for I haue many days put syluer owt of my purse & hyred men to chyd me for remysyon of my synne, & this day I may kepe my syluer in my purs, I thank yow alle."

Having implicitly insulted her audience, Margery goes on to clarify her purpose: "Rygh so I sey to yow, worshepful serys, whyl I was at hom in myn owyn contre day be day wyth gret wepyng & mornyng, I sorwyd for I had no schame, skorne, & despyte as I

was worthy. I thank yow alle, serys, heyly what fore-noon & aftyr-noon I haue had resonably this day, blyssed be God therof" (28). The humor again comes from Margery's wit, from her acceptance of the insults hurled at her, but on her own terms. Her use of repartee, defined by Arthur Berger as "a technique which counters aggression with aggression" (45), enables Margery to take control of a situation meant to convince her of her own subordinate status. We laugh at this technique because, as Berger notes, "we delight in seeing the determined defense of the ego by a person and the eventual embarrassment of a would-be aggressor" (46).

Lochrie sees this tale, and particularly the phrase "hauyng good game at here wordys," as central to understanding how Margery's humor functions in the text of her life. Lochrie's insightful reading of this passage bears quoting at length:

For Kempe the story has more to do with laughter than with money, but her transaction is linked to the same system of exchange. In return for abuse, she offers laughter rather than money. This laughter explodes the economy underlying the man's payment and the Church's commerce in sins because it returns something without value in exchange for something which seems to be without value but in fact is not. Her laughter...confounds the Canterbury monks, but, more importantly, it undermines their authority (143).

Throughout the text, Margery is having her own good game at the expense of those who chide her; here, the irony of her address to the "gret men" allows Margery to imply the opposite, turning the power differential inside-out. Just as her violent weeping enables her to break through the societal boundaries that try to restrict her, her wit prevents them from closing in once more.

Repeatedly, Margery comes up against authority figures who abuse her: she is imprisoned, banished from districts, threatened with rape, and attempts are made to burn her as a heretic. In every encounter, Margery ultimately triumphs, either by remaining steadfast in her convictions and doing what she originally set out to do, or by bringing these aggressors around to her side. In the process of assuming control of these situations, she portrays her aggressors as comically inferior in their convictions and/or behaviors, and we laugh as she denies them authority over her. Margery's refusal to leave York after fourteen days is an example of this rebuttal of authority; her subsequent encounter with the Archbishop of York further illustrates the strength of her character.

When the Archbishop asks why she weeps, Margery answers, "Syr, ye xal welyn sum day that ye had wept as sor as I." He then tells her, "I am euyl enformyd of the; I her seyn thu art a ryth wikked woman," to which Margery responds, "Ser, so I her seyn that ye arn a wikked man. And yif ys ben as wikkyd as men seyn, ye xal neury come in Heuyn les than ye amende yow whil ye ben her." The Archbishop's revealing reply to this is, "Why, thow, what sey men of me" (125).

This exchange is a source of humor because of the sharp honesty with which Margery confronts this powerful figure. As her audience, we focus on the space between what society deems a proper response to an Archbishop, and what Margery deems a proper response to any sinful man. We perhaps expect that Margery will negotiate that space carefully, so when she uncompromisingly plows across it, we laugh. To better understand our amusement, we can turn to Freud's discussion of the naive, which "occurs if someone completely disregards an inhibition because it is not present in him" (182). While Margery's effortless candor might indicate lack of inhibition, we can hardly say that the instinct to check her words is not present. We have seen Margery hold her tongue with confessors and in situations that present immediate and serious danger. According to Freud's theory, when someone disregards an inhibition that is present, she is seen not as naive but as impudent, and her actions provoke indignation rather than laughter. But it is precisely Margery's impudent stance, undertaken not out of malice but out of a steadfast belief in her knowledge of God, that renders the situation comic. Her impudence is, paradoxically, naive.

During these clashes with authority, we side with Margery because she is clearly mistreated and because we enjoy her triumphs. Humor functions in these instances to subvert the patriarchal system, to hold open the space that she has created with her physical spirituality. Thus we laugh with Margery against her enemies. But through most of her narrative, Margery is an uncomfortable, unruly presence, and there are moments when the text invites us to laugh at her. In these instances the humor is perhaps less an intentional generation by Margery than a by-product of her insistence on exploring her spirituality—not within the confines of an anchor-hold at the edge of town, but at large in the midst of the society that shuns her.

Margery is candid about her behavior, describing in detail the disturbances created by her violent tears, which occur with greater frequency as the narrative progresses. Eventually, she is made to sob and flail by absolutely any reminder of the Passion

of Christ, including Mass, handsome men, and babies (if they are male she cries because they remind her of Jesus; if they are female she cries because they don't). While Margery clearly wants her audience to understand the depth of her devotion, she is also telling us that there is no other like her. She stands apart defiantly, often presenting herself through the eyes of her contemporaries, forcing us to imagine ourselves as fellow-pilgrims approaching the outer limits of our patience. From this position, located opposite Margery and looking directly at her, we witness her uncompromising alterity.

When, for example, Margery meets up with Richard, she knows that he is the broken-backed man whom God has sent to accompany her return from the Holy Land. Richard is not so easily convinced, however, fearing that he will be robbed and Margery raped because he cannot offer adequate protection. Eventually, her assurance and the sum of two nobles persuade him, and they set out. Richard does not actually travel with her but tells her, "Thu xalt go forth wyth thes too men & woman, & I xal metyn wyth the at morwyn & at euyn, for I must gon on my purchase & beggyn my leuyng" (77). Six chapters later we learn that "Aftyward, as this creatur was in Rome, owr Lord bad hir yeuyn a-wey al hir good & makyn hir bar for hys lofe. & a-non sche wyth a feruent desyr to plesyn God yaf a-wey swech good as sche had & sweche as sche had borwyd also of the brokebakkyd man that went wyth hir" (92).

The humor here comes not from Margery giving away her money, but from her giving away that which she has borrowed from a man who begs for a living and who is supposed to be paid by Margery to make this trip. In this instance, Margery does seem to be operating under Freud's principle of the naive. Her devotion to God is so great that she has no inhibition to overcome before giving away Richard's money. (Although there are many times in the text when she questions God's commands, she follows this one whole-heartedly.) Because we cannot identify with this naivete, we laugh at the discrepancy between what societal norms dictate (namely, that one does not give away money that rightfully belongs to someone else, especially if that someone is a beggar) and what Margery believes to be the only proper course of action.

Indeed, her ideas about what she should do are often contrary to what others deem appropriate. In Book II, we have an example of Margery's unflinching determination, in which the humor comes from her declaration of her own naivete. She accompanies her daughter-in-law home to Germany on a trip that is against the wishes of everyone who knows her, including her confessor and her daugh-

ter-in-law. On her way back to England, she has the recurrent problem of being cast out by the group she is traveling with because of her bitter weeping. When she arrives in Calais, she meets a group of English travelers whom she knows from earlier in the trip and decides to accompany them across the Channel. However,

Sche desiryng to selyn wyth hem to Douyr, nowt the wolde helpyn hir ne latyn hir wetyn what schip thei purposyd to selyn in. Sche speryde & spyde as diligently as sche cowde, & euyr sche had knowlache of her intent o wey er other tyl sche was schepyd wyth hem, &, whan sche had boryn hir thyng in-to the schip wher thei wer, supposyng thei xulde a selyd in hast sche wist not how sone, thei purueyd hem another schip redy to seilyn. *What the cause was sche wist neuyr* (italics mine) (243).

While the response she receives is sad, Margery's determination to do what she wants to do, regardless of the wishes of the other people, is, in itself, amusing. We imagine her sneaking and spying to get the information she needs. But the punch-line of this story comes from her feigned ignorance of the reason why people do not want to travel with her. Our expectations are raised because Margery is the aggressor, determined not to let people avoid her. At the moment when she claims not to understand, her aggression and our expectations both deflate; we laugh because we know better. She has recounted dozens of similar reactions, relishing them almost as much as she relishes her tears. Her attempt to portray herself as naive at this point in the narrative is perhaps meant to counter the very sly means by which she discovers which ship to get on. But her aggression is only momentarily undermined by this attempt; ultimately, she triumphs by sneaking onto the right ship just before it sails.

By and large, humor functions as part of the mechanism that helps Margery resist being completely marginalized by her society. In her dealings with authority figures, humor constitutes "good game," the means by which Margery subverts and inscribes into her narrative the power structure that disapproves of her singular relationship with God. At other times, humor results from the clash between Margery's iron will and the cultural framework that cannot expand far enough to accommodate her. As this narrative

illustrates, "good chere" and mysticism are not mutually exclusive. In fact, rather than undermining Margery's piety, the humor in her text, like the tears, serves to underscore her spiritual conviction.

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Notes

¹ Margery describes one of her greatest role models, St. Bridget, as having had "a lawhyng cher" (95.)

² Lochrie's very interesting argument sees Margery as the agent of humor through out her text. While I agree that Margery creates humor quite consciously in her interactions with authority figures, I see other instances of humor that are perhaps more situational, of which Margery may not have been fully aware.

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"She may have better fortune than yow semeth": revisioning Dorigen

This paper will focus on Dorigen of Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*¹ and her re-creation of self through her "texts," her complaints. In his recent book, *The Disenchanted Self* H. Marshall Leicester indicates "any text, by its nature as a linguistic phenomenon, generates its own set of *rhetorical inflections of the grammatical subject*, what is often called its speaker" (10). Leicester also examines Chaucer's tales as "examples of impersonated artistry" which concentrate "on the way language creates people" (10). David Raybin contends:

Postulating a world marked by perpetual linguistic flux, the *Franklin's Tale* asserts the necessity of continuous interpretation and decision-making (66).

Dorigen, a "mere woman" manages to assimilate and decisively use language to become a "subject" rather than the expected "object." I propose that the length of each complaint fashions a timeframe, one which is immediate, yet separate for the narrative,² which emphasizes the process of choice and re-creation of identity as Dorigen dwells on her difficulties, constructing and discounting possibilities while determining answers for herself even before discussing either her anxieties or her predicament with her husband.

Underlying this interpretation of *The Franklin's Tale* are my applications of suppositions derived from the field of Symbolic Interactionism,³ the theory of Leicester, and text linguistics.⁴ Of prime importance to each of these is the belief that interpretation involves decision-making.

Interpretation itself becomes an activity of the mind which must engage in manipulating linguistic and semantic relationships. In his book, *Symbolic Interactionism: an Introduction*, Joel Charon lists basic activities of the mind as "delayed response, the consideration of strategies of action, and the active definition and redefinition of the world of objects" (91). To delineate these activities more specifically, Charon quotes Meltzer's findings:

Minded behavior . . . consists of presenting to oneself, tentatively and in advance of overt behavior, the different possibilities or alternatives of future action with reference to a given situation. The future is, thus, present in terms of images of prospective lines of action from which the individual can make a selection. The mental

process is, then, one of delaying, organizing, and selecting a response to the stimuli of the environment. This implies that the individual constructs his act, rather than responding in predetermined ways (95).

Such activities can be applied to Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale* on at least two levels. First, the readers of the tale constantly make decisions based on both the "text" provided and each reader's background (personal history, culture, emotions, and education) in order to begin an interpretation of the tale. Secondly, Dorigen herself, within the "text," creates "texts"⁵ which encourage readers to re-evaluate all layers of "text," (including Dorigen as both subject and object), and to shift or alter overall interpretations. John Stephens and Marcia Ryan point out Chaucer's concern with the "capacity of language . . . both to communicate and to impede understanding" and "the extent to which the problem of unstable signification is central to a reading of the *Franklin's Tale*" (63).

This reading will concentrate on merely one interpretation of *The Franklin's Tale*. Dorigen, one of the three main characters in the tale, quickly becomes the point of convergence. Whether as readers we like or dislike Dorigen, in order to interpret the tale we must follow both her words and actions. "Voice" in writing remains a "function not of persons but of language, of the linguistic codes . . ." (Leicester 9). Dorigen's "voice" gains complexity through our interpretation of her texts. Such interpretations are not static. Even as Dorigen re-fashions herself, we re-evaluate her, her text, the Franklin's text, and Chaucer's text as well. The text becomes a "figure of possibility" . . . allowing "flexibility, . . . openness to otherness and possibility within the open-endedness of subjectivity" (Leicester 168). Jill Mann points out:

The openness of Chaucer's stories to other possible developments makes us aware that they are not fixed into inevitable patterns; like life itself, they are full of unrealized possibilities (144).

Linguistic enticements offered to readers to "join in" are part of the power of Chaucer's texts and part of their allure as well:

The use of the plural, the appeal to the general is indeed an invitation to readers to bring their own experience and feeling to bear . . . (Mann 136).

As we read and re-read a text such as *The Franklin's Tale*, we encounter what Leicester calls the "phenomenon of retrospective revision, the way a later moment in the text simultaneously extends, alters, and undoes an earlier one" (87). Such readings, by their nature, rarely allow us to remain totally "comfortable" with an interpretation of a text. What do our interpretations

mean? Why do readers labor to "come to grips" with difficult passages? David Seaman identifies one possible explanation which deals with some of the difficulties of the process of interpretation:

The Franklin's Tale forces one to consider the process by which readers, both in the tale and of the tale, draw their conclusions. It can lead the reader to consider what persuades one to favor a particular set of evidence from the text over another; in this sense, the tale becomes a mirror that can reflect the reader's own literary, social, and moral value systems as surely as the concluding question exposes those of the Franklin (53).

Within the tale, we must interpret texts of the "subjects." Linda Charnes highlights one of the structural techniques Chaucer uses to direct our attention to Dorigen:

What we see emerging in the tale are two opposing narrative time systems, as Averagus's time frame is compressed and Dorigen's is expanded (301).

Averagus's time flies quickly; as readers, we view time with and through Dorigen's interpretations. Thus, we not only "perceive" more of Dorigen; we are also placed within the expanded time frame as we spend more time watching Dorigen's activities and interpreting Dorigen's texts. Dorigen becomes tentatively real. David Seaman identifies an alluring depth in Dorigen which is produced through her first "lengthy" text:

One learns of Dorigen's fears—for example, those centered on the rocks of the Brittany coastline (865-93)—through her own lengthy discussion of them, and the effect of this is to encourage the reader to empathize with her situation in human terms (45).

If we, as readers, identify or empathize with Dorigen, we imprint within ourselves, even as we witness the "printing" of Dorigen: ". . . a psychological progression within the narrating consciousness of a self with a certain structure of character" (Leicester 55). Indeed, Jill Mann, through her descriptive phrasing, aptly determines emotive impressions of Dorigen as both subject and object:

Dorigen moves slowly through a process which is for her personally felt and unique; the image of the slow process of engraving on a stone emphasizes its gradualness, its almost imperceptible development (141).

For Averagus and Aurelius, Dorigen remains an object. Barrie Ruth Straus's examination of *The Franklin's Tale* delineates the inherent "notion" of "woman" to be "an object similarly to be

possessed and maintained" (137). In the linguistic framework of her world, Dorigen's options are limited. The days of her enforced separation from Averagus (as he plays at war in England) multiply into years. To castigate a bereft Dorigen for her extreme sorrow as she "moorneth, waketh, wayleth, fasteth, pleyneth" (819) after her husband, "hire hertes lyf" (816), denies her even the place of "other." Anne Thompson Lee comments:

If she were a man, Dorigen might board a ship, learn to navigate the dangerous cliffs herself, and go in search of Averagus. As it is she can only take the place society has made for her, which means sitting high above the sea, thinking about her husband and moaning about the terrible rocks. The fact that she has enough spirit to complain, to question the universe, shows an energy of character to which we respond with intuitive sympathy (172).

Left with little to do, Dorigen sits by the sea and deliberates. As she dwells upon her husband's absence, various dangers multiply within her mind and heart until she finally articulates:

Eterne God, that thurgh thy purveiaunce
Ledest the world by certein governaunce,
In ydel, as men seyn, ye no thyng make.
But, Lord, thise grisly feendly rokkes blake,
That semen rather a foul confusion
Of werk than any fair creacion
Of swich a parfit wys God and a stable,
Why han ye wrought this werk unresonable?
(865-872)

The audacity of this question astounds Morton Bloomfield.⁶ The question, as important as it may be, however, is only one segment of Dorigen's first complaint (865-893). Dorigen is capable of borrowing from the male world of logical discourse, setting up propositions and responding to them. Stephens and Ryan mention, "The major tool that women are shown to possess with which they can subvert the authority of those over them is their creative capacity" (73). As readers, we witness the "voiced" movements of her analysis. As we take the time to interpret each movement, we are separated from the "action" per se of the story. She moves from the (patriarchal) given of a male "parfit wys . . . and a stable" (871) God; questions these assumptions and definitions ("Why han ye wrought this werk unresonable?" [872]; "Se ye nat, Lord, how mankynde it destroyeth?" [876]; "...but how thanne may it bee / That ye swiche meenes make it to destroyen..." [882-883]), provides evidence ("Ther nys yfostred man, ne bryd, ne beest" [874]; "An hundred thousand bodyes of mankynde / Han rokkes

slayn..." [876-877]), and concludes that she has no choice but to leave "logical" reasoning to the clerks.⁷ Yet, Dorigen is not simply being teary-eyed throughout this scene. She uses the "reasoning" of her world,⁸ realizes that such limits and definitions are not enough for her, comprehends that within her world she has no other recourse,⁹ acknowledges her annoyance with the situation ("It dooth no good, to my wit, but anoyeth" [875]; "Whiche meenes do no good, but evere anoyen?" [884]), and undermines her "reliance" on clerks by offering an alternative "But wolde God that alle thise rokkes blake / Were sonken into helle for his sake!" (891-892).¹⁰

Even though Lee places Dorigen at the "heart of the *Franklin's Tale*" (169), she views Dorigen's lengthy second complaint (1355-1456), "by almost any standard" as a failure (174).¹¹ Collette terms the complaint a "*derke fantasye*," proof of Dorigen's inability to function: "Without Averagus, Dorigen seems to lose self-control" (407-8). Carole Koepke Brown focuses on the complaint as necessary to the overall structure of the tale. Other critics (Bowman, Straus, Raybin, Rudat) have acknowledged the complaint's importance. Bowman identifies the complaint as a much-needed expression of grief:

While her distance from the sensibility of the male world in which she lives causes her distress and contributes to her objectification, she is able to shape self-expression within the discursive materials of that world (248).

Of key interest here is the concept that Dorigen is able to "shape self-expression." Even as she "wepeth, [and] wailleth" (1348), Dorigen examines her alternatives, and re-defines her future self through her manipulation of language. This process is discussed by Charon as one of the tasks a rational being can perform:

Hertzler (1965:53-54) states that language "enables men to overcome the limited time-and-space perceptions of the subhuman creatures. It is, in fact, man's means of mentally breaking through the space-time barrier . . . he is also able to inhabit simultaneously the past (through legend, traditions, and formal records), the present, and the future (by means of declared ideals, projections, anticipations, plans, and programs)" (59-60).

Straus interprets Dorigen's comments on suicide as an "abstract ideal or appearance of the importance of keeping the integrity of women's bodies" that merely perpetuates "masculine desire and order" (157-8). Raybin, however, reads Dorigen's complaint as clear evidence that Dorigen continues to make choices. Rudat extrapolates, by citing the example of Penelope (1443-1444), that

Dorigen manifests the gift of wit in her use of her "long lamentation":¹²

... like Penelope, Dorigen intends to keep her chastity by playing a delaying game until her husband returns (458-459).

In Dorigen's lengthy complaint, readers can observe her self-fashioning¹³ and can become themselves part of the process of re-creation of subject. This complaint, more so than even the first, incorporates Dorigen's thought-processes, her use of the (patristic, male-perpetualized) legends of "good women," and hints at her options. Some readers, the narrator, and Averagus misread Dorigen's complaint:

The assumption that the male code of values is equally valid for Dorigen thus not only marginalizes her own subjectivity and blinds both narrator and characters to her experiences; it results, for her, in emotional suffering greater than any the men appear to be subjected to (Bowman 247).

The length and repetitiveness of the list is intended to slow the readers down, to once again separate us from the action, to encourage us to ponder Dorigen's dilemma.

After Raybin asserts, "the complaint as a whole is structured upon Dorigen determining what choices are available to her," he notes that Dorigen adapts and restructures Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum* (73). As readers incorporate textual allusions to misogynistic diatribes into both their own knowledge bases and Dorigen's, interpretive possibilities shift, and, as Van Dijk attests:

knowledge is not fixed but changes from situation to situation, also during discourse comprehension. This not only applies to the acquisition of knowledge about the text, as it is represented in episodic memory but also may involve more general and more permanent changes in our knowledge of the world (237).

Dorigen does not unthinkingly repeat verbatim the legends; she chooses which ones to consider, where to place them within her list, and which ones to leave out of the list entirely:

As her speech develops, Dorigen has tried to convince herself that there exists an option other than dishonor or suicide. The suggestion as she closes her complaint is hopeful: many women have rightly chosen suicide over dishonor, but they are not judged superior to those who have chosen to pursue an honorable life . . . Dorigen, like the noble final exemplars, may choose to follow on her own terms the path of life (Raybin 74).¹⁴

As Dorigen creates her text, she refers to other texts ("these stories beren witnesse" [1367]; "as the bookes telle" [1378]). Dorigen also indicates that she can relate, read, and use as rhetoric such stories ("Mo than a thousand stories, as I gesse, / Koude I now telle as touchyng this mateere" [1412-1413]; "To reden how thy doghtren deyde," [1429]; "What seith Omer of goode Penelopee?" [1443]; "Pardee, of Laodomya is writen thus" [1445]).

Dorigen's references in her text provide reminders of the various levels of text and the constant interpretations readers must manipulate in order to come to terms with all of them: the text of (Dorigen's Complaint), of (Dorigen), of (the Franklin), the text of (Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*), the text of (Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*), and the pre-existing texts of (Chaucer's [via retrospective revision] *Legend of Good Women* and *Troilus and Criseyde*). Thus, a critical, questioning Dorigen creates a critical, questioning, endlessly re-reading (and thus re-creating) reader of ever more elusive texts.

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Notes

¹ All citations from Chaucer are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, Third Edition.

² In discussing the length of the second complaint, Morton Bloomfield links the "rationale" behind the complaint with that behind a soliloquy:

Another point which must be borne in mind when trying to find a rationale for this long complaint is what one might call the formal variation, the stopping of the narrative action, moving out of time and normal sequentiality in order to develop, explain, or enrich the action (193).

Part of the nature of the soliloquy is the possibility of separation which occurs. The moving out of time or normal sequence provides a "space" for separate, focused attention.

³ Social Interactionism is described as a blend of psychology and sociology which "focuses on the *nature of interaction*, the dynamic social activities taking place between persons" (Charon 22).

⁴ As the work of several text linguists demonstrates: A text is a basic unit of communication contained in a linguistic form which is produced to be received by another and is a phenomenon which has form and meaning for both those who produce and those who receive the act of communication. A text is not read

in a vacuum, but rather is interpreted by both producer and receiver(s) under many changing parameters and conditions. Due to the highly complicated process needed to interpret and understand a "text" and to the numerous choices made during the processes of cognition for both partners in the act of communication, each text becomes part of a highly individualized phenomenon. . . . Therefore, the method of macroanalysis becomes an evolving process which takes into account background, context, and the assimilation and retrieval of conceptual information. See de Beaugrande, Dressler, and Van Dijk.

⁵ Charon cites William and Dorothy Thomas: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (139).

⁶ Morton Bloomfield sees this scene as "the most extraordinary scene in *The Franklin's Tale*" (189). He identifies the scene as "the first example in Western literature...where the horrible and frightening aspects of nature lead a spectator to question God's goodness (189).

⁷ I see Averagus's wife in a similar position (albeit with fewer husbands and *experience*) to the Wife of Bath. Dorigen chooses responses which are different than what one might expect from the Wife; however, they both are part of a male dominated world:

The Wife's very marginality puts her in a position to understand the official cultural account of the "nature" of women and marriage as a human construction because she continually experiences it practically as something done to her by men. Therefore she can identify traditional masculine characterizations of women, negative or positive, as ideological weapons... (Leicester 76).

⁸ Carole Koepke Brown points out, "the first *complainte* carries the weight of Boethian philosophy and theodicy" (168).

⁹ Leicester reminds readers, "Woman in the symbolic order has been only what men have made of her and what they have made her be, the other and guarantor of masculine identity" (189).

¹⁰ By the end of the first complaint, Dorigen can be said to be disenchanted: "Disenchantment may generate a hunger for the transcendence it renders absent, so that the world as it is comes to seem worthless" (Leicester 192).

¹¹ Anne Thompson cites the "utter dreariness" as the overwhelming factor of the complaint's failure (174).

¹² Wolfgang Rudat argues:

I submit that her long lamentation is actually a manifestation of her *wit*. The key to an understanding of her one-or-two-day monologue ("a day or tweye," 1457) is the fact that toward the end of her catalog of women who preserved their chastity by committing suicide she ponders,

What seith Omer of goode Penelopee?

At Grece knoweth of her chastitee (1443-44).

The attentive reader can figure out why Dorigen asks the rhetorical question of what Homer says about Penelope (458-59).

¹³ Even though most scholars use the concept of "self-fashioning" in discussions of works primarily from the Renaissance, in his book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning From More to Shakespeare* Stephen Greenblatt points out:

One need only think of Chaucer's extraordinarily subtle and wry manipulations of persona to grasp that what I propose to examine does not suddenly spring up from nowhere when 1499 becomes 1500. Moreover, there is considerable empirical evidence that there may well have been less autonomy in self-fashioning in the sixteenth century than before... (1).

¹⁴ Note, however, the judges (except for Dorigen) are men. Dorigen continues to struggle within her ideological cage, using material as she sees fit.

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Images of Christopher Marlowe in recent fiction

As a reader and avid student of Christopher Marlowe's works since my college days, I have on occasion been pleased and intrigued to encounter depictions of Marlowe in modern fiction. No doubt because it was the four-hundredth anniversary of Marlowe's death, 1993 was particularly rich in such treatments of Marlowe. What I would like to do in this paper is to focus specifically on the portrayal of Marlowe in four novels from last year. As we shall see, all four of these novels draw upon and reflect scholarly and academic studies of Marlowe; they are all by writers who have done their homework. Still, the biographical data that we possess would seem to offer scope for a variety of interpretations, so it is striking how much these portraits share with each other. Being able to view comparatively so many works published so closely together affords us a rare opportunity to assess the present popular perception of Marlowe and may, moreover, tell us something about ourselves. Literary reputation, after all, is at least in part a social construct.

The four novels that we will be considering are Anthony Burgess' *A Dead Man in Deptford*, Judith Cook's *The Slicing Edge of Death*, Stephanie Cowell's *Nicholas Cooke: Actor, Soldier, Physician, Priest*, and Lisa Goldstein's *Strange Devices of the Sun and Moon*. Burgess's *A Dead Man in Deptford* traces Marlowe's career from his recruitment as a spy during his university days to his assassination at Deptford. It is the most self-consciously literary of the four, and its complexity is emphasized by the narrator, who suggests that "It may well be that plain English cannot encompass a life so various, tortured, and contradictory" (3). In the postmodern way, he calls attention to the fact of narration. For example, upon reaching the novel's first conversation between two characters, he interrupts to ask, "But how will you have your dialogues, reader? I will follow the foreign fashion and indent and lineate" (5). Dialogue is from then on marked by indentation and opening dashes. There are no quotation marks.

Character names reflect modern spelling, but in conversation characters are wont to remind each other of the variation found within Elizabethan spelling. Thus, introducing himself to Thomas Walsingham for the first time, Marlowe says that he is "Marlowe or Marley or Morley. You have a choice" (32). Similarly, when the Earl of Northumberland asks if he is Merlin, he answers

"Merlin or Marlin or Marley or Marlowe. The names of us common people, my lord, are subject to change in the process of onomastic circulation. They are fluid stuff" (137).

To be named, I presume, is to be fixed, to be made a known quantity. The fluidity of the narrator's characterization is maintained in another way. He is called Jack one time early in the novel, but fully identifies himself only at the very end, and then obliquely: "My own name you will find, if you care to look, in the folio of Black Will's plays, put out by his friends Heming and Condell in 1623. In the comedy of Much Ado About Nothing, by some inadvertency, I enter with Leonato and others under my own identity and not, as it should be, the guise of Balthazar to sing to ladies that they sigh no more" (269). Those willing to consult the textual notes of a good edition of Shakespeare may thus learn that Burgess's narrator is Jacke Wilson, an actor whose portrayal of Balthazar is revealed by a stage direction in the Folio edition of *Much Ado About Nothing*. However, no sooner does Burgess thus identify the narrator than he abandons him to speak to us in his own voice.

Cook's *The Slicing Edge of Death* is another novelization of the last years of Marlowe's life, tracing it from his role in the fight in Hog Lane that ended with Tom Watson's killing of William Bradley to Marlowe's death at Deptford. While individual events of Marlowe's life are often imaginatively interpreted, the novel is the least interesting of the four. Its parade of facts about Elizabethan life is too much of an end in itself, rather than being a means to a larger end, and it has no stylistic rewards.

Cowell's *Nicholas Cooke* is a historical novel of another sort. Nicholas is a fictional character who, having run away from a brutal master to whom he had been apprenticed in Canterbury, grows up in the theatrical world of Elizabethan London before undertaking a series of other adventures and careers. Marlowe, who is called Morley throughout the novel, befriends and helps Nicholas when he first comes to London. Morley's depiction, as we shall see, is quite interesting, but it occupies only the first part of the novel. He is, in fact, dead by page 91 of the book's 435 pages. The use of Morley for Marlowe, and Shagspere for Shakespeare, is intended by Cowell to help us separate her characterizations from our literary preconceptions. The narrator is Nicholas himself, who relates his story gracefully and delightfully.

The last work, Goldstein's *Strange Devices of the Sun and Moon*, is fantasy rather than historical fiction. The depiction of Marlowe indeed reflects the outlines of his life as we know it, but it is interwoven with the story of Alice Wood, a bookseller whose

changeling son Arthur must take his place — as king in a pivotal war within the fairy world. The blend of historical detail and the fantastic is nearly seamless, and one is swept along by both story and language.

Having now been introduced to our four novels, let us explore what they can tell about the current, general perception of Marlowe. I will begin by noting a consensus that I was pleased to find: Marlowe is not Shakespeare. That should, of course, strike us as biographically and historically obvious, but Shakespeare has long attracted kookish speculation that his works were authored by someone else, and Marlowe has frequently been a contender for that honor.¹ It is not, I must say, a position that has bulked large in Marlowe studies, but what there is of it seems to have piqued the public's interest. Having served as the Membership Chair of the American Marlowe Society for several years, I can testify that a membership application from a non-academic is all too frequently from someone who believes that Marlowe survived Deptford and lived out his life as someone else. That someone is most commonly Shakespeare.

The most obvious objection to Marlowe's being Shakespeare, or anyone else after 1593, is that he would have had to have survived his officially reported death at Deptford. That topic I will return to shortly, but since Shakespeare, alias Shagspere, is a major character in Cowell's book and is alluded to in the other three, it is interesting to see the relationships that these novels posit between the two. The historical data are simple enough; we have absolutely no information of any kind which actually links the two in any specific action or conversation or collaboration. However, they inhabited the same small theatrical world, they both sought the patronage of the same man, Southampton, for their poetry, and it seems clear in their plays that each learned from and reacted to the success of the other.

Hence, I would think that Goldstein gets it wrong when she portrays Tom Kyd, Tom Nashe, and Kit Marlowe as failing to recognize Shakespeare when they are reading, hot off the press, Robert Greene's allusion to "An upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers . . . the only Shake-scene in a country." "Who is this here?" asks Marlowe, and Nashe replies, "I think I met him once . . . An actor who wanted to write plays. ShakeShakes something. I can't remember now" (200). Goldstein is presumably making the point that Shakespeare did not loom as large for his contemporaries as he does for us, but the publication of Greene's attack makes sense only if readers will recognize the allusion, and Marlowe's *Edward II*,

written around this time, surely was not written in complete ignorance of Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays.

Goldstein's one reference to *Edward II* is interesting, for she suggests that Marlowe's attraction to the subject reflected his growing awareness "that people were much more complicated than they seemed" (174). Certainly that seems more likely than Cook's scenario. She has Marlowe writing a deliberately offensive play, filled with sodomy, in order to teach Henslowe a lesson for suggesting that Marlowe write a play that would take advantage of the current fashion for plays about kings, the kind of plays that Shakespeare had been writing. Seeing *Edward II* as no more than a dirty trick is hard to understand. In general, though, she quite plausibly shows a Marlowe who knows of Shakespeare and is scornful of him. Burgess's formerly mild-mannered Will of Warwickshire allows the success of the *Henry VI* plays to go to his head. His boasting to Greene is at the root of the "upstart crow" attack.

Cowell's Shagspere is a major character in her book, but Morley and he are shown together only once. The two have coincidentally both gone to Southampton's on the same afternoon. When Morley arrives, he is obviously at ease in the presence of nobility, fully taking part in the conversation and holding the attention of the assembled guests. He has even dared, on the spur of the moment, to bring Nicholas with him, then a mere apprentice, because he finds him sexually attractive. In contrast, Shagspere arrives a bit later than Morley and stands for a long time at the edge of the room without attracting attention: "No more noticed was he than the soft servants who came and went . . ." (80). When Shagspere is dismissed by Southampton, Morley remains behind and asks Nick to leave with Shagspere.

This last touch, though, is not simply to suggest that Morley is more successful at the game of patronage, but that his appeal to Southampton includes his sexual preference. Cowell's Shagspere is heterosexual, while in all four novels, Marlowe is openly homosexual. Such certainty about Marlowe's homosexuality has not always been the case in Marlowe studies, nor in fictional portrayals of Marlowe, but it has strongly featured in much recent scholarship.² The actual evidence is both literary and biographical. Marlowe's works obviously contain several scenes of homosexual attraction, including Edward's love for Gaveston and Spencer Junior, Jupiter's dandling of Ganymede on his knee, and Neptune's attraction for Leander. Added to this use of homoerotic imagery is the well-known charge in the Baines Note alleging that Marlowe was of the opinion "That all they that loue not Tobacco & Boies were fooles" (Brooke 99). The weight which

one should attach to this statement has often been debated. Richard Baines, like Marlowe, was one of Walsingham's agents, and when he was arrested with Marlowe in Flushing on charges of coining, it seems that the two had nothing good to say about each other. In gathering the charges in his note, most of which have to do with blasphemy and heretical beliefs, Baines may have been acting on his own, or he may have been following orders, and in either case he may have been more or less scrupulous in recording what he heard. We certainly know nothing of the circumstances of these statements, nor of the tone in which they may have been spoken. The deduction of Marlowe's homosexuality is thus plausible, even if it seems prudent not to overstate the case.

Moreover, we should be mindful that making this deduction of homosexuality raises more questions than it answers. Recent scholarship has made it clear that modern terms such as "homosexuality" carry with them numerous connotations and assumptions that can not be anachronistically applied to the past.³ Some would argue, in fact, that one can not say much of anything with any certainty about what it meant for a male to be sexually attracted to other males in Elizabethan London. This caveat does not concern our novelists. The modern writer may be more willing to perceive and accept homosexuality than in the past, but having done so, he or she will tend to portray it in terms of our own time.

For all but Burgess, the basic approach is to show Marlowe openly referring to his preference for boys and men, and to include some brief portrayal of a love affair. As mentioned, Cowell's Morley is sexually attracted to Nicholas Cooke, who responds with deep love and desire, although as Nick grows he finds that that he is sexually attracted to women rather than to men. Goldstein's Marlowe falls for a young nobleman, an amateurish spy he encounters on one of his missions. Cook's Marlowe is a more fickle and much crueler lover. Having courted and then dropped one of the boys in Henslowe's company, he goes out of his way to introduce his new lover: "Hugh, meet my past lover; Jamie, meet my present one" (146). Both of these lovers are fictional. Burgess, however, posits a romantic relationship with Thomas Walsingham. The idea is not new, but it is erected on slim evidence. Thomas Walsingham was Marlowe's patron and probably his friend, to judge from Edward Blount's preface to *Hero and Leander*. Marlowe was staying at Scadbury, Walsingham's country estate, when arrested shortly before his death. Walsingham had been active in the secret service when it was run by his uncle, and we know that he knew all of the men present at the

time of Marlowe's death. However, it seems that he had not been active in this service since inheriting his family estate. That he knew Marlowe in his role of spy is certainly possible, but is unproven. That they were actually lovers is based on no proof at all. As Burgess pictures it, however, it was love at first sight. He follows Marlowe on his mission to the seminary at Rheims, where they engage in some rough sex in an inn and have a romantic tryst in an open field. The affair flourishes. Its most outrageous moment occurs when Walsingham, who is to sit as a magistrate of Kent, asks Marlowe to accompany him to Canterbury. They stay with Marlowe's family, and though given separate bedchambers, they end up sleeping together and being discovered by Marlowe's father and mother, who are devastated by the discovery.

The flamboyance of this last love affair accords with the personality of Marlowe as depicted by all four novelists, and indeed, one assumes that these writers have picked Marlowe in large part because of his romantic reputation as a daring and skeptical thinker. Much of this image, it has been recently argued, may stem from some very subjective and speculative nineteenth-century mythmaking.⁴ What do we actually know of Marlowe's life that gives any insight into his beliefs and personality? We know that he and Thomas Watson fought a duel with William Bradley, and we know that on one other occasion Marlowe was enjoined to keep the peace. We know that he had some kind of involvement with Walsingham's secret service which ended up requiring the intercession of the Privy Council to prevent his M.A. from being withheld. As noted, we know that he and Baines were arrested for coining in Flushing. Whatever other work he may have done as a spy is not known, but the fact that all of the men present at the time of his death, as well as several others with whom his name has been linked, were in one way or another members of the secret service may indicate that he continued to serve the government.

In addition, we have several allegations about Marlowe's beliefs, but the full context that would enable us to weigh such remarks is gone. For example, Thomas Kyd's charge that Marlowe had tried to convince people to shift allegiance from Elizabeth to James or Baines's statement that Marlowe had boasted of having the right to coin could have been disinformation, a trap for the unwary by Marlowe in his role as government agent. The largest part of such allegations, by Baines, Kyd, Robert Greene, and others assert that Marlowe was given to expressing unorthodox and skeptical religious opinions, and it does seem that Marlowe's arrest in 1593 may have focused on his religious beliefs.

Kyd, after his torture for possessing a heretical tract he said was Marlowe's, described Marlowe as being "intemperate & of a cruel hart" and spoke of his "rashnes in attempting soden pryvie iniuries to men" (Brooke 104, 107-8). Against this one may weigh the various literary prefaces and allusions which indicate that others thought of Marlowe as a friend, and some of the above allegations connect him with the intellectual world centering around Sir Walter Raleigh.

Critics and biographers have often wanted to tone down the more unsavory parts of this data, but those tend to be the very parts that our novelists relish. Near the beginning of Cook's novel, one character describes Marlowe to another: "What kind of a man is Kit? Brilliant, difficult, adder tongued, dominates any company he's in . . ." (16). The others would concur. Marlowe's reputation for religious skepticism is strongly stressed by all. Cowell has to work the hardest to incorporate these details since she devotes less space to Marlowe and they are presented to us as they are experienced by a thirteen year old boy. It turns out that the behavior described in the Baines Note is very common knowledge indeed. It is, in fact, the subject of gossip amongst the St. Paul's Boys. Nick also hears people saying that Marlowe is a spy, and he himself one night finds Marlowe and Thomas Heriot jokingly attempting to conjure up the devil at a pub. Cowell's is not a discreet Marlowe. He is kind, however, as some of the boys argue, and as his care for Nick makes evident.

Goldstein's Marlowe has a quick temper, but he is also quick to forget. He is a mystery to his friends, in part, at least because he really does not care what others think of him (201). Burgess's Marlowe similarly knows little of discretion, but he stays angry longer and takes insults less well. He is a rough and tumble street fighter rather than a master swordsman. We see him virtually demolish three toughs who have been seeking protection money from his friends. Later, when Robert Greene has been proclaiming him an atheist, he threatens him and wounds Cutting Ball, the thuggish brother of Greene's mistress. Cook's Marlowe apparently empathizes more with Cutting Ball. When Ball is being hanged, Marlowe bribes the executioner to allow him to tug on Ball's legs so that he will die a quick and relatively painless death. Burgess and Cook both present Marlowe as a heavy drinker, and Cook especially suggests that his indiscretion is related to his drinking.

Such indiscretion is not a good trait for a spy, and as we have noted, Marlowe was, in some sense or another, a spy. The activities of the Elizabethan secret service strike us as brutal and sordid.

There is a police state quality to its rooting out of heretics and dissidents, and something like the Babington Conspiracy strikes us as the deliberate entrapment and execution of gullible people for political purposes. One can understand why some scholars have wished to minimize this side of Marlowe's life, and it should be stressed that we really do not know much about Marlowe's government activities. He may have gathered the names of fellow students with Catholic leanings. He may possibly even have gone to Rheims for this purpose. He may have occasionally acted as a courier. He may have done much more.

What kind of spy do our novelists see in Marlowe? Cowell, writing from the perspective of Nicholas Cooke, does not show us any spying, although others know that he is one. Cook's Marlowe likes spying. His work for Poley is occasional, but he enjoys "both the money and the amusement" that it provides (63). Of his activities at Rheims, he reminisces "That nothing else had quite matched the excitement of taking such risks . . . It had been as if he were pitted against masters in a marvelous game of chess" (73). Goldstein's Marlowe also takes on occasional tasks for Robert Poley, but only because he needs the money, and when Thomas Walsingham's patronage enables him to do so, he stops spying. Burgess, however, suggests that one can not stop. His Marlowe becomes a spy when he is a student because he sees it a way of obtaining both money and advancement, but he finds it a bloody business: Burgess imagines him as having been active in the Babington affair. His Marlowe wants out, but there is no way out.

This leads to our final topic, the death of Marlowe. Since we have the records of the inquest, which was held by William Danby, Coroner to the Royal Household, one might well feel that there are very few deaths in the period about which there could be less mystery. However, from the time of Hotson's rediscovery of this document, there has been speculation that its description of a violent quarrel over the bill, "the reckoning," did not tell the whole story.⁵ As noted earlier, there are those who argue that Marlowe's death was faked, that it was a coverup allowing Marlowe to escape his legal difficulties and live out his life under some other name. There is little that one can say to such people: who now can convince a true believer that Elvis is dead? Still, there is something touching about such theories. They seem to assume that the world would value the literary talent of a Marlowe too much to have allowed him to die a young and violent death. They also seem to assume that his colleagues would stand by him despite his legal difficulties, that the government agents he worked with would protect their own. My sense, though, is that

these would not be the most common assumptions of modern readers. The majority opinion is surely that it is very hard for a spy to come in out of the cold, and that governments may be all too quick to solve a problem by eliminating an embarrassing individual. This accords with the second type of conspiracy theory, which argues that because all present at Marlowe's death had been in the Elizabethan secret service, it must have been, for some reason or other, a murder sanctioned by forces within the Elizabethan power structure.⁶

Cowell does nothing with these speculations. Nick hears the news that his friend has been killed in a tavern fight, and later encountering Ingram Frizer, the boy tries ineffectually to beat him up. Goldstein's account of Marlowe's death weaves it into the fairy war; Robert Poley has been working for one faction of the fairies and has incorrectly assumed that Marlowe was working for the other side. Both Cook and Burgess, however, explain Marlowe's murder in terms of an official conspiracy. In Cook, Eleanor Bull's house, the place where Marlowe died, is what we would now call a "safe house," a place maintained by the secret service; Marlowe is drugged so that stabbing him is easy. His friends in the theatre find that the story presented at the inquest is simply unbelievable, but do not dare to speak out. The reasons for the murder are multiple: Marlowe's recklessness and drinking are seen as posing a security problem; to save himself from heresy charges Marlowe has attempted to blackmail Sir Robert Cecil, the head of the secret service; and Marlowe's plays are seen as being too subversive of public order. Burgess has the others holding Marlowe while they stab him. As with Cook, it is clear that Marlowe is no longer trusted by those in the secret service. As Poley, Frizer, and Skeres restrain Marlowe, though, they tell him that there are two other possible reasons for his death, "and you will never know whether it is a knight or an earl who wishes the voiding. . . . One deletes you from life's book as a warning to others, or because he fears your tongue, or for dislike and no more, or as a payment for insolence. The other is afraid of a speaking out under duress that will light the powder of his own ruin" (266). Burgess, in short, alludes to common suppositions about Marlowe's death, but refuses to provide a resolution of the mystery.

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Notes

¹ The best known work of this kind is Calvin Hoffman's *The Murder of the Man Who Was "Shakespeare."*

² Kuriyama provides a book-length analysis of the psychological implications of Marlowe's homosexuality. See also the recent study by Bredbeck.

³ Bredbeck's *Sodomy and Interpretation* surveys recent criticism on this issue and discusses the problem of understanding references to sodomy with particular attention to Marlowe.

⁴ This is in particular the thesis of Thomas Dabbs. See also the introductions in the works by Friedenreich and MacLure.

⁵ Hotson himself clearly felt that all mystery had been resolved by his discovery.

⁶ The most recent argument that Marlowe was murdered as the result of a conspiracy is Charles Nicholl's *The Reckoning*, which provides a wealth of biographical data on all of the people connected in any way with Marlowe's death or the secret service.

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Measure For Measure and the Duke's dark deeds: though he might "steale from the state", still *cucullus non facit monachum*

The enigmatic Vincentio, Duke of Vienna, has been vexing critics for years by stubbornly hiding his identity in corners, appearing now a Duke, now a friar, and almost always being judged badly in either office. Shakespeare's Duke is an intriguing mix of philosophical, religious, and political convictions; his participation in the instigation of the bed trick continues to draw negative commentary, not only because of its apparent immorality, but also because of the number of lies the Duke must tell in order to pull off his scheme. Indeed he undergoes a process of discovering himself and in the end must understand how he can keep his promise regarding ruling Vienna, which includes a promise of holding the office, representing himself as a good and stable leader, ruling his subjects wisely, and judging them justly.

"[I]t is vertuous to be constant in any vndertaking" (3.2.238-9), says the Duke. To undertake a contract, and then to invalidate that contract through lack of proper action, results in the utter abolition of everything the contract stood for. The Duke himself recognizes that the foundation of society rests upon honor between parties:

There is scarce truth enough alieue to make Societies
secure, but Securitie enough to make Fellowships ac-
curst: Much vpon this riddle runs the wisdom of the
world: This newes is old enough, yet it is euerie daies
newes (3.2.235-43).

Therefore societal organization rests upon an agreement between one person and another, between several employees and an employer, and between many citizens and one ruling office. When the duke uses the word "undertaking," he refers to a specific legal term regarding societal contracts. A. W. B. Simpson, in his *A History of the Common Law of Contract: The Rise of the Action of Assumpsit* speaks of any contract during the Renaissance as coming under *assumpsit* — an agreement wherein there is a mutual exchange based upon certain understood terms. As Simpson notes, the word *assumpsit* has a technical and detailed definition in English law:

An "assumpsit" is normally thought of as an undertaking, in the sense of an assurance, and for many purposes this is no doubt accurate enough to catch the sense of the word in the early cases. But simply to translate the word in this way, and leave the matter at that, fails to bring out the full range of the possible nuances of the word, for the modern word "undertaking" does not carry with it the same overtones (215).

Contracts in themselves were built upon a verbal promise, and this specific promise of *assumpsit* was considered voluntary and verbal, and went by different names, like pact, promise, or constitution.

The rules governing *assumpsit* envelop a great deal of promise-making, and, interestingly enough, involve nearly all the kinds of promises made in *Measure for Measure*. The idea of *assumpsit* has to do not only with making a promise, but with actually undertaking to perform some action. The important aspect of *assumpsit* which applies specifically to *Measure for Measure* is the idea that one cannot read the minds of the parties involved in making an agreement. If only spoken words were involved, then the words themselves become important signals which form the thoughts of the parties and which help each to interpret the symbolic language of the argument itself. In essence, words form the contract again in the mind. The mental contract culminates the process of an ultimately intangible agreement expressed in final form through language. Therefore the qualities of promises in themselves, from their beginning as mere thought, to the spoken words of the promise, to the specific actions of the participants in the carrying out of the promise, all become part of the legal tangle involved in the word *assumpsit*. When the Duke uses the term "undertaking," he also refers indirectly to his Friar disguise, because "in legal contexts [the term *assumpsit*] had earlier been used in connection with entry into a religious order — one who did so *habitu religionis assumpsit* (Simpson 215).

When the Duke undertakes to keep Isabella safe from harm, this "suggest[s] the idea that the defendant had made himself responsible in a particular way, viz. by taking something (or some person) into his custody or control" (Simpson 217). The same is true for the Duke as Duke of Vienna as well — he has promised to take custody of all of his subjects, not only Isabella. However, the Duke's handling of Isabella recalls similar situations in "early *assumpsit* cases [where] the defendant [had] always taken the plaintiff's person or property into his custody, and *thereby* made himself responsible" (Simpson 217).

Shakespeare's Duke attempts to point out the truth that such agreements are built upon words tenuous enough to lead to false agreements, those which "make Fellowships accurst," and sometimes the truth becomes only barely sufficient to maintain "Societies secure." That the Duke himself has not set a good example in keeping agreements suggests that he, too, has something to learn about maintaining security in his own society. The Duke must learn to keep the agreement between himself and his people. Such an agreement must be defined from both the Duke's perspective and that of the people: the Duke expects his subjects to obey, and his subjects expect him to rule.

The Duke actually abandons his first promise to govern his people and keep the state in favor of a counterfeit one; he pretends to promise that he will give up all possessions and live in poverty as a friar. This counterfeit promise diverts the Duke from his primary purpose and results in not only justice delayed but nearly justice denied. In effect, what William B. Bache says in his *Measure for Measure as Dialectical Art* rings true — the Duke does move from "seeming Duke" to "real Duke" but the movement occurs because he starts to take seriously his promise to govern Vienna toward the end of the play. Up to a point, Vincentio plays at being a Duke, just as he plays at being Friar Lodowick. He has not assayed the power he has, and therefore others must attempt to create a just state in the midst of what amounts to anarchy. The Duke's actions throughout the play reveal that his power is not his own — that the power, in fact, lies in the office, not the person. The usurped friar's habit serves as an outward sign of the Duke's abandonment of his state, his people, and his promise. Lucio says this succinctly when he states that it was a

mad fantastical trick of him to steale from the State, and
vsurpe the beggerie hee was neuer borne to (3.2.98-99).

Whether Lucio knows that the Duke has absconded from the commonwealth *and returned* does not matter — what might go on in Lucio's mind is anyone's guess — but Lucio does realize that to leave Vienna means that the Duke has left his people, that he has abandoned his estate in life and taken upon himself another, lower, estate.

The monks and nuns concerned with religious and not political promises in *Measure for Measure's* Vienna, are technically unable to make binding promises to other people; a promise to God supersedes a promise to an individual. During the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, religious figures were considered beyond civil law:

... a feoffment to a monk was void, and a monk could not be party to any form of contract (Simpson 540).

That is, a monk or nun could not be prosecuted under civil law, nor was he or she subjected to civil law in any way. According to Simpson, "monks professed were civilly dead, as were friars, and as a general rule lacked all legal capacity" (539). Although such civil laws "became obsolete under the Reformation" (540), canon law, to which the monks and nuns were subject, was in itself spiritually intertwined with civil law. For the Duke to become a friar was not only abdication and abjuration of his political state; he was also declaring himself dead legally, albeit symbolically — both dead as the law and dead to the law. He substituted a set of religious laws for the political laws which he himself had affirmed through his office. While the Duke-Friar appears to combine law and religion together in his disguise, his actions pertain little to either. He is, as Lucio says, "a meddling Fryer" (5.1.128) and an "olde fantastical Duke of darke corners" (4.3.162-63), instead of a powerful personage.

The Duke admits that he had neglected his state in the past; now, however, he has deserted it. When he takes upon himself the lifestyle of a friar, he returns to his people, but he returns powerless to help in any but the most superficial way. And now, someone as powerless as Lucio can unhood him.

The Duke is a curious character who combines an earthly authority in his dukedom with a heavenly authority in the guise of a Franciscan friar; yet as either Duke or Friar he lacks something which is completed by the other personality, a fact that he realizes by the end of the play. The Duke's knowledge of both earthly and heavenly laws should give him an authority above all others around him; yet he is constantly subjected to problems which he can only attempt to overcome, and he continually scrambles to overcome the hurdles which Angelo throws in his way without resorting to revealing his identity. The Duke's powers, both earthly and heavenly, have distinct limits, and in the end he must rely on a higher authority than himself for the *deus ex machina* of the dead Ragozine, the only truly serendipitous occurrence in the play (for everyone but Ragozine), and the one that ensures that everything turns out well. Though the Duke loves to help others "in doing good" (3.1.204), and attempts to use a quasi-divine power to order events so that in the end justice will prevail, yet the end result of his justice seems to many to be injustice. Because of the operation of the Duke's mercy, the guilty are rewarded with spouses; not one person is whipped, hanged, or flogged, and even the murderer Barnardine merely becomes

remanded into the custody of a friar to undergo instruction. Too, the innocent seem to suffer more than they should. Isabella must suffer the reality of her brother's death until the Duke deems the time right to tell her that Claudio has not died. Something seems to go wrong with the judgment scene, yet justice and mercy do meet there in the elaborate and dramatic denouement. The idea that the Duke could treat even the most serious offenses with mercy becomes a point of contention. Whereas the Duke integrates his character and assumes his role as giver of justice tempered with mercy, the power of that justice seems to disappear when held up against the light of mercy. But the duality of justice combined with mercy creates a double-perspective, just as the Duke-Friar is two persons in one. Shakespeare keeps the audience squinting at the Duke-Friar, and in the end reveals the Duke as an integrated person, but only through the disguise of the Friar can the real character of the Duke become visible — both to the audience and to the Duke himself.

Measure for Measure appears to have been set up with the ideal of the Aristotelian double plot for comedy, "such as we find in the *Odyssey*, where, at the end, the good are rewarded and the bad punished" (*Poetics* 25). But instead of Aristotle's ideal of the good rewarded and the evil punished, the audience is faced at the end with a wish that "Correction, and Instruction [should have] both worke[d]" (3.2.33) through the person of the Duke. Yet after Act 5, the audience may feel that neither instruction nor correction worked, and therefore may feel cheated. Religion seems powerless, for despite the Duke's entreaties as friar, nothing brings about a better state in the souls of his subjects; in the end the pure force of his own jurisdiction over his subjects, through his own speech, gives weight to what must be justice through grace, "despight of all controuersy" (1.2.25-26). Significantly, all other speech but the Duke's becomes not unnecessary but superfluous — the Duke (by official letter) has himself given Claudio a reprieve; the requests of Mariana and Isabella, though genuine, nevertheless can have no real effect in the world of Vienna except upon themselves. The difference between what the audience expects to be the final judgment of a powerful Duke and what the Duke actually does as a representative of mercy bridges the gap between the powerful Duke and the powerless Friar. The Duke becomes neither all-powerful nor completely powerless. It seems that neither the Duke's politics nor the Friar's philosophies become the basis of judgment at the end but that power emanates from the office, whereas mercy emanates from the individual. Hence the duality of Duke-Friar becomes a duality of the office

versus the person. His final success comes from the recognition that the true Duke must eclipse the Friar-Duke.

The Duke decides that to judge justly, he must use the power he has over others to effect changes within individuals, and in the end, the commonwealth, too, will change. Thus the Duke learns his two-fold occupation — to change morals as well as laws, but to do it through a combination of justice and mercy. The fact that moral laws can clash with religious and civil laws appears to be part of the problem in Vienna; if the people had only one set of rules to live by, things would go much better for them. If Claudio and Juliet could get by with a future-promise of marriage, and the church agreed to that, then the two would have no religious problems. But they do have a problem with the state, and the state itself is changeable. In *Measure for Measure*, the Duke relinquishes his political power and trades it for mere appearance. Although the appearance helps him understand his subjects better, it does not help him rule them better. The Duke must *be* Duke, not a fantastic friar.

The Duke has the ability to be present anywhere an important incident occurs, and soon characters work themselves out of seemingly impossible situations, although often success is not due directly to the Duke-Friar's actions. He is the Duke of dark corners, always lurking just out of view, but hovering about all the action. He is, in a sense, like the laws Vienna has — they are there in spirit, even when they are not enforced. But when the Duke begins with the problem that the commonwealth has indulged in too much liberty, and he believes that it needs more justice, especially where sexual matters are concerned, he runs into a problem because he relinquished his political power. When Angelo and Escalus split the Duke's power, with Angelo taking the heavier hand, the immediate arrest of Claudio sets the Duke's mind reeling with anticipation at what will occur as a result of his own abdication.

That the Duke merely plays the part of Friar, that he does not live up to a flattering portrayal of a holy lifestyle, can be seen in his inability to keep clear of the appearance of evil. Friar Lodowick's bed trick itself seems less than holy; its end is more advantageous for patching up problems regarding broken promises than for producing spiritual rewards. The bed trick certainly is not a plan in which a pious cleric ought to engage his sheep. But from his first advance toward Isabella, he defends himself regarding his intentions, as he asks the Provost to leave him alone

a while with the Maid, my minde promises with my habit,
no losse shall touch her by my company (3.1.179-181).

The Duke promises here to guard Isabella's purity while he is with her. In fact, the entire bed trick, which the Duke shortly reveals to Isabella, is a practice in arranging promises to be kept by unwilling participants. Friar Lodowick merely orchestrates the keeping of Angelo's original promise to Mariana, while keeping his own promise to protect Isabella while she is in his presence. Jacques Lezra, in "Pirating Reading: The Appearance of History in *Measure for Measure*," presents an excellent summary of images of pirating, which includes many instances in the play of the replacement of one thing or person by an inferior or mirrored version:

From Duke Vincentio's concluding "an Angelo for Claudio, death for death" to the title itself, *Measure for Measure* seeks to take the measure of the many uses of *for* — linguistic, aesthetic, juridical, and sexual — that arise when an absence needs, as the Duke will put it, to be supplied (1.1.18) (Lezra 257).

This idea of one substituted for another carries over into the substitution of Mariana for Isabella. But the substitution is not a simple one; Friar Lodowick needed prior knowledge of Angelo's and Mariana's contract, as well as current knowledge of Mariana's whereabouts. He has both. Too, the echoes prevalent in the actions and words of Mariana in Isabella's place take on special meaning. The Duke wishes to "Pay with falsehood, false exacting / And performe an olde contracting" (3.2.295-6), and he does so with the substitution of Mariana for Isabella.

When the Duke greets Mariana at the moated grange, he comes as one who belongs in this removed place, apart from the court yet somehow still connected through the convent to the world of Vienna. The fact that the grange is a holding of the convent house is an important note; in this scene, the grange becomes the appointed meeting place of the Duke and Isabella, for they had "promis'd here to meete" (4.1.17). That the Duke already has met Mariana on occasion is immediately evident, for she says that his "aduice / Hath often still'd [her] brawling discontent" (4.1.6-7). When Isabella arrives, the Duke learns of the circumstances under which Isabella should meet Angelo:

He hath a Garden circummur'd with Bricke,
Whose western side is with a Vineyard back't;
And to that Vineyard is a planced gate,
That makes his opening with this bigger Key:
This other doth command a little doore,
Which from the Vineyard to the Garden leades,

There haue I made my promise, vpon the
Heauy midle of the night, to call vpon him (4.1.28-36).

This description recalls the double-door of the convent itself, which had two keys as well. The mention of the double-walled garden, as well as the tableau of Friar and Novice meeting at the moated grange, all suggest a renewed emphasis on the religious elements in the play. In essence, what happens in this particular scene at the beginning of Act 4 is not a partnership between Isabella and the Friar, but a novice following the orders of one to whom she must be obedient. According to Bourdillon in *The Order of Minoreesses in England*:

by the end of the thirteenth century all the spiritual descendants of St. Clare enjoyed by papal grant the spiritual guidance and practical control of the Friars Minor. As a natural and inevitable corollary to this privilege, each of the English Minoreess houses had received exemption from episcopal jurisdiction; the nuns were under the governance of the friars intermediary to the pope alone; even the Archbishop of Canterbury could interfere in Minoreess affairs by special papal mandate only (55).

Because the Franciscans wielded great sway over the Minoreesses, and indeed held "very extensive powers in . . . [their] hands" (Bourdillon 55), it is therefore unfair to judge Isabella as one who blindly follows advice. For a Minoreess, only the Pope himself was more powerful than her Friar-Counselor. Thus Isabella must agree to allow Mariana to substitute for her.

Isabella indicates that she has told Angelo that she will bring a servant with her to the assignation, "whose perswasion is, / [she] come[s] about [her] Brother" (4.1.49). But when Mariana takes Isabella's place, the words which Isabella tells her to speak "soft and low" (4.1.70), "Remember now my brother" (4.1.71), take on added significance. Bache notes:

In the night, Angelo will of course think that it is Isabella that speaks the directed words and that he is being reminded to remember his promise concerning Claudio. But since the "known" person will really be Mariana, we are given to understand that the brother that Mariana must mean is Frederick, the great soldier, whose death at sea prompted Angelo to break off the engagement to Mariana (28).

Therefore, the lives of two brothers hang in the balance — that of both Claudio and Frederick. With these words on Mariana's lips, Angelo's promise comes full circle, and the Duke succeeds

in orchestrating the important substitution of one maidenhead for another. Isabella's part in the bed trick must be considered minimal at best; even her brief instructions to Mariana merely reflect the Duke's design.

As the Duke's entire stratagem begins to fall apart, he soon realizes that he must become Duke again to save the day. That the Duke must constantly move from one person to the next, solving one problem after the next, becomes evident in the alacrity with which he works — at one moment, he attempts to prepare Barnardine for death; not long after the pirate Ragozine provides by his death the appropriate substitution. That the Friar must begin to draw from his power as Duke significantly alters his personality in the play. Whereas before the Duke merely spoke philosophically and attempted to prepare souls for that undiscovered country, using his wits to bridge gaps in promises which should have been kept, now the Duke leaves nothing to chance. The Duke recognizes Angelo's sudden panic in his attempt to execute Claudio before his time; yet the Duke succeeds, through letters written and sealed by his own hand, to convince the Provost to keep Claudio alive. To do so, the Duke must remind the Provost that "the hande and Seale of the Duke" (4.2.208) represent the power to which he has promised fealty. The Duke also begins his program of disinformation to Angelo and Escalus, by letters so confusing that both question his sanity (4.4.4-5).

The Duke's ability to reveal all previously hidden evils, and to breach the broken promises — his own and others — results in a last act where the movement toward justice is swift. When the Duke arrives at the "consecrated Fount, / A League below the Citie" (4.3.102-3), he begins a parade which progresses into the city. Arriving in his stately official garb as Duke, he speaks first of having heard of the "goodnesse of [the] Iustice" (5.1.6) of both Angelo and Escalus, and he takes one on each side of him, as his "supporters" (5.1.18). This tableau presents the Duke as Vienna; he becomes his own as well as Vienna's heraldic shield, and its supporters, Angelo and Escalus, stand at his side. His entrance as Duke recalls his departure at the beginning of the play, but this time he enters with the power of his office. Isabella immediately demands "Iustice, Iustice, Iustice, Iustice" (5.1.26), and the Duke hears the strange tale told over again. The Duke demands that she "Confesse the truth" (5.1.113). When the Duke decides to absent himself again from the proceedings, the audience cannot help wondering how his return in the power of his official self could be helped by his return to his former disguise. But as Friar Lodowick, he admits that "The Duke's vniust" (5.1.302), and after

being unhooded, he quickly manages to mete out justice first by the letter of the law, and then afterward with mercy. The delay between justice and mercy results in a delay in relief for those involved; yet even with that brief delay, and despite the administration of mercy and justice, critics span the extremes from being dissatisfied with his harshness to being affronted by his leniency. As Duke, Vincentio attempts to remain faithful to protecting Vienna, through recognition of the laws and the penalties for breaking them.

According to the Duke as judge, the machinations of the two women were too intricate for them to think of on their own. He says, indeed, "This needs must be a practise" — a stratagem, and "someone hath set [them] on" (5.1.112), though he knows full well he instigated the trick himself. Significantly, whereas at the start of the play the Duke had thought that ignoring the law was a form of mercy toward his subjects, that freedom was better than too-hard restraint, now he sees the law itself as containing mercy, as "the very mercy of the Law crie[s] out" (5.1.412). In this, the most important judgment over which the Duke presides, he finds Angelo guilty not only of "violation / Of sacred Chastitie" (5.1.409-10), but also of "promise-breach" (5.1.410). The Duke himself has, only lines before, renewed his own promise to keep Isabella from harm:

Your *Friar* is now your Prince: As I was then
Aduertysing, and holy to your businesse,
(Not changing heart with habit) I am still,
Atturried at your seruice (5.1.387-88).

Thus the Duke retains the emotions he experienced as Friar, but his "hidden powre" (5.1.397) has become evident in his ability to judge and to wield his power justly. Too, his interest in Isabella helps his interest in the state, in that the two may soon provide Vienna a hereditary prince to continue the stability of governance.

The words of the Duke become the most powerful spoken — they are instantaneous and potent proof that the Duke has returned. People summoned by the Duke appear "instantly" (5.1.254); some are married "instantly" (5.1.382), and the action proceeds swiftly in this final judgment scene. Mariana and Isabella must plead for Angelo's life together, yet the Duke's words remain the driving force of the action. The Duke's first judgment, "He dies for *Claudio's* death" (5.1.447), cannot be altered or unsaid; the Duke insists that such a request is "vnprofitable" (5.1.461). With the condemnation of Barnardine to a life of tutelage at the hands of a Friar, and the pardon of his "earthly faults" (5.1.488), the muffled Claudio appears and the Duke may

now commute Angelo's sentence justly, and he does so immediately. Though the Duke recoils at the idea that Lucio should be pardoned as well, he pardons the one he "cannot pardon" (5.1.504) with the words "Thy slanders I forgiue" (5.1.528). With the marriages of Lucio and Kate Keepdowne, of Mariana and Angelo, of Claudio and Juliet, and of the Duke and Isabella, stability brings a resolution affirming promise-keeping in Vienna, which replaces the former promise-breaching.

The movement in the play becomes one which highlights the Duke's recognition of his own duty to Vienna. His servitude to his people he never forgets, but an abandonment of power does not achieve the looked-for resolution in implementing justice. It is only in his official status as Duke that he may recognize that the law in itself brings a merciful truth to those who must submit to it; it is only in deference to the mercy of the law that true mercy may emerge through the person of the Duke.

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Elizabeth's new Arcadia: *The Lady of May*

Working with *The Lady of May* presents the critic with numerous challenges, not the least of which concerns the work's form. S. K. Orgel, who argues that *The Lady of May* is "unquestionably the finest of the pre-Jacobean entertainments," describes the event at Wanstead as a masque, placing Sidney's work in the tradition of "Jonson and the Milton of *Comus* in treating the masque as primarily a literary form" (Masque 22). While the considerable literary appeal of *The Lady of May* merits favorable comparisons with Jonson's and Milton's masques, in form and function the presentation bears closer affinities, instead, with court entertainments that greeted the Queen on her progresses and with the more public royal celebrations. And *The Lady of May* likewise resembles in intention what Louis Montrose calls "pastoral of power" (Eliza passim), whereby, as John D. Bernard explains, "poets trained in humanist schools subserve and flatter the autocratic regime to which they owe their vocation" (2).

Viewing *The Lady of May* as a royal entertainment raises issues that continue to plague interpretations of Sidney's first complete work, for as John Stevens argues, in such performances, "the 'game' is private but it is played in public" (187). Indeed, all too often undue emphasis has fallen on specific private or topical references thought to be included in all performances for Elizabeth. Seen primarily as opportunities for individuals to "act out" their political beliefs or personal aspirations, entertainments become significant only as historical documents, a perspective that in turn precipitates an emphasis on specific external evidence to determine an otherwise impenetrable meaning. This accent on an at best elusive private design continues to exert a dominant influence upon interpretations of *The Lady of May*, a situation Robert Dudley's connection with Sidney's entertainment only exacerbates. Indeed, numerous critical accounts of this entertainment highlight the marriage issue in one form or another or insist upon reading the central debate between the foresters and the shepherds as reflective of court intrigue at some level. Reducing the event at Wanstead to specific historical or political allegory, however, limits the scope of Sidney's artistic achievement and thwarts recognition of the larger issues *The Lady of May* embraces.

My skepticism of readings of *The Lady of May* that hinge on private concerns notwithstanding, all such entertainments share a function of considerable importance to Elizabeth. Louis Montrose's comments about the politics involved with the Queen's progresses and his description of their public function reflect what I have in mind:

The Queen travelled in an entourage sometimes numbering upwards of five hundred. From her itinerant court emanated an aura of splendor and an illusion of authority that far belied the limits of her government's police power, administrative efficiency, and fiscal resources. Thus the progress was more than an instrument of public relations and a refreshing change of scene; it was an extraordinary elaborate and extended periodic ritual drama, in which the monarch physically and symbolically took possession of her domains (169).

The Lady of May is very much a "periodic ritual drama" that Sidney utilizes to illustrate the Queen's taking possession of her domains and to indicate the positive effect her rule manifests. Stressing this central feature releases Sidney's entertainment from the grip of interpretative strategies that focus upon innuendoes drawn from Leicester's and Sidney's personal or political convictions, approaches which by reducing *The Lady of May* to the level of biographical anecdote consequently fail to appreciate both Elizabeth's choice of Espilus instead of Therion as a fitting husband for the May Lady and Sidney's masterful manipulation of pastoral conventions.

The opening lines of *The Lady of May* strike a pastoral chord and suggest the form the drama will take:

Her most excellent Magesty walking in Wanstead Garden, as she passed down into the grove, there came suddenly among the train one appparelled like an honest man's wife of the country (21.1-3).

The Queen's walk through the grove calls to mind a commonplace pastoral motif, the retreat or pastoral interlude which traditionally provides the royal personage temporary relief from the tensions that characterize life beyond the enclave's borders. Yet, just as the Queen's progresses served an important political purpose, Sidney's pastoral retreat does not function as a simple vehicle to escape the outside world. Signifying what Sidney describes as pastoral's capacity to detail "what blessedness is derived to them that lie lowest from the goodness of them that sit highest," the Wanstead community not only shows Elizabeth's reinvesting the countryside with the natural order she symbolizes

but also announces the kind of social structure required to maintain the concord her arrival restores (*Defense* 27). While experiencing a degree of autonomy living in the English countryside, something of what Thomas G. Rosenmeyer calls "pastoral freedom," the rustics, though not the foresters, acknowledge that their independence is relative, contingent upon the court's maintaining order. As the May Lady's mother's supplication to Elizabeth announces, "Your state is great, your greatness is our shield" (22).

The Queen, likewise, may step down as she enters the May Lady's world, but by her actions she neither abdicates her political position nor forswears her responsibilities. Instead, she reinforces both, her leisurely stroll through the gardens demonstrating the natural reach of her power and majestic grace. The author's primary purpose is certainly to compliment Elizabeth, and the awkward and often comic fashion in which the rural characters, with the significant exception of the May Lady, address her sets a tone differing markedly from the flattery customarily rendered, for they speak to their monarch in terms that disclose the limits of their experience. Rather than according the Queen a divine status that manufactures an insurmountable gulf between the monarch and her subjects, the rural characters respond to her on their personal level, as Elizabeth instead of as a disembodied icon. For instance, addressing her Queen at the conclusion of the event, the May Lady says, "Lady your self, for other titles do rather diminish than add unto you" (31.8-9).

Sidney's humanizing the Queen, moreover, accentuates the ideal personal bond she enjoys with her subjects and affirms the essential idea that the rural community at Wanstead exemplifies the natural order and subsequent wealth desired for all England. Wanstead functions, then, simultaneously as an inset within England and as a metaphor for England itself.

In addition to setting the tone and indicating the "event's" form, the introduction also announces one of the entertainment's primary themes when the Suitor, the May Lady's mother, "crying out for justice" (21.3) addresses Elizabeth:

Only one daughter I have, in whom I placed all the hopes of my good hap, so well had she with her good parts recompensed my pain of bearing her, and care of bringing her up. But now, alas, that she is come to the time that I should reap my full comfort of her, so is she troubled with that notable matter, which we in the country call matrimony, as I cannot choose but fear the loss of her wits, at least of her honesty (21.11-17).

The Suitor's circumlocutions and her awkwardness lead Robert E. Stillman to argue that the May Lady's mother is "odd" and that her "reasoning, like her language, is slightly askew" (37-38). True, the woman comically distills the intricate courtly formalities connected with marriage into the single word "matrimony"; and yet, she defines the issue in terms indicative of the potential injustice threatening to consume the entire community in "some bloody controversy" (21.22-23). Through her confused discourse, she implies as well that the marriage question involves more than her personal desires.

At this juncture, the difficult problem of just what to make of the characters in *The Lady of May* warrants attention. Although agreeing with Robert Kimbrough that this entertainment attests to Sidney's "ability to reveal character through speech," I question whether the "actors" are "fully characterized" (65). While Sidney colors his rustics with vestiges of personalities and provides them with simple motivations, he limits their depth to ensure that the important characters retain fundamental human characteristics and reflect the emblematic function each serves to clarify his quasi-allegorically configured process of the Queen's possessing her domain. The necessity to detail, as a result, the kind of England Elizabeth creates circumscribes characters' roles, making motivations both the product of "human" desires and servants to the central argument.

That the May Lady's mother and her daughter possess titles instead of names strikes me as "odd." Although not naming Elizabeth derives from court protocol, Sidney's giving proper names to all the characters except the mother and the May Lady flags the two women for special attention. When she approaches Elizabeth, the May Lady's mother emotionally expresses maternal concerns for her daughter's welfare, including her threatened chastity; likewise, throughout the entertainment her daughter remains very much a rural lass burdened by a difficult choice — whom to marry. Yet, in addition to being a country girl, the May Lady, as her name connotes, represents the spirit of the season — in this capacity she is also the daughter of nature.

Vivacious, youthful, and beautiful, the May Lady incorporates in her character numerous features associated with spring, such as the season's lusty spirit. Her mother's worry over her daughter's chastity probably having less to do with assaults from the suitors than with the May Lady's pursuit of her natural desires lends urgency to the choice of a husband, for to maintain her honor and to act upon her inclinations to "obey/ The Proclamation made for May," she must wed (Kermode 223-25). Asking

Elizabeth to make the choice between shepherd or forester, the May Lady states a preference for neither of the two: "I like them both, and love neither" (25.2). Her loving neither suitor signals that the Queen's choice addresses issues beyond romantic interests. And the spectacle of shepherds and foresters "hauling and pulling to whether side they should draw The Lady of May" (22.17-18) that the Queen discovers as she advances serves more-over as a "speaking picture," a graphic depiction of the thematic conflict (Defense 17). The evenness of the match attests to the difficulty of the May Lady's choice, for she "seemed to incline neither to one nor other side" (22.18). While her not expressing a preference for shepherd or forester accords the Queen an important role in the drama and ensures either choice's satisfying the shepherdess, the May Lady's statement mitigates the significance of romantic concerns or motivations alone.

When the mere arrival of Elizabeth stills the fracas, the immediacy of the response appears little more than conventional, for the intuitiveness of rustics reaffirms the natural authority their monarch possesses. The mother's formal supplication to Elizabeth points out that the Queen harmonizes "diverse gifts" with imposing wisdom: "Your mind is wise, your wisdom makes you mild" (22.6, 11). In effect, a natural response to the season having precipitated a scuffle between shepherds and foresters, the resulting tussle requires the intercession of the Queen's rational influence, for Elizabeth embodies nature as a moral force and exemplifies the person Socrates praises as having the capacity "to see 'a One and Many' in nature" (Plato 312). As the May Lady's parting words to Elizabeth imply, the Queen is the eternal spirit of spring incarnate:

Therefore I will wish you good night, praying to God,
according to the title I possess, that as hitherto it hath
excellently done, so henceforward the flourishing of
May, may long remain in you and with you (31.11-14).

And through his strategic location of the May Lady, traditionally important only on the day she is chosen as the Lord of May's spouse, at the center of the drama, she subsequently becomes "the Lady of the whole month of May" (24.22) and Elizabeth in microcosm. More significantly, Sidney, flatteringly writing the Queen into the seasonal rites of spring, adapts the native festival to dramatize her natural and necessary place in her domain. Elizabeth represents nature as a decidedly moral social force, for the justice her *repossession* triggers connects the Queen to Astraea/Virgo, the just virgin who, as Frances Yates writes, is "a complex character, fertile and barren at the same time; orderly

and righteous" (30). Throughout *The Lady of May* is implicit the impression, explicitly developed in another royal entertainment, George Peele's *Descensus Astraeae*, that Elizabeth, "descended of the Trojan Brutus line," is Astraea, her arrival heralding a revival of "happie times/ That do beget such calme and quiet daies,/ Where sheep and sheheard breath in such content" (1:214).

The Lady of May does not, despite Elizabeth's appearance in all her royal splendor, focus upon her heroic attributes, though the Queen's presence demands their tacit inclusion. Instead of addressing her heroic persona, Sidney concentrates upon what would normally be considered secondary attributes, such as gentleness and learning, those features amenable to the environment Sidney creates of Wanstead. Concurrently, while *The Lady of May* emphasizes Elizabeth's justice and wisdom, themes often included in the heroic literature dedicated to her, the entertainment presents them in a lower register; as the May Lady tells Elizabeth, she "hath passed through greater difficulties" (30.5-6) than the problems confronting her at Wanstead.

By far the most appealing character in the entertainment, the May Lady states her case, as Robert Kimbrough writes, "in naturally flowing phrases and easy terms, revealing her innate charm and intelligence" (65). Sidney endows the May Lady with carefully chosen characteristics to ensure her representing Elizabeth in simple form. Thus, coupled with her not having a proper name, the May Lady's admirable qualities mark her for special consideration. While Elizabeth symbolizes eternal spring or nature in general, the May Lady exemplifies the more temporally restricted month of May. In addition, the young woman's "good parts" mentioned by her mother correspond with Elizabeth's "diverse gifts."

Although she portrays Elizabeth's complex attributes in simple form, the May Lady does not simply cede her position to the Queen and having fulfilled her ordained role disappear in an allegorical haze. Nature figure though she is, she remains fixed in her society, telling her Queen and combining both nature and society in her statement, "this place and this time are my servants" (24.22). Sidney refines her connections with Elizabeth to reinforce a similar relationship between the rural Wanstead community and the crown.

As the May Lady kneels before her monarch, her words reveal none of the nervous tension or empty oaths that characterize earlier addresses. Duly reverent but not self effacing, she takes pride in her position and compares herself favorably with the Queen:

Do not think, sweet and gallant lady, that I do abase myself thus much unto you because of your gay apparel, for what is so brave as the natural beauty of the flowers (24.15-17).

Betraying no vestige of arrogance in her address to Elizabeth, she tells her that in any other circumstance she "would look for reverence at [the Queen's] hands" (24.23). Adding that the Queen surpasses her "in that wherein I desire most to excel" (24.25), the May Lady proclaims Elizabeth "the most beautifullest lady these woods have ever received" (24.26-27). The first impulse is to assume that the May Lady wishes to excel in beauty; but the context suggests that her beauty transcends mere physical attributes, especially since the shepherdess depreciates her own attractiveness — she describes herself as only "a fair wench." Voicing no wish to be Elizabeth or to eclipse the Queen's beauty, she seems instead to desire harmony, serenity, the essence of which her natural simplicity perceives in the Queen.

Her inability to choose between the two suitors threatens her sanity, indicating that the shepherdess lacks that in which the Queen excels, the ability to judge correctly. Seeking Elizabeth's help, she simply and concisely describes the conflict troubling her wits:

With me have been (alas I am ashamed to tell it) two young men, the one a forester named Therion, the other Espilus a shepherd, very long in love forsooth. I like them both, and love neither. Espilus is the richer, but Therion the livelier. Therion doth me many pleasures, as stealing me venison out of these forests, and many other such like pretty and prettier services; but withal he grows to such rages, that sometimes he strikes me, sometimes he rails at me. This shepherd, Espilus, of a mild disposition, as his fortune hath not been to do me great service, so hath he never done me any wrong; but feeding his sheep, sitting under some sweet bush, sometimes, they say, he records my name in doleful verses (24.31-32, 25.1-10).

The May Lady ends her address by asking Elizabeth "whether the many deserts and many faults of Therion, or the very small deserts and no faults of Espilus be to be preferred" (24.11-13). Following the May Lady's request, Therion and Espilus engage in an amoebae singing match that evolves into a debate between Dorcas and Rixus over the merits of each contestant's occupation. The mild-mannered Espilus "as if he were inspired by the Muses" (25.24) extols the shepherdess's beauty, comparing her to his sheep "as white as milk" (26.7) and asking that he

might "possess [her] grace" (26.10). The tenor of the shepherd's verse indicates that he is not quite the "true Pastoralist" Frank Kermode labels him (244). For though he writes her "doleful verses," he refrains from active courting, seemingly showing more concern for his flock than for the shepherdess. Espilus's passive nature — Dorcas describes him "as quiet a lamb that new came from sucking" (27.20) — makes him, moreover, an easy mark for the pugnacious and practical-minded forester. Dorcas's amplifying the tranquility that obedience to laws brings the community, however, presents the shepherd's case from a point of view that appeals to Elizabeth's and even to the May Lady's mother's interests. As Katherine Duncan-Jones says of Therion's rages, "a young man who was capable of hitting a girl before he was married to her was scarcely a promising prospect for matrimony" (149).

While Espilus attacks the forester's lack of wealth and intelligence, Therion counters with the lure of freedom, adding that "no wealth but you I would" (26.16) and that marriage to Espilus will make the May Lady a slave equivalent in worth to one of the shepherd's two thousand sheep. With amazing consistency, critics, adopting Therion's perspective on Espilus and pastoral, express an uncanny willingness to turn a blind eye to the forester's egregious faults.

Espilus clearly differs from conventional shepherds who spend their time at leisure and in love, deviations that have elicited negative appraisals. For instance, because Espilus mentions his wealth and calls the May Lady a "treasure" (26.6), he is often taken to represent an actual shepherd who, in Kimbrough's estimation, leads a "stagnant" life or who (67), in Louis Montrose's opinion, is actually "a voluptuary masking as a contemplative" ("Insinuation" 13). Neither a conventional shepherd befitting an imaginary Arcadian landscape nor a literal wealthy yeoman of the English countryside, Espilus manifests characteristics of both to become an appropriate member of the idealized community Sidney creates at Wanstead. Consequently, whereas like the traditional herdsman of antiquity, Espilus, praising the May Lady's beauty, invokes his two thousand sheep to signify what Nancy Joe Hoffman describes as "extravagant beauty and not flocks as far as the eye can see," the shepherd also refers to them as instruments of profit (49).

Espilus offers the May Lady a life of comfort in a society of shepherds among whom "there is no envy, but all obedience; where it is lawful for a man to be good if he list" (28.11-12). Both shepherds emphasize order and describe a community that, while promising many virtues connected with the Golden Age,

differs in significant ways that clearly reflect societal and socio-economic circumstances at Sidney's Wanstead. Working in harmony, owning flocks of substantial size, and obeying laws, shepherds supply Elizabeth with products of considerable economic importance to her kingdom — wool and mutton; reciprocally, her rule guarantees the security and reinforces the moral conduct essential for this prosperity to continue.

Although the freedom the forester offers appeals to modern sentiments, the life Therion and Rixus describe is actually decidedly anti-societal and parasitical, the independence the foresters profess tarnished by the threat of privation. In response to Espilus's promise of "pasture rich, the wool as soft as silk" (26.9), Therion points to the "deer in wildest woods" (26.13), the inhabitants of the "many deserts" which contrast with the shepherds' more domesticated landscape.

The connotations of "deserts" for Elizabethans correspond with the Greek meaning of Therion's name, "wild beast," for the "wildest woods" were dangerous wastelands populated by savage animals and ruthless thieves, signifying chaotic, irrational, and immoral forces that threaten civilization. Rixus' assertion that Therion is "of the noble vocation of huntsmen" (27.14) disguises his poaching stags from Dudley's woods, very much as Spenser's Brigants, "a lawlesse people" who "neuer vsde to liue by plough nor spade," pilfer and even murder (6.10.39). Thus, unlike Espilus, who supplies an important commodity, the forester is "a thevish prowler" (27.19), a "free agent" given to violent emotional outbursts, going so far as to strike the May Lady. Given the manner in which Sidney develops the relationship between the May Lady and Elizabeth, Therion's intemperate conduct towards the shepherdess must be viewed as an affront to the Queen and the more positive attributes of nature she wishes to nurture by her rule. Violence against nature is the foresters' way, for as depicted in the entertainment, they are more feral than rural.

The May Lady's qualifications in her request for Elizabeth's decision focus upon the central issue with which the Queen's choice is concerned:

Therefore, O lady, *worthy to see the accomplishment of your desires*, since all your desires be most worthy of you, vouchsafe our ears such happiness, and me that particular favor, as that you will judge whether of these two be more worthy of me, or whether I be worthy of them; and this I will say, *that in judging me, you judge more than me in it* (30.7-12, my emphasis).

The decision will fulfill the Queen's desire for harmony in her kingdom, for she judges not simply between two young men, but between two conflicting ways of life, between two versions of nature; and she must take into consideration the social ramifications of her choice. Far from the "surprising fiasco" Orgel claims the Queen's choice made of *The Lady of May*, her awarding Espilus to the May Lady indicates that Elizabeth appreciated what Kallistone refers to as "Sidney's unorthodox treatment of pastoral convention" to make the mode more representative of the idealized community the Queen's repossession establishes (46).

The Lady of May flatters Elizabeth's wisdom and natural authority, portraying her as the epitome of the erected wit in that her rule instills in her country an order validated by the idealized nature informing her vision. The fusion of the Queen with nature suggests, too, a kinship with Plato's ideal statesman who brings about order not through artificial laws, but through the agency of nature's unwritten guidelines. On a more practical level, Elizabeth rejects the feral and economically unproductive nature Therion epitomizes and champions instead Espilus, who symbolizes an idealized, domesticated, and economically productive pastoral society. The union of springtime fecundity, the May Lady, with the shepherd's commercial acumen spells continued prosperity, promised in Elizabeth/Astraea's ritual repossession of her domain. Thus, *The Lady of May* shows how the Queen, through her natural authority and wisdom, molds nature to reflect her design not only for Wanstead's community but also for all England; the monarch inaugurates with her rule a Golden Age decidedly her own, her New Arcadia.

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on Early British Literature

Fact and fiction in Gascoigne's "The Adventures of Master F.J."

In the first of three epistles which preface the second edition of his poems (called *The Posies*, 1575), George Gascoigne makes the kind of claim for fictionality familiar to any of us who go to movies or read copyright pages:

But for the satisfying of all men universally, I doe here protest unto you (reverend) even by the hope of my salvation, that there is no living creature touched or to be noted therby (1.7).

The piece in question is Gascoigne's "The Adventures of Master F.J.," a tale based on a set of poems about a young man's early experience of courtly love — and the keystone of Gascoigne's first edition of poetry, *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* (1573). According to the epistle just quoted, "F.J." had produced a scandal, particularly because readers assumed it was a true tale. Gascoigne says, "some busie conjectures have presumed to think that the same was indeed written to the scandalizing of some wortheie personages, whom they would seeme therby to know" (1.7). In fact, though no official record exists, Gascoigne's volume was apparently confiscated, prompting Gascoigne to revise his poems for a second edition (called "Corrected, perfected, and augmented by the Authour" on its title page 1.1). Forced to revise, Gascoigne must work hard to make himself and his poems rightly understood.

In this context, how are we to understand "F.J.," Gascoigne's most inventive and most controversial work? As a true, perhaps even autobiographical, tale, or as a piece of misunderstood — failed — fiction? This question is made more complex when we notice that in Gascoigne's *Flowres* (1573), "F.J." is presented as fact: the narrator G.T. simply retells the tale — as he heard it from F.J. himself — in order to explain the set of poems he has obtained from F.J. Well, as I hope to show, this factuality is really a fiction, and it is part of Gascoigne's scheme both for presenting his own poems in a context in which they could be understood and for engaging his readers in what Rowe calls "imaginatively seeking out meaning" (279). Disguising fiction as fact created a witty and suggestive context for reading the poems, and by allowing fact and fiction to interact in interesting ways, Gascoigne urged his readers to distinguish fact from fiction — and truth from mere fact. His attempt to do so was based on his essentially Humanist assumptions about his readers. Their failure to read as

he expected is the most important factor in shaping Gascoigne's revised poems and his subsequent literary work.

"F.J." tells the story of a young man (his initials, we are told, suggest "Freeman Jones" — that is, nobody in particular or a certain person whose name cannot be revealed) who, while a guest at a country estate, falls in love with Elinor, the married daughter-in-law of his host. The first half of the tale describes their developing affair — the rise of which ironically marks the decline of the character F.J. into an excessively overheated love that finds expression in bawdy verse. G.T. tells us that F.J.,

swymming now in delightes[,] did nothing but write such verse as might accumilate his joyes to the extremitie of pleasure (78).

But when Elinor's former lover, her Secretary, returns, the young F.J. is spurned. The second half of the narrative focuses on F.J.'s attempts to come to terms with this change.¹ He is urged toward healing by Frances, the host's daughter and a woman who would make a good match for him. F.J., however, misses this opportunity, and at the end of the narrative simply withdraws from the country house and the courtly game, hoping that the tide may turn so that others may "stick on sands" as he has done: "Then will I laugh and clappe my hands, / As they do now at mee," he hopes (105).

Gascoigne uses a variety of means for creating the illusion that "F.J." is based on real events. The first is a set of introductory letters which seems to create a kind of paper trail for "F.J." and the poems which follow it in the volume. In fact, the entire edition is presented as an anonymous manuscript miscellany, gathered for private circulation but later discreetly released into print. One of the letter writers, H.W. (hidden, like F.J. and G.T. discreetly behind initials), begins,

In August Last passed my familiar friend Master G.T. bestowed uppon me the reading of a written Booke, wherin he had collected divers discourses & verses, invented uppon sundrie occasions, by sundrie gentlemen (49).

Though this G.T., the editor of the manuscript, demands "secrecie" (51) of his friend, H.W. nonetheless decides to publish the manuscript in the interest of "common commoditie" (49).

In this way, Gascoigne consciously mimics the process of producing a manuscript collection in order to suggest a familiar and legitimate history for his edition; we can trace its development through the process of manuscript collection, transmission, and friendly exchange that leads, somewhat surreptitiously, to print. Indeed, the aura of secrecy and anonymity only enhances our interest in what follows.

The realistic details Gascoigne builds in to his narrative is the next way he suggests that "F.J." is a true tale. While G.T. is intriguingly vague about the location of the story's events — they take place "in the north partes of this Realme" (51) — he fills his retelling with specific details, especially those which place "F.J." in an English country house setting that closely mirrors the circumstances of Gascoigne's readers and reproduces for them not only the locations but the social dynamics of such a place.

In his *Life in the English Country House*, Girouard shows that by the 16th century the great chamber had become "the ceremonial pivot" of such houses (88). This is precisely what the room is in "F.J." The host appears only there, presiding over meals that are preeminently social events: during one apparently typical evening, this Lord observes that F.J. is not eating well and so initiates a discussion of the "doubtful lottes of love" (60). The meal is followed by dancing, emblematic of the courtly maneuvering taking place throughout this evening, and F.J. contributes to the lively entertainments by setting one of his own poems to music (62). Eating, witty conversation ("prety nyppes" 60), dancing, and setting poems to music — these elaborate social activities are centered in the great chamber: this room is central to the house's activity, and Gascoigne makes it central to his narrative.

Girouard's description of the English country house suggests other ways in which Gascoigne carefully recreates a country house setting — his handling of Elinor's withdrawing chamber and the gallery were even quite chic.² His use of this setting verifies the tale's apparent truthfulness by reproducing a setting familiar to his readers. Just as he depicts for them the conditions of manuscript transmission with which they were familiar, he also recreates his tale as if it were taking place in their own great chambers and withdrawing rooms. Indeed, Gascoigne's tale, which contains more than one instance of courtly play — dancing, singing, poetry reading, and storytelling — could also serve as just the sort of entertainment it depicts. Thus Gascoigne's setting offers a witty reflexivity that mingles the facts of his readers' experience with his own fiction. The third — and most crucial — way Gascoigne presents "F.J." as a factual narrative is his use of his narrator, G.T. In fact, the tale's reliability depends on the narrator's stance as a true reporter of events. G.T.'s authority is established, as we have seen, by means of the introductory letters in which he is introduced as the compiler of the manuscript that contains "F.J." More than that, G.T. makes clear there that he is responsible for the prose which connects the poems in "F.J." He explains that the poets, including F.J., from whom he gathered poems, "themselves

did alwayes with the verse rehearse unto me the cause that then moved them to write" (51), and G.T.'s work of ordering the poems involved creating the explanatory links that provide the "history" (51) of the tale.³ For "F.J." this means that the poems and letters which are its core represent the verifiable artifacts of its title character's love affair — artifacts mediated by G.T.

Thus from the beginning G.T. expresses an authority which is personal, intimate, and grounded in the biographical situations which gave rise to the poems. This authority is made clear through G.T.'s frequent references to F.J. as his friend (more than ten times). More frequently (at least twenty times), G.T. cites F.J. as his source, inserting parenthetical tags like "(as he declared unto me)" (51) or "(as I have heard him saye)" (64, see 52). When he needs stronger affirmation, he adds something like "My friend F.J. hath tolde me divers times" (53). His constant reminders that his tale is not his own but one related to him from a firsthand source intimate gives his readers the sense that what they are reading has actually occurred "in the north partes of this Realme" (51).

Gascoigne also has G.T. invite conjecture about the facts behind the tale by his handling of a minor character, Dame Pergo. G.T. reports that he has not been specific about her identity "and that for good respects, least hir name might altogether disclose the rest" (87). He adds a similar comment to his conclusion, telling his readers he "will cease, as one that had rather leave it [his retelling] unperfect than make it to[o]plaine" (105), i.e., if he tells more, his readers may guess the identity of the persons behind his tale. In these various ways, then, G.T. invites us to read a true tale, and he tantalizes us with the possibility of discovering the facts behind his telling. But G.T.'s reliable narrative, as well as the propriety of reading only at the level of facts, is undercut in significant ways. Specifically, G.T.'s reliability is shown to break down just when we need it most, and Frances, herself a deviser of tales, points the character F.J. past biographical readings to imaginative ones which foster self-knowledge. Both instances point to the fictionality of "F.J." and argue the importance of such fictions.

G.T.'s authority as a narrator is grounded exclusively on his access to the inside story of F.J.'s experience. But both his literal reading of F.J.'s poems (for him they are always and entirely artifacts that are glossed by biographical facts) and his authority as a narrator are undermined when he tries to solve what he calls "a great quarrel" (76) over one of F.J.'s poems, "Beautie shut up thy shop." The premise of this poem (using G.T.'s description) is F.J.'s "ymagining that *Beautie* having a shop where she uttred hir wares of all sundry sortes, his Ladie had stollen the fynest away,

leaving none behind hir, but paynting, bolstring, forcing and such like" (76). The poem begins,

Beautie shut up thy shop, and trusse up all thy trash,
My Nell hath stolen thy fynest stuff, & left thee in the lash:
Thy market now is marred, thy gaynes are gone god wot,
Thou hast no ware, that may compare, with this that I
have got (75).

"Nell" is identified later in the poem as "my Hellen" (l. 37), and F.J. declares "that my Hellen is more fayre then Paris wife, / And doth deserve more famous praise, then Venus for hir life" (ll. 41-2).

The debate over F.J.'s verses arises when their recipient, Elinor, "grew in jeolodie, that the same were not written by hir, because hir name was *Elynor* and not *Hellen*" (76). Elinor shows herself a limited, literalist reader of courtly verse: she does not understand that in order to praise her, F.J. writes figuratively, alluding to Helen of Troy to (as Gascoigne advises the novice poet in his *Certaine Notes of Instruction*) "finde occasion to pleade by the example of some historie" (1.466). Unable to move from the literal to the figurative, Elinor misses the implicit compliment. In the terms I have laid out in this paper, she cannot accept the fictionality of F.J.'s poem.⁴

But G.T. shows himself to be no better than Elinor at interpreting F.J.'s verse. Like her, G.T. assumes that the debate over the poem can be resolved only by identifying the real "Hellen," so he marshals all the privileged information he can to prove that the poem "was written by [for] this Dame *Elynor*" (76) and not for another person by that name. He appeals to F.J.'s word ("Well F.J. tolde me himselfe that it was written by this Dame *Elynor*"), to G.T.'s own analysis of F.J.'s character ("he would never bestow verse of [on] so meane a subject" as "that other Hellen"), and to facts to which only he has access (that F.J. met this Helen some six years after his affair with Elinor). This is all quite elaborate, but it does not prove G.T.'s point, especially when we notice he is overlooking the obvious solution, namely, that F.J. is speaking figuratively. G.T.'s literalness is not different in kind from Elinor's, and it points to the limits of his reliability.⁵

Besides undermining G.T.'s authority, which itself points to the fictionality of the work, the discussion of this poem has a second important effect: it illustrates the futility of reading poetry only for biography (or facts), and so points to the necessity of figurative readings. It is a reading lesson, pertinent not only within the narrative but for readers of Gascoigne's fiction masquerading as fact. By pointing out the limits of reading "F.J." as fact, Gascoigne coaxes his readers toward reading "F.J." as a fiction.

A second such reading lesson occurs when, in the second half of "F.J.," Frances attempts to heal the title character of his lovesickness and turn his attention from Elinor to herself.⁶ As part of her strategy "to wynne his will unto conformitie by litle and litle" (95), Frances tells a tale which, she claims, is

a straunge historie, not fayned, neither borrowed out of any olde authorritie, but a thing done in deede of late daies, and not farre distant from this place where wee nowe remayne (96).

She declares that her tale is true — based on facts. In her tale, a husband discovers that his wife, for many years a model of fidelity, is having an affair with his best friend. The husband hides his knowledge but ends his intimate relations with her for a time. When they resume intercourse, he is careful to leave payment — in coins called "Slippes" (98). This strange practice prompts the wife to inquiry, and when the husband reveals what he knows, the wife repents, and all three are reconciled.

Despite her claims, Frances's tale is remarkable not because of its presumed factuality but because of the way it aims to reflect to F.J. his own experience. Kinney calls Frances's tale "deliberately analogous" (92). She offers in it multiple opportunities for F.J. to see himself, and wherever he connects with her tale, F.J. is coaxed toward acting ethically and sensibly. First, the love triangle in which the illicit lover is also a good friend of the husband's should remind F.J. of his own circumstances. And then from the lover's willingness to end the affair and reconcile with his friend (called the "rare tractabilitie in the lover") (100), F.J. may learn to end his affair with Elinor. But F.J. may also see himself in the husband's grief at his wife's infidelity (it is like F.J.'s grief over Elinor's fickle interest in him), and he may even see his own "slip" in the wife's. Frances suggests that if F.J. can learn from her tale as the wife learned from her husband's object lesson, F.J. too may amend his ways.

What we see — while F.J. does not — is that the truth of Frances's tale is not to be found in its factuality, but in its relation to the character F.J. — that is, in its figurative applicability to him and in its rhetoric that urges him to amend. From this perspective, Frances's description of her tale as "a thing done in deede of late daies, and not farre distant from this place where wee nowe remayne" (96) may be simply a witty way for pointing out to F.J. and to us that her tale is really a fictive version of F.J.'s own experience. Frances's tale, then, is a multi-layered reading lesson, encouraging F.J. to see himself while at the same time encourag-

ing readers of the work to see the efficacy of storytelling — that is, the power of fiction.

I have tried to show that Gascoigne's "F.J." is presented as fact in a variety of ways, but also that its factuality is undercut significantly. I would now like to suggest briefly that Gascoigne's reasons for employing this complex interplay between fact and fiction are centered around two factors — Gascoigne's decision to publish his poems and his assumptions about his print readers.

Gascoigne had been writing poetry from at least the early 1560's, undoubtedly distributing his poems in manuscript form. His poetry was written into, and out of, a context where poems function along with gifts, songs, and tokens as part of an elaborate social system, a system which "F.J." imitates and inspects. In the winter of 1572-73, the success of a poem addressed to Lord Grey of Wilton ("Gascoigne's Wodmanship") and financial difficulties which had led him to seek fame and reward as one of the English volunteers in Holland, motivated Gascoigne to publish his poems as a means for displaying his abilities and his fitness for employment. Having decided to move from manuscript to print, it was both natural and necessary for him to present his poetry by means of what Marotti has called "social-narrative articulation" (10). That is (and this is my argument for the origin of "F.J." and for the premise of the entire volume of poetry), Gascoigne created G.T. and the work's presumably factual background as a way to recontextualize his own poetry. Doing so allowed him to present his poetry to readers without implicating too closely his own experience. It also provided readers with a social context, recreating the kinds of conditions in which such verse found its meaning.⁷

Gascoigne's expectations of his readers, then, were high. He believed that they would enjoy the witty reflexivity whereby the tale they read closely mimicked their own, or their aspirant, social circumstances. He aimed to engage them in some "busie conjecture" — the phrase is from "F.J." (61) — characteristic of coterie literature.⁸ More importantly, though tantalizing them with an apparently factual tale, he nonetheless pushes them to transcend the literal readings such a tale invites so that they see and understand the importance of reading figuratively.

Gascoigne had at least some confidence that his readers would not misread him, confidence based on his essentially Humanist assumptions about his readers. Arthur Kinney, in his *Humanist Poetics*, summarizes these conditions of readership:

More and Gascoigne, like Erasmus, have a residual trust in their readers to doubt and debate what is presented

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as, after all, a hypothesis, a hypo-thesis. It is fiction and not fact, argument and not report (56).

Trained by means of deliberative oration to argue both sides of any topic, this reader is willing (and able) to fill in what fiction writers only imply and so achieve what Kinney calls "independent judgment" (51). Gascoigne assumes his readers would not, in his words, "take Chaulk for Cheese" (1.10-11), that they would not be the kind of literalist readers represented by G.T. and Elinor but that instead they would discover the fictional basis of the work and consequently the work's underlying usefulness (analogous to Frances's tale, which aims to improve F.J.).

That his readers failed to read "F.J." in this way — the point with which this paper began — forced Gascoigne to revise "F.J." in 1575, adding a new introduction and conclusion which tightly frame the work and clarify both its fictional basis and its moral instruction — but that's another story.

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Notes

¹ The turning point in "F.J." is clearly marked: G.T. announces that "here I will surcease to rehearse any more of his verses, untill I have expressed how that his joyes being now exalted to the highest degree, began to bend towards declination" (79).

² Girouard says that "to have great chamber, withdrawing chamber, best bedchamber and gallery *en suite* on the first floor [upstairs to most Americans] was the commonest Elizabethan and Jacobean recipe for magnificence" (102). The country house in "F.J." exhibits this arrangement. Elinor's chamber — a combined withdrawing and bedchamber — seems to be adjacent to the great chamber, for Elinor could pass very quickly from one to the other (62), and from the door of her chamber could overhear conversation in the great chamber (66). Further, she refers to "the gallery neere adjoining to hir chamber" (68, see 60, 64).

³ Rowe expresses what most readers notice about G.T.'s prose portions, namely that "the narrative overwhelms the poems" (275). At points in the tale where he calls himself back to his task as narrator, G.T. highlights his own contributions:

well I dwell too long upon these particular poynts in discoursing this trifling history, but that the same is the more apte meane of introduction to the verses, which I meane to rehearse unto you, and I think you wil not

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disdaine to read my conceipt with his invention about declaration of his commedie (74).

⁴ Thus Elinor is the perfect model of those Gascoigne calls in the second epistle prefatory to *The Posies* "ignorant Readers" (1.10) who "understande neyther the meaning of the Authour, nor the sense of the figurative speeches" (1.11).

⁵ G.T.'s authority is undercut in others ways as well. For one, he romanticizes F.J.'s love affair. He evokes the overly witty comparisons of F.J. to a "valiant Prince" and "the Astronomer" who "hath fixed his hungry eies to behold the Comete long looked for" (54). More seriously, he is responsible for the facile romance language which glosses over what amounts to date rape by F.J. late in the tale: "he drew uppon his new professed enemie, and bare hir up with such a violence against the bolster, that before shee could prepare the warde, he thrust hir through both hands, and &c" (92).

⁶ The best discussions of Frances are in Hedley and Lanham. Lanham writes that Frances provides the "only countervailing morality present in *F.J.*" (46) and that "Her tale . . . provides an alternate climax to *F.J.*, an assertion of positive value to balance the pure negativism, the sheer loss of F.J.'s affair with Elinor" (47). Hedley connects Frances's figurative approach with Gascoigne's method throughout the edition. Of Frances's tale, Hedley writes that it is "A fictional world of her own creation, in which high standards of discretion, generosity, and social responsibility are finally honored by all concerned, [that] provides a satisfaction to her moral imagination which her own actual situation refuses her" (162). Further, she uses her tale to "coach" F.J. into seeing himself accurately (161).

⁷ Marotti, writing about "F.J.," Sidney's *Arcadia*, and other "courtly and satellite-courtly verse," says, "Inevitably, contextual particularity was lost when such work passed to a wider audience both within and beyond the writers' own times" (10). Thus such works need to be recontextualized, what Marotti calls "the act of social-narrative articulation" (10), in order for them to be understood.

⁸ "Coterie literature" is Marotti's phrase. McCoy writes that Gascoigne's "purpose was to excite his readers to a state of 'busie conjecture' and thus introduce them to the pleasures of courtly discourse" (41) and that "In publishing his manuscript he sought to initiate a larger audience into the mixed signals and complex protocol of an elite code without wholly profaning its mysteries" (33). In "F.J.," this rhetorical evasiveness is described with respect to the F.J.'s intent in a poem he sings after dancing with Frances: "he ment in cloudes to discipher unto Mistres *Fraunces* such

matter as she wold snatch at, and yit could take no good hold of the same" (64).

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Reading and teaching Milton in the 90's

I. Polemical Introduction in which an uncouth swain follows Lady Alice to the library

For those who study Milton's texts in the perilous flood of their colleagues' publications, the last ten years have been invigorating, largely because a host of "partial" critics have "interrogated" everything Miltonic.¹ The powerful engines of Structuralism, Deconstruction, Neo-marxism, Feminism, Cultural Critique, and that eclectic replicator, Post-modernism, have thrummed so busily in the stacks and circled so beguilingly the carrels of our kingdom that all is chafed, hot and raw. There may be no text in the class, but there is certainly class in the text (and race and gender).²

We have been led (or driven) to reconceive Milton's great poems, to search out this nuance and that implication, to read against the text and between the lines: wandering upstairs for high matters of state and church, downstairs for the plight of the poor sods, and into my lady's (and more recently, my lord's) chamber with psycho-linguistic keys that unlock the secrets of Milton's psyche.³ Good.

We have also been urged to throw off the shackles of culturally embedded interpretations.⁴ History, we are reminded, is always written by the powerful at the expense of their victims. And what is canonical literature if not the aesthetic face of elitist history? And wouldn't Milton be the classic case of that blind face? If all this doesn't stir up the uncouth swain, nothing will. Fresh woods everywhere! For the mature reader of Milton — one fluent in Milton's syntax and idiom and comfortable with presumptive matters of habitus and praxis — the turmoil has been an almost unmitigated good.

But for the immature reader (undergraduate or graduate) this is all pretty heady stuff. A bright undergraduate (let's call her Lady Alice) who wanders through the double-shades of books and journals may imagine that the polemical critics are warning her that Milton and traditional studies of Milton contain something pretty bad. Maybe an incubus? A succuba? A lurking chi-maera? A bogey? At the very least, she should beware the swarm

of hornets armed that nest under 821-M64 with the Papa WASP, John Milton.

Each facet of this demonic, grotesque, hive organism has a dreadful name, and if Alice listens carefully to those who would exorcise the many-headed demon, she can construct a veritable Be-el-zebul of a curse: homo-phobic-phallo-logic-ethno-entropic centrism. Once named, it's everywhere! Texts that do not mention it have repressed it. Texts that deny its existence are feeding it in the attic. Texts that praise it are paid lackeys or nazi symps. Perilous wood indeed!

Lady Alice will be told that the beast manifests two contending/complementary "western" illusions: the autonomous ego and the unchanging human heart; that it is the child of logocentrism and capitalism; and that it battens on a desire for immortality rooted in the western denial of death.⁵ She will, no doubt, be greatly relieved to be told that *if* self, soul, and God exist (they probably don't), they are almost certainly social constructs — and not her personal fault — though of course she shares in the collective guilt of her imperialist ancestors who have perpetuated and exploited various "peoples" by means of these and other illusions.

Seeking to heal the ancestral faults, she will learn that the first step toward purification is to debunk those holy-joe maunderings about transcendence: pretty general agreement about doing that. But once she has demystified the atemporal, she will get contrary advice as to what to do next. The Foucauldians will conjure paradigm shifts that leave Renaissance texts forever on the other side of a cultural cataclysm. Milton's texts are shards — puzzling artifacts from a lost culture — powerless, but alien. This separation from the "now" takes additional power from the "linguistic turn," the Saussurian/Derridian recognition that language "means" by means of differences among its own structures rather than by reference to the world of things.⁶ Thus a poem, logically, is a pointed case of the world of words, an instance of an artistic structure in which the rules and concerns of diurnality are distanced. Alice may think she has found authorization for unpurposive play with language.

Confusingly, the Marxists forbid all language play-as-play, especially Kantian/Arnoldian purposive-purposelessness.⁷ Lady Alice will be urged to parade arm-in-solidarity with those same texts in History's inexorable march toward freedom.

If she tries to follow all the advice, it's Double-Think time: language that is forever divorced from material referent is always

materially implicated. This paradox may or may not be radically true, but it is likely to darken the undergraduate library.

At the centered-circumference of the inmost maze, Lady Alice will meet the effete deconstructive dancers, tappity tapping at the *olde daunce*.⁸ Will you, won't you, will you won't you? Won't you join the dance? Walruses and Carpenters. *Danse difference*.

Spiraling in and out of the deconstructive site of subjectivity, wielding chaos as a weapon, are partisans — fierce voices — prophesying war. Each stipulates the truth of its own arguments and seeks to destroy the “oppressors.”⁹ The only rule is to rule. The goal is power. Bunk. Debunk. Bunk. Bunk. Debunk. Bunk. It's got a nice beat, and you could dance to it. *Danse carnival*.

But for Lady Alice the most important (and disturbing) voice is that which prompts her to redact Milton's ontological plenitude into a penplain, and so to swallow Cosmos into History. Western metaphysics, she will learn, got it backwards. It's really History that makes Cosmos, and properly read, traditional cosmos is just an interesting aberrational sub-set of History.¹⁰ If she swallows that lesson, she will automatically read Milton's transcendent affirmations as coded commentary on cultural constructions: Miltonic texts become a sort of materialist cabala. Any lingering impulse to take Milton at his word and so to see in his transcendent language a visitation from or an envisioning of supra-temporal reality will be blunted, if not scorned. Milton's God becomes a polemical counter, a powerful image banded by social and political adversaries for partisan advantage.¹¹

We leave our Lady errant considering the possibility that “Milton” is merely an empty category to be filled in by the privileged — those holding power, pens, and tenure. And wondering whether “early modern” is a less tendentiously distorting rubric than “Renaissance.”

That's the end of Part One. By now you are probably either smiling broadly, or mad as hell. Part One was filled with wicked over-generalizations — based on extreme cases. It ignored the great good sense of most Miltonists, and the considerable backlash against agenda-driven critiques.¹²

Students still choose to major in literature because they wish to study artistic texts, not because they wish to do sociology, or psychology, or political science, or gender studies. Wellek's and Warren's old binary of “intrinsic” and “extrinsic” study still describes a fundamental impulse.¹³ And if the “intrinsic” students are at present very often being taught by “extrinsic” professors, why, this too shall pass. The thing to do is to sort the wheat from the chaffing and move on.

Still, my students often have trouble sorting. Iconoclastic passion is seductive. These kids think they are immortal! What's a caring professor to do? Are our undergraduates ready to play among the new sophists? The answer is as it has always been. Of course not! Was I ready to play with Empson? Was I prepared for Sartre? How can one get ready to chew dynamite caps? But I did and they will and they must. And there will and there must be casualties.

And why not? Nothing secret. Nothing sacred. No cloistered virtue allowed. Time to beat the stuffings out of those stuffed owls. If we cannot ever hope to be right, we can benefit by changing our ways of being wrong.

II. Non-transcendent Milton and the new-historicist machine or what can I put in that big hole?

Recently there has emerged a truly spectacular way of being wrong about Milton's aesthetic world. Perhaps it would be fairer to say that some new historicists do not read Milton for his imaginative creations. Renaissance art has become a sort of cultural *roman à clef*, and criticism's task is to trace the reflections of material reality in art. At root, the shift is very simple: Milton's texts which are for me the figures to be illuminated by study of their various grounds, have themselves become grounds for the study of various figures of ideology. We could study *Paradise Lost* as a case (among many) of eco-rape. Lines from “Lycidas” could be placed among lines from a dozen other poems to form a ground for exploring elitism. Just think of the topics for term papers and articles and books! Journals! New programs!

There are, however, some unfortunate side effects. If the text is seen as an instance of something else (and it always *can* be), then one need not treat the text as an object of study. One need not then be “fair” or complete. J.R.R. Tolkien's exemplum concerning *Beowulf* catches the game exactly.¹⁴

A man had a tower. Friends, neighbors, and strangers discovered it to be made of the most various materials, and so they took it apart to study its pieces.

One found a hewn stone that documented race-based slavery in sixth century Britain. Two found a stain that proved human sacrifice to be a feature of early Christian worship. Three found a round stone that evidenced the suppression of a primal matriarchy. And Four found scratches that recorded the visit of alien space travelers.

No one remembered that from the tower window the man had been able to look out over the sea. And that his prayers from the tower's top had frequently been answered.

Somehow it is not surprising that Annabel Patterson announces in a recent book that she is now most interested in the history of jurisprudence.¹⁵ Such a history probably does give a more interesting and accurate reflection of certain material realities than does an epic about Eden. Not that there is anything *wrong* with that. *De gustibus non disputandum* . . .

But if one is interested in Milton's created world, shouldn't one take the structures of that world pretty much at face value? I mean (nudge, wink), who would question the existence of the ghost in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*? No ghost, no *Hamlet*. However interesting such a de-reconstructed play might be, the game would not be Shakespeare's. Certainly it's a matter of degree: one may or may not like a colorized *Casablanca*, but Bogart in a fright-wig won't do. Just so, *Paradise Lost* is Milton's game. Forthwith, a primer of Milton stuff that some new historicists translate, deny, scorn, or ignore.

Milton's aesthetic cosmos is wound upon armatures of order, hierarchy, and correspondence.¹⁶ Imagine a horizontal line on the blackboard. Below the line is "History," a Miltonic simulacrum of our time/space continuum. In Milton's fictional world, two models of hierarchy are especially prevalent: a vertical ladder, and a center with rotating circumference. Each entity of the fictional world has been composed in a womb, exuded into the structured world. Each lives its allotted time and then returns to the general store. All flesh is grass. All grass is dust. Dust thou art, to dust thou must return. Everything has a life-cycle.

In Milton's world, everything that is, is organized, and everything that is organized, moves. Directions are moral. *Up* and *In* are good. *Out* and *Down* are less good. Entities perched on the ladder and floating in the gravity well struggle to "improve" their positions. There is a right way and a wrong way to conduct that struggle.

This dynamic operates in structures as simple as the military chain of command and as complex as a Brownian quincunx field, but the entities that live and move are never self-generating, never self-sustaining. They are not produced by chance. Life has intention and value, and therefore meaning.

Now look above the line on the blackboard. Each "History" entity is an instance in time of its Ideal, an imperfect manifestation of its *Illo Tempore* original, an ectype of its "Cosmos" archetype that is, was, and ever shall be. Above the line is the God-world. The principles that organize History first organize Cosmos: heavenly

forms manifest the hierarchical ladder, the enfilate globe, and all the imaginable, dynamic combinations of the two. In Milton's imaginings, heaven is a realm of such dynamic stasis that even sorrow at the loss of one-third of an infinite number of angels is beatitude. As Milton's "earth" is a simulacrum of the existential world, so his "heaven" is a simulacrum of transcendent being. Entities perched on the heavenly ladder and floating in the heavenly gravity well are not mutable, but they are not static either. The womb-child structure that churns earth has its *illo tempore* original: "bright effluence of bright essence increate."

History exists meaningfully only because it is the shadow of Heaven. Cosmos is both the pattern for and the standard by which History is to be judged. Cosmos can exist without History. History cannot exist without Cosmos.

All this might be said better, differently, and at greater length, but it is foundational for Milton's art. The careful reader who looks for coherent art in "Lycidas" or *Comus* or *Paradise Lost* will inevitably invent some version of all this in the process of discovering the unity of Milton's art. A reader who does not approximate this set will find Milton's art incomplete, puzzling, and inchoate. These grounds fit Milton. The careful reader of Conrad or Faulkner must invent somewhat different structures, of Woolf still others, and so on. In almost no case, can the reader simply take his own cosmology, ontology, and physics as the givens of a fictional world. Hello? *It is remarkable that any of this needs to be said.* I hope I'm wasting your time. Nevertheless . . .

If we erase Cosmos (the above-the-line), History (the below-the-line) has neither significance nor existence, *in Milton's imaginings*. In passing, we may note that Milton's lower stage, Hell, is an example of such erasure. Satan's "progress" is precisely the fading of the creative, informing echo of Cosmos from History. Lucifer was a bright shadow of God. For Satan to lose all resemblance to Lucifer, is for Satan to wink out of existence. No hierarchy, no gravity well, no Cosmos — no being.

It's no good saying there is no such thing as Cosmos. You may believe that none of Milton's imaginings has anything to do with the material world in which you live. No problem. But if you do not grant an artist's premises, you simply cannot read that art. Since all Milton's poems are built upon these transcendent givens, to eliminate transcendent reality is going to leave some mighty big holes.

To switch the metaphor, removing the heart from the body of his work leaves bloody stubs and a vacancy in the chest cavity.

Either the text is dog meat or we need a transplant capable of informing and sustaining its passion, learning, and rhetoric.

If the replacements for God-and-such must be both material and passionate, must be both culturally generated and socially driven, must provide a millennium for which to strive and a set of devils to blame, I know who to call. 911-666. The materialists of the cultural left. New-historicism is scrubbed up, green-gowned, gloved and eager to attach material organs to the transcendent stubs.

Say what? Well, so's YOUR old man. Hey! I warned you. Fairness is passé. The point is to make a point. Play on! You be the new historicist. Okay?

Step One: Choose from your own personal world an intolerable social/political/economic problem. That's your agenda.

Step Two: Project that present woeful condition forward to a time/place where it will be much mitigated. Note the socially managed changes that have fixed the problem. That's your millennium.

Step Three: Establish a vector by drawing a line back from the perfected future to the imperfect now. Line up the sequence of changes. That's your amelioration gradient.

Step Four: Continue that line on back until it intersects a canonical Renaissance text. That's the site of your critique.

Step Five: Find an extra-literary text roughly contemporary with the canonical text, the more marginalized that text the better. Valorize the marginalized text. Bonus for elaborate etymologies and cross-cultural-national examples.

Step Six: Describe your agenda-condition as it appears (or is suppressed) in both the canonical and marginal Renaissance texts. Read all transcendent statements as historical statements in disguise. Evaluate the texts on the social amelioration gradient.

Step Seven: Value or castigate the canonical text accordingly as it manifests the agenda problem and "interrogates" the social/political structures of power and privilege that have created the Renaissance version of the problem that you find intolerable in your own life. Wax eloquent about the mute, inglorious Miltons who are legion behind the marginalized text. *Let the scars in the Renaissance text do the work of your contemporary wound.*

Step Eight: Add references to favored social historians and to post-structuralist discussions of, for example, law, penology, economics, and anthropology. Footnote the network.

For those readers who, at least momentarily, respond positively to your valorizing of the "problem," you have filled the void in Milton's text that was occasioned by the amputation of transcen-

dent referents. You will have made Milton's text, for that person at that moment, vital and relevant. And that's pretty good.

There are, however, some problems. Literary critics habitually make sweeping generalizations on the basis of relatively few textual instances. We can do so because of the relative timelessness, compression, and intentionality of literary texts. Literary texts are "considered" in ways that other texts are not. When we read less considered texts and make the same kind of generalizations we are accustomed to making with literary texts, we're likely to speak nonsense. Three instances of child abuse in a play is conclusive; three instances of child abuse in court records is not.

What Foucault has to say about nineteenth century French prisons works for Elizabethan prisons, right? Only within the genre "prison." The treatment of children and women recorded as the practice of several noble families in the sixteenth century is true for all families in the entire epoch, right? Only within the genre "domestic hell."

When we combine a totalizing moral certainty about motives with a discipline-induced tendency to generalize on scanty evidence, we are likely to speak *dangerous* nonsense. Such totalizing would be funny, if it were not done with such dead-serious fervor.¹⁷

And the patterns of reasoning that gain solemn agreement would make a sophist blush. Here is one of my favorite totalizing cascades.

All distinctions are binary, right? All binaries are hierarchical, right? All hierarchies are based on power, right? All power differentials are exploitative, right? Therefore . . . With this fulcrum you can move *anything!* Except, maybe, love?

III. The accommodating professor

For the class-room Miltonist (and especially for the undergraduate student) the aggressive stances and the programmatic turmoil I have just sketched (and perhaps aroused in my audience) are not all that useful. Like Raphael with Eve and Adam, the Milton-teacher must try to fit difficult material to an audience that is, by definition, less than fit. Always the problem of the wind and the shorn lambs. Milton speaks directly to the dilemma, over and over again. *Accommodation*, the eternal problem of the artist, is the daily task of the teacher.

Your students may thrive when you throw them into the critical melee; most of mine do not. Their initial response is usually disappointment, even dismay that the critical studies to which they have turned for help in understanding "Milton's texts" are

so frequently dedicated to problematizing his text, his thought, his beliefs, and his age — or to quarreling with some other critic whose “framing” of Milton’s text must be “interrogated.” The cited piece is always in another journal with another call-number on another shelf (maybe even in another library) and the road to it requires considerable perseverance. And when your student gets there? The essay is using Milton to argue . . . *something*. It is not using *something* to illuminate Milton.

The result is frequently a disappointed student, and, not infrequently, a distortion of Milton.¹⁸ This last I find painful, but I understand, and I try to explain. When the text does not fit the conclusion that it must fit in order to maintain a foregone conclusion, something has to give. And if one is, for reasons that go far beyond Milton, unwilling/unable to give up that foregone conclusion, then the text . . . the text . . . remains unread? Is rewritten?¹⁹

Try to understand, I say, that *sometimes*, for some people, Milton is more important as a symbol of something than he is as an artist. (As a polemical human being I can understand that, but as a professor of literature I can't empathize with it.) Most of my students understand, but they shake their heads. They thought they were *literature* majors.

There is abroad a confident, totalizing imperative, blissfully unaware of its paradoxes. “All foundational statements are false.” My favorite example is by a 60's poet: “It matters not who you love, / Nor how you love. / So long as you love.”²⁰

Well. Suppose I love my dog and do so by beating it with a chain? Maybe commitment and passion and politics are not all that counts. Maybe disinterestedness, negative capability, and aesthetic distance are not so bad after all. Recently I spoke with a student from England who had studied with a famous English marxist critic. He told me that a relationship that had gone down hill since the first day, finally hit the wall when he put on his thickest low-class accent and said to the elite-marxist professor: “Oi kindr loiks “Truth and Beautie.”

IV. An unpolemical conclusion in which I try to choose both/and in an either/or world but am wholly trapped by my valorization of Milton's text

When I read certain recent Renaissance (Early Modern) critics at their moments of greatest polemical intensity (Goldberg, or Belsey, or Patterson, or Wittreich, or Dollimore), I am reminded of an old joke that concludes with this exchange between two observers of a man who has just come out of a tailor shop:

“Oh, Martha, look at that poor deformed man!”

“Ah yes, George, but see how wonderfully his suit fits.”

I will conclude by seeking ways to benefit from the fresh perspectives and iconoclastic insights of the new-partialists without accepting the accompanying deformations. To that end, I will sketch a project in some detail. Let's see how it might go.

Let's say I am interested in John Milton's English sonnets. Most of them seem to be about social, material things, about power and who has it. The new partialists can help quite a lot here. Class, gender, power.

But most of the sonnets also establish a perspective that is aggressively non-material and defiantly atemporal. To read them, I'm going to need to recognize some metaphysics.

The project needs both Cosmos (for the perspective) and History (for the occasion). Two discourses, two contracts are being negotiated. One is set forth as ceremony, one as ritual. Both are measured as art. I'm going to need to pay attention to their rhetorics and their poetics, their metaphysics and their politics. Time for a hypothesis.

I hypothesize a study of the ways in which John Milton's English sonnets invoke ceremony and ritual in formal authorizations of social and spiritual power. I am concerned to examine those interactions as they function with, and within, the authority of art. A major project, probably a book.

My hypothesis requires an above-the-line ideal, a platonic perfect unity against which below-the-line poems may be measured. In that “perfect” universe, social power (whose commerce is ceremony) would reflect and embody spiritual power (whose commerce is ritual). Their congruence would inform and be reflected in the work of the perfect artist (whose commerce is poesis). In this perfect imagining, ceremony, ritual, and poesis would so authorize each other that their analytical separateness would yield to a single motion — each leading, each following like dancers in a circle, like the three graces, like the cardinal virtues.

However, in the experiential world, social and spiritual truths are partial and incongruent, and poetry's inscriptions are necessarily imperfect. Milton insists that imperfection is motive for strenuous effort, not a matter for despair, not a license for complacency. He finds complex hierarchical relationships to be the framework within which love and freedom, and therefore art, thrive.

The swallowing of Cosmos by History has gone so far that it may be useful to desynonymize Ritual and Ceremony. A *Ceremony* is a formal recognition/assertion that the initiate and the celebrant conspire in the power structures of a cultural unit. The

initiate yields his individual power to that of the cultural unit as a condition of receiving its power and protection. "We hold these truths to be self-evident." "If any one knows why these two should not be joined in marriage, let him speak now or forever hold his peace." "We are the fit audience." Ceremony is the formal, assertive contract of social, political authority.

A *Ceremonial Poem* seeks to authorize its occasion by wrapping that occasion in the ambient power of the "present" social/political time and place. The power of ceremony is the power of cultural norms; thus, a successful ceremonial poem makes it clear that the occasion is ours, or that the occasion is emphatically not ours. Simply put, *Shibboleth* gets in. *Shibboleth* does not. Here is plenty of work for the cultural historians.

Ritual differs sharply from ceremony. A ritual evokes a timeless pattern. "All men are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights." "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." "What God has joined, let no man put asunder." Ritual is the commerce between time and eternity. Hence it is mysterious, a bargaining tinged with prayer, propitiation, and coercion. "Give us this day, our daily bread . . . For thine is the kingdom." Here is work for the metaphysicians.

In Milton's art, man is a creature of both ceremony and ritual. His duty is double: to seek archetypal patterns so that he may distinguish true infusions from distortions; and to shape the flawed cultural embodiment of infinity toward coherence with its perfect original. That is what the protestant reformers thought they were doing. That is Milton's stated conception of the true poet's task. Here is a triple project: social, religious, and artistic.

In Milton's world, political/cultural perversions of the true pattern must be corrected or discarded. Sometimes a king must die — not for being a king, but for *not* being a king after the pattern of infinity. Sometimes a husband or wife must be divorced — for *not* being a true husband or wife. Ritual is always concerned with a transcendent power as it relates to a culture's social norms. A successful ritual re-originates the culture's historical embodiment of the archetype. Ritual kinship — "Our Father, which art in heaven" — is quite different from ceremonial kinship — "We are Englishmen."

A *Ritual Poem* tests its historical occasion against the transcendent: how does the occasion "on earth" match up with its pattern "in heaven"?

Since the "in heaven" is not directly available, the poet chooses various cultural inscriptions of the transcendent for comparison, chooses moments when the congruence between ceremonial

and ritual power appears greatest. Milton's usual practice is to choose from the Bible and the Classics. That a Greek, an Hebraic, and an English event evince the same archetype — despite their obviously differing cultural/political contexts — is, for Milton, argument for truth, not falsehood.

The ritual/ceremony binary I have just sketched is a tool, a heuristic; it is not a classificatory engine. (Taxonomists are near cousins to taxidermists.) Improperly used, it will mark all Milton's poetry "FAIL." His ceremonial poems fail because he knows that the political millennium necessary for perfect social commerce is always not here. His ritual poems fail because he knows that The Kingdom is not of this world. Poesis may reach for but cannot reach perfection if ritual and ceremony do not succeed. From "Fair Infant" to *Samson Agonistes*, and at all the stops in between, Milton and his heroes are wayfarers, spiritual/social beings stumbling through this world, illuminated (sometimes) by the light of Christ. To reject this, is to refuse Milton's game.

At the end of the day (or at least of this essay), the matter is quite simple. The tools of recent polemical criticism can be pertinent and illuminating when the study is of what I have here called ceremony. Help your students understand their excellences and help them see the occasional, unfortunate blurrings of historical contextualization by polemic.

But point out that these same tools can be nihilistic or procrustian when applied to ritual. Help your students discover the metaphysics that are foundational to Milton's art.

And if your students are thorough-going secularists, help them understand that to acknowledge transcendence in *Paradise Lost* does not require them to burn any personal ideological cards. Help them to see that such both/and understanding is the initial dividend when one comprehends the meaning of "aesthetic."²¹

What to say about essays that care little or nothing for Milton's art? Frame them as "if" — "then." If one wishes to use art to advance a particular cause, then this essay will show you how. Teach your students how to identify the cause that drives the polemic. Finally-finally. If your students attend to both ceremony and ritual and seek the interaction of the two within Milton's aesthetic structures, that's one giant step for pluralism, one small check for particularism.

Oh. Be sure to tell them that it's okay to be a literature major.

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Endnotes

¹ The "newness" of recent study is signaled by a rapidly proliferating technical vocabulary, much of it borrowed from other disciplines. Linguistics, anthropology, sociology, psychology, economics, philosophy, political science, and ethnology are frequent contributors. The effort is to blend conventional divisions of study in fruitful ways. Sometimes the effect is to obfuscate, rather than to clarify, and sometimes the jargon functions as shibboleth, separating "us" from "them."

² The puns are nearly irresistible. Stanley Fish, whose study, *Surprised by Sin* (Berkeley, 1971), forms a bridge between New Criticism and Postmodernism by way of Reader Response, started it. Herman Rapaport's *Milton and the Postmodern* (Lincoln, 1983) is one place to go if you want more. R. A. Shoaf's *Milton: Poet of Duality* (New Haven, 1985) is another. Unless otherwise noted, names of critics and studies are intended as broad examples. Many critics could stand for more than one tendency. For example, although I cite Jonathan Goldberg as an instance of deconstructive criticism, his work might also have served as an instance of a particular turn in gender criticism.

The problem of editing a general talk for a broad audience for print where it may be read by specialists is not one I have solved with this essay. The two alternatives were to triple the length of the paper by engaging a host of essays, or to do the Olympian "no footnotes needed." I do not imply that any critic is limited to or properly characterized by my use of her in this essay. Other critics might have served the same function. The reader familiar with Milton criticism can no doubt supply additional instances, and may wish to deploy alternative taxonomies.

³ See William Kerrigan's *The Sacred Complex: On the Psychogenesis of "Paradise Lost."* (Cambridge, 1983) and Annabel Patterson's *Reading Between the Lines* (Madison, 1993).

⁴ In Great Britain, such critics might be called "cultural materialists," self-named heirs of Raymond Williams, e.g. Jonathan Dollimore. The interested reader might start with *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* (Cornell, 1985). In the United States, they might be termed "new historicist," Stephen Greenblatt and a legion of imitators. Most, but not all, such studies are strongly leftist in orientation. The interested reader might start with *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Chicago, 1980). A recent collection is edited by H. A. Veveser, *The New Historicism* (London, 1989). The objection of such critics is not to cultural embedding, but to embedding interpretation in the dominant,

Western, Capitalist, Elitist, etc. culture. Some might spot links with political correctness.

⁵ Ernest Becker's, *The Denial of Death* (New York, 1973) is a powerful example of neo-Freudian reconstructions of our sense of self that help form the new *habitus*.

⁶ See Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* and Jacques Derrida's *Writing and Difference*.

⁷ For the political seriousness of everything, see Leah Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth* (Chicago, 1986). For a contrary view, see the selections from Kant included in Hazard Adams' *Critical Theory Since Plato* (New York, 1971). The question of work and play would seem to keep the deconstructionists and the Marxists forever at odds, but various neo-Marxists have begun to rehabilitate Kantian theoretical space.

⁸ See Jonathan Goldberg's *Voice Terminal Echo: Postmodernism and English Renaissance Texts* (New York, 1986).

⁹ The conventional stridency of the attacks on the West in studies of Renaissance literature seems a carryover from the "relevance" of the 1960's. I remember a student saying "How can you expect me to write a theme on Keats' poetry when Nixon has bombed Cambodia?" Somehow, the study of literature as art is not enough.

¹⁰ The parallels between the self-fashioning of cultural studies and the self (dis)fashioning of Milton's Satan are striking. Ultimately the revolution simply installs other stars with other agendas and similar egos. Orwell's pigs always move into the farmhouse. And even the demystification winds up remystifying. Somewhere there ought to be an essay which matches Derridian and Satanic rhetoric. Always something has to go into the God-Slot.

¹¹ See Christopher Hill's *Collected Essays. Volume 2: Religion and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England* (Amhurst, 1986).

¹² See the "Introduction" by Annabel Patterson to *John Milton, Longman Critical Readers* (New York, 1992) for a judicious and informative overview of current Milton criticism.

¹³ *Theory of Literature*.

¹⁴ "Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics." I have modified the details (though not the spirit) of Tolkien's narrative.

¹⁵ *Reading Between the Lines*, 1993.

¹⁶ The following set of postulates comes from more places than I can trace. Mostly, from Milton. Some are only metaphors and models, but they do seem to help students who wish to grasp Milton's accomplishments, rather than castigate his D.W.M.ness.

¹⁷ For an expansion of all this, see David Aers, "A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists; or, Reflections on Literary Critics

Writing the 'History of the Subject,' in *Culture and History: 1350-1600* (Detroit, 1992).

¹⁸ New Historicism seems to have worked better, in general, with sixteenth than with seventeenth century writers, better with Shakespeare than with Milton. Maybe Milton is so explicit about foundations that he resists the resisting reader? Examining that hypothesis would be a long and worthwhile project.

¹⁹ For a classic example, see Catherine Belsey's *John Milton: Language, Gender, Power* (Oxford, 1988). Read the full context in Milton's text of the passages she quotes.

²⁰ Rod McKuen, I think? If it's not, my apologies to Mr. McKuen.

²¹ For the emergence of something that looks a little like a Kantian aesthetic in the Marxist community, see the "Introduction" to Christopher Norris' *What's Wrong with Post Modernism*. (Baltimore, 1990). Norris hates it.

Teaching Milton's "Lycidas": planting seeds of responsibility

Our society is fascinated with violence and death — at least with observing it. Staged depictions, however, no longer satisfy. The latest craze is watching real life situations on televised police docudramas and rescue programs. Many young people are becoming so desensitized to violence and death that they find it difficult to perceive the reality of death and the value of human life. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross feels "[i]t might be helpful if more people would talk about death and dying as an intrinsic part of life" (141). One way to encourage discussion of our mortality among high school students is to teach prominent early British works that examine death and its effect on humans, such as John Milton's pastoral elegy "Lycidas." Charles B. Dodson comments: "students are often startled to see how frequently the works could be discussing incidents and situations that are reported or dramatized on television or even that they have experienced themselves" (48). Milton was a student himself when he wrote "Lycidas" to express his grief over the tragic death at sea of Edward King, his friend and fellow scholar/poet at Cambridge University, in 1637. Today, young people who identify with Milton's loss would benefit from studying "Lycidas," Milton's depiction of one man's sorrow that illustrates the universal phenomenon of bereavement.

According to David Partenheimer, since literary knowledge is not an end in itself,

literature teachers should . . . design . . . lessons that connect literature with . . . human problems such as environmental pollution, violence, drug abuse, racism, and sexism.... [Thus], literature might influence how students think and act in and outside the classroom. Students might discover that they are the authors of their own lives and participants in an epic of human experience (42-43).

If such seeds of responsibility were planted, young people would begin to see the great disparity between human responses to staged acts of violence and death, and the genuine human responses to violent acts occurring. Grasping this disparity would enable young people to grow, mature, and develop a higher regard for human life.

In "Lycidas," Milton employs the classical pastoral form with its idyllic setting and a virtuous shepherd/narrator lamenting the

loss of his fellow shepherd/poet/friend. The idealized form actually aids Milton in authentically depicting the natural human response to loss. According to Lorna Sage, the pastoral form is a myth of community . . . [that] is not merely a literary convention: in the early seventeenth century pastoral pageants . . . were a way of enacting social solidarity, keeping an aristocratic society in touch with the clarity, order and serenity of a simpler pattern of existence (270–71).

Sage feels that through his pastoral poems, Milton explores "the traditions and enduring norms at the base of human communities" (270), such as the grieving process, in "Lycidas."

"Lycidas" presents a beautiful and truthful representation of human emotions experienced in bereavement and the natural progression of stages of grief which move towards acceptance of loss. Students could fruitfully consider the grieving process as a journey, with stages or stopping places along the way. At least four stages of grief are apparent in "Lycidas": depression; acknowledging our own mortality; questioning, as we contemplate the meaning of existence; and acceptance of loss, which may be accompanied by hope. These four stages are not all-inclusive and may occur in any order or not at all; however, bereavement and the responding emotions that accompany the process are universal.

Milton relates a history of past friendship between the two shepherds to explore the stage of depression, a stage that usually accompanies or follows fond memories of the deceased. The two shepherds were inseparable, together "Oft till the star that rose at evening bright / Toward heaven's descent had sloped his westering wheel" (ll. 30–31). Twice, Milton refers to the shepherds feeding their flocks together; and the shepherds spent their leisure time together as well (ll. 32–36). Such a close friendship is a phenomenon common among young people, and one with which students can easily identify.

"But O the heavy change, now thou art gone, / Now thou art gone, and never must return!" ("Lycidas" ll. 37–38) Kübler-Ross notes that depression can be a tool to facilitate the state of acceptance (87). The shepherd, in his sensitive, vulnerable emotional state, becomes acutely aware of the parallel existence of the vegetative cycle in nature. The loss of Lycidas is

As killing as the canker to the rose,
Or taint-worm to the weanling herds that graze,
Or frost to flowers (ll. 45–47).

Even nature's most young and exquisite are subject to physical decay. Students could consider how examples of this natural

process compare with our human existence. Awareness of humanity's place in the natural world helps us to realize and to accept the finality and universality of death.

Throughout "Lycidas," nature's seasonal cycle corresponds to our journey of life as well as to the emotional journey we experience in bereavement. The opening lines create an image of nature's season of death, alluding to the premature death of Lycidas:

O ye laurels, . . .
Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere,
I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude,
And with forced fingers rude,

Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year (ll. 1–5).

Such diction conveys the shepherd's emotional condition as he begins the mourning process. His pain is sharp and bitter, unrelenting. Later, Milton's shepherd again expresses melancholy when he describes the laying on of flowers, just before he attains the stage of acceptance of loss. But here the shepherd's melancholy has modulated; we sense his spirit is renewed. Colorful, fertile images starkly contrast with the barren images of the opening passage, and paint a scene teeming with life: "gushing brooks," "green turf," "vernal flowers," and

The white pink, and the pansy freaked with jet,
The glowing violet,

. . . .

And every flower that sad embroidery wears:
Bid amaranthus all his beauty shed,
And daffadillies fill their cups with tears,

To strew the laureate hearse where Lycid lies (ll. 144–51).

The ancient tradition of laying on of flowers, dating from the Neanderthals who strewed the corpse with an assortment of flowers, stresses the quintessential analogy between humanity and nature (Panati 35).¹ Understanding this analogy can help us to see what Milton knew and saw so clearly — the truth of nature (Nietzsche 61).² The humanity/nature analogy is a recurring theme in Milton's Bible; we read in Psalm 103:15–16: "As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. When the wind has passed over it, it is no more; and its place acknowledges it no longer."

A second stage of grieving compels us to acknowledge our own eventual death, painful but necessary if we are to come to terms with the mortality we fear. We exist in a state of elemental humanity during bereavement, as grief strips away our individuality, and we cannot hide from the fearful truth of our existence, that our life is brief, uncertain, and fragile. Kübler-Ross maintains:

[T]his [fear] is very understandable and can . . . be explained by our basic knowledge that, in our unconscious, death is never possible in regard to ourselves. . . . In simple terms, in our unconscious mind we can only be killed; . . . therefore death . . . is associated with a bad act, a frightening happening (2).

Milton's shepherd considers his own death early in the poem when he entreats the Muses:

So may some gentle Muse
With lucky words favor my destined urn,
And as he passes turn,
And bid fair peace be to my sable shroud (ll. 19–22).

Milton's choice of words like "gentle Muse," "lucky words," "favour," and "fair peace" lend a positive tone to the lines. No evidence of fear or horror is discernible, and the shepherd appears to accept death as his unalterable destiny, even at this early stage of his journey. Surely this paradox is due to Milton's religious faith of an afterlife.

"[F]avor my destined urn." As Milton's shepherd/poet honors Lycidas upon his death, so the shepherd desires honor after his own death. Students could consider twentieth century figures who have been granted posthumous honor, like Janice Joplin and John F. Kennedy, a consideration which could lead to a discussion of the intrinsic value of human life, the indefinite rewards of life, and the relativity of honor. Our concept of honor (or what we consider worthy of honor) is relative, not only to culture and country, but also to our stage in life.

A third stage in the journey of grief is characterized by questioning, as we seek an explanation and contemplate the meaning of existence. Because no definite answers exist (and sometimes we do not even know the questions), anger is a natural and inevitable response to loss. Milton's shepherd wonders if the tragedy could have been prevented, and seeking someone to blame, he challenges the Nymphs: "Where were ye . . . when the remorseless deep / Closed o'er the head of your loved Lycidas?" (ll. 50–51). The shepherd then acknowledges that not even the Nymphs could have saved Lycidas from his fate (ll. 56–63). His anger intensifying, the shepherd demands, "Alas! What boots it with incessant care / To tend the homely, slighted shepherd's trade?" (ll. 64–65). Why, he asks, should he "scorn delights, and live laborious days" (l. 72) while others "sport with Amaryllis in the shade" (l. 68)? The shepherd naturally meditates on the meaning of existence in terms of his own life and profession, claiming that "[f]ame is the spur" (l. 70) that compels us to

sacrifice worldly pleasures; but suddenly, when we hope to gain the "fair guerdon . . . Comes the blind Fury with the abhorred shears, / And slits the thin-spun life" (ll. 73–76).³ Most of us can relate to the futility Milton's shepherd expresses. Young people must learn to make choices and sacrifices — not always for fame — but for other rewards like scholarships, good grades, or success in sports. Those of us who have "scorn[ed] delights" and "liv[ed] laborious days" will understand Milton's words.

Milton employs the pastoral convention of the procession of mourners to express possible answers to his existential questions. As the first mourner in the procession, Phoebus Apollo speaks to the shepherd's anger. Phoebus proclaims that while the physical body is subject to decay, praise is not (l. 76); and again Milton expresses his belief in immortality: "Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil . . . / Of so much fame in heaven expect thy meed" (ll. 78–84).

The shepherd then asks what could have caused the tragedy, still searching for someone to blame. A second mourner, Neptune's Herald, "asked the waves, and asked the felon winds, / 'What hard mishap hath doomed this gentle swain'" (ll. 91–2). Finally, Hippotades, god of the wind, claims:

It was that fatal and perfidious bark,
Built in th' eclipse, and rigged with curses dark,

That sunk so low that sacred head of thine (ll. 99–102).

This explanation illustrates our human tendency to attribute what we do not know or understand to fate or luck.

The next mourner is the god of the river Cam, Camus, who, "footing slow," mourns his "dearest pledge" (l. 103). Camus represents Cambridge University, and we sense that Lycidas will be greatly missed by his professors and peers. Milton, as a young man, was consumed with a desire to fulfill his poetic potential, and here he grieves that his friend's creative genius is lost. Perhaps he simultaneously wonders, "What if it happens to me?" Young people often have a false sense of invulnerability, and studying "Lycidas" would help them to realize how fragile and how precious human life really is.

The shepherd's anger peaks in St. Peter's discourse on the wicked shepherds. By his own admission, Milton's intention here is to foretell "the ruin of our corrupted Clergy, then in their height" ("Headnote" to "Lycidas," NA 1451), but the passage also expresses the universal question we often ask during bereavement: Why did this person die an untimely death when there are others who we think do not deserve to live? St. Peter harshly rebukes those shepherds who

Creep, and intrude and climb into the fold!

Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold
A sheep-hook, or have learned aught else the least
That to the faithful herdman's art belongs! (ll. 115–21).

Obviously, Milton attacks the venal clergy, but through discussion, students would recognize that others are also responsible for teaching and influencing us, like teachers, poets, musicians, and especially parents. Milton implies early in the poem that a shepherd's responsibility is to feed his sheep. His vivid display of anger towards those corrupt shepherds produces a clear contrast with the purity and goodness of Lycidas. St. Peter's anger can be placated only by the knowledge that divine justice will prevail: "[T]hat two-handed engine at the door / Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more" (ll. 130–31). Students could discuss life's mutability and the element in human nature that demands justice. Most will have learned firsthand how unfair life can seem, and many will understand a thirst for revenge, since young people are notoriously attuned to the notion of fairness. Undoubtedly, students could provide an endless list of popular heroes, born of human imagination, whose sole purpose is to fight for "justice and right." Comic heroes, like Superman; movie heroes, like Rambo; and literary heroes, like King Arthur, are a few examples.

Partenheimer contends that "[s]ome vision of the good, the true, and the beautiful is essential to a meaningful personal life and a humanistic society" (44). Unfortunately, much of what confronts young people today does not cultivate a Platonic vision. Nothing expresses the world view of a particular generation better than the lyrics and sounds of popular songs, and today, some rock groups express the hopelessness and despair many young listeners feel. Violence and death are common topics of this controversial rock music, and its beat — like its lyrics — is predominantly primitive. Perhaps the offense is not that the groups express the anger, depression, and hopelessness many young people feel, but that is all they do — express the pain. Tragically, the musicians — and the music — offer no hope, and young listeners are left with raging emotions and nothing constructive to do with them. Guns 'n' Roses is one group that attracts many young people though most older listeners find their work offensive. A Guns 'n' Roses song entitled "Dust 'n' Bones" claims:

There's no logic here today
Do as you got to, go your own way
I said that's right
Time's short your life's your own

And in the end

We are just Dust 'n' bones.

The phrase "no logic" emphasizes the absence of rational thought, often called the Apollonian impulse, and the prevalence of destructive emotionalism, the Dionysian impulse, in this type of rock music. The Dionysian impulse which tends to annihilate the individual (as does the state of bereavement) is an essential part of our humanity, not harmful in itself; but danger arises when no Apollonian reason counterbalances the powerful Dionysian forces.⁴ The unbalanced state effected by this despondent music might help explain the apathy and hopelessness that many of our youth experience. Today's entertainment related media teems with news of tragic events pertaining to this category of rock music, like an April 9, 1994, news item recounting the suicide of Kurt Cobain, the "troubled lead singer of the pioneering grunge rock band Nirvana. . . [who] wrote the music and anguished lyrics to most of their songs." As Michael Azerrad declares, rock songs are so popular because they speak to human anxiety. "The divorce, the violence, the diminished opportunities for an entire generation — that is so crucial to the sound of their music. . . . The band translated that pain and anger and confusion in musical sound waves very directly that hit a nerve among a large . . . [number] of kids." The tragic lives of rock musicians like Cobain epitomize the results of the destructive unbalanced Dionysian forces, and sadly, many young people idolize these figures. Students could be encouraged to express their frustration, fears, and questions regarding life and death by bringing lyrics to class, or writing their own lyrics, which they feel relate to "Lycidas" and, upon prior approval, discussing the lyrics orally or in written form. This exercise would establish a direct link between the students' lives and their experience of "Lycidas."

Students could make another connection with Milton's poem by studying "Lycidas" in its historical context and recognizing the bond between our society and early seventeenth century English society. Crime and violence, the plague of AIDS, clashing social issues, and natural disasters confront us today just as similar difficulties beset Milton's society. The plague of 1665, the Great Fire of London in 1666, religious and political strife, and

. . . a growing skepticism of dogmas old and new . . . [all] forced . . . the traditional codes and hierarchies of English life . . . [to give] way to new (and often bitterly resented) diversity One universal truth emerged from the [Puritan] revolt and the civil wars — that no

one universal truth was to be had, whether by sword, prayer, or study (NA 1767).

Milton, who was a radical proponent of liberty, was so engulfed in the controversies that he almost lost his life during the Restoration. Christian humanism and Neoplatonism are two Renaissance concepts that greatly influenced Milton, who has been called the ideal Renaissance Christian Humanist. Students could identify many aspects of their lives that, indirectly, are a result of the wide-ranging transformation that took place in England over three hundred years ago.

In "Lycidas," a journey of grief consummates in acceptance of loss, the stage where the mourner ideally attains a state of peace, often accompanied by hope. Milton melliflently portrays this stage in the emotionally satisfying close of "Lycidas," where the shepherd expresses faith and hope that Milton's Bible had taught the poet to recognize as gifts.

Weep no more, woeful shepherds, weep no more,
For Lycidas your sorrow is not dead,

Sunk though he be beneath the wat'ry floor (ll. 165-67).

Milton compares Lycidas' death and eternal life to the archetypal setting and rising of the sun, and he refers to the salvific power of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, the prototype of all shepherds:

So sinks the daystar in the ocean bed,
And yet anon repairs his drooping head,

.....

So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high,
Through the dear might of Him that walked the waves
(ll. 168-73).

The shepherd finds peace, hope, and a sense of renewal in his despondency, and now we see the humanity/nature analogy in a new light. Human life has a distinction that nature lacks — the promise of individual immortal life, a promise in which Milton's shepherd, like many of us, believes. Sage observes: "Milton specifically interprets Christianity as a breaking of the pagan cycle which denies personal continuity. The pattern he wants to see is progressive, with an individual eternity at the end of it" (286). Accordingly, students might research and discuss various views of life after death, a subject that many students would find absorbing.

From the secular psychological point of view, Kübler-Ross indicates that in the past, religion has offered hope, purpose, and a reward for suffering; but today, the number of people who believe in life after death has declined. She is therefore concerned that, in our society, suffering has lost its meaning. Suffering has no purpose if we do not believe we will be rewarded after

death (15). Beliefs about immortality are fundamental to the individual and society, and from the study of such beliefs, students would achieve a perspective of death and suffering as an integral part of life. Without his Christian belief in immortality, Milton could not have ended the poem on a positive, hopeful note: "At last he rose, and twitched his mantle blew: / Tomorrow to fresh woods, and pastures new" (ll. 192-93). Milton's shepherd, having completed his journey of grief, has achieved a more profound understanding of himself and his world.

Students would reap many benefits from studying "Lycidas." A deeper awareness of the actuality of death and the grief it causes would enhance students' sensitivity to the tragedy of thoughtless violence and death, endowing them with a deeper respect for human life. Today's young people will have to make decisions on issues concerning life and death as adults. They must learn to think critically and compassionately about sensitive issues such as abortion, voluntary euthanasia, treatment of the elderly, and the environment; and studying works such as "Lycidas" would challenge them to do so. Discussing the vital link between humanity and nature would help students to realize their place in the universe and their responsibility to their fellow human beings, society, and the earth. Seeds of responsibility can surely be planted by teaching "Lycidas," Milton's immortal portrait of bereavement, seeds which, through cultivation, could help young people to grow into mature, perceptive adults who think deeply, critically, and compassionately about the meaning of their individual and social existence. Francine du Plessix Gray has captured the essence of Milton's "Lycidas," succinctly expressing my own convictions about the poem:

"Lycidas" is at once a symbol of the diurnal rhythms of nature, an archetype of the man-God who dies and is resurrected, a sign of reconciliation with our fear of mortality and our hunger for eternity. And I am at a loss to know what preoccupations are more relevant, at any time, to our psychic survival (1).

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Notes

¹ Charles Panati, *Panati's Extraordinary Origins of Everyday Things* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987) 35. According to Panati, "the earliest evidence of a funeral tradition has been traced to Western Asia's Neanderthal man.... Neanderthals began the practice of burying their dead with ritual funerals. They interred the deceased's body, along with food, hunting weapons, and fire charcoals, and strewed the corpse with an assortment of flowers. A Neanderthal grave discovered in Shanidar, Iraq, contained the pollen of eight different flowers." Also, according to Jana Garai, "both the Greeks and the Romans . . . like the Egyptians . . . strewed flowers over the bodies of their dead, more in analogy than in offering." Jana Garai, *Book of Symbols* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973) 118.

² Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy, Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 1968) 61. Milton's clear understanding of the truth of nature in relation to humanity, and as a cogent force in poetry, anticipates Nietzsche's later distinction between "the real truth of nature" and the "lie of culture that poses as if it were the only reality." Nietzsche claims, "the sphere of poetry does not lie outside the world as a fantastic impossibility spawned by a poet's brain: it desires to be just the opposite, the unvarnished expression of the truth, and must precisely for that reason discard the mendacious finery of that alleged reality of the man of culture."

³ Edmund Spenser, "The Shepherdes Calender," *Spenser: Poetical Works*, ed. J.C. Smith and E. de Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1965) lines 13–18. This passage recalls the words of the shepherd Cuddie in Spenser's pastoral eclogue when Cuddie bemoans his lot as an unappreciated poet:

The dapper ditties, that I wont deuise,
To feede youthes fancie, and the flocking fry,
Delighten much: what I the bett for thy?
They han the pleasure, I a sclender prise.
I beate the bush, the byrds to them doe flye
What good thereof to Cuddie can arise?

Also, Sir Philip Sidney in his *Defense of Poesy* acknowledged the difficult life of a poet and uplifted poetry as a noble profession with great moral and social value. Sir Philip Sidney, "Defense of Poesy," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. M. H. Abrams, 6th ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1993) 1: 479–499.

⁴ Nietzsche 35–60, et passim. Nietzsche likens the Apollonian impulse to the dream experience, characterized by "that measured restraint, that freedom from the wilder emotions, that calm of the sculptor god." Nietzsche compares the Dionysian condition to a state of intoxicated reality . . . which seeks to destroy the individual and redeem him by a mystic feeling of oneness." Nietzsche could be taken as referring to the effect of a rock concert on a group of young people when he describes the "rapture of the Dionysian state with its annihilation of the ordinary bounds and limits of existence." This condition "contains . . . a lethargic element in which all personal experiences of the past become immersed. This chasm of oblivion separates the worlds of everyday reality and of Dionysian reality. But as soon as this everyday reality re-enters consciousness, it is experienced as such, with nausea: an ascetic, will-negating mood is the fruit of these states." Also, according to C. Hugh Holman and William Harmon, the terms Apollonian and Dionysian "connote much the same thing as classicism and romanticism, . . . [and] Milton has been said to show a perfect balance of romanticism and classicism." C. Hugh Holman and William Harmon, *A Handbook to Literature*, 5th ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1986) 33, 91, 148.

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Two hearts strangely warmed: Johnson and Wesley on salvation by faith

Although the eighteenth century is considered an age of great and popular pulpit oratory, Samuel Johnson has never figured prominently in that image. As a member of the laity, Johnson did, however, write about forty sermons, most to aid his friend the Rev. John Taylor of Ashbourne. These sermons are yet another literary genre in which Johnson excelled and present "the fullest intellectual expression of the Christian Johnson" (Hagstrum and Gray lii). As Robert Voitle points out, the sermons also serve as the only true source of Johnson's religious attitudes:

The *Sermons*, practical divinity, offered Johnson his only opportunity to speak out. Religion is not for the Club, nor is it a proper subject for the periodical essay, prose fiction, biography or poetry. Furthermore the nature of the future state is the sort of topic which can be discussed only if one is willing to resort to that free speculation which Johnson so strongly mistrusted, wherever it was applied (160).

Because Johnson does allow himself to speculate in the sermons, they provide the only reliable source, other than the Prayers and Annals, for investigating Johnson's reaction to and perhaps attraction to evangelical, and specifically Wesleyan Methodist, sentiments. A close study of these sermons reveals that "Johnson not only responded in his life and work to Wesley's spiritual leadership, but also felt the force of his faith and came to share it in some measure" (Brantley 146).

Although it is not the intent of this paper to explore in depth the personal and professional connections between Dr. Johnson and John Wesley, a brief overview of that relationship would serve at this juncture. Little evidence exists of personal meetings between these two intellectual leaders, but they could hardly have failed to know one another's thought. The Methodists' Holy Club at Oxford was active during Johnson's stay at the university, although he apparently ignored this dissenting group, including John Wesley. Yet, in the development of his religious thought Johnson was early influenced by the same text that shaped Wesley and his Oxford group, William Law's *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, a text which stressed a devout life of Christian charity

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and the need of introspection and religious awakening. After their Oxford days, one can only speculate about chance encounters of the two men between 1729 and the early 1770s. The Rev. John Bowmer notes, however, that Wesley frequented the Baptist's Head, a tavern where Edward Cave and his literary friends (probably including Johnson), often met (16). And, evidence does exist in Boswell's *Life of Johnson* that Dr. Johnson was well aware of Wesley's ceaseless activity during the height of his ministry. Johnson commented that whatever might be thought of some Methodist teachers, he could "scarcely doubt the sincerity of that man [Wesley], who travelled nine hundred miles in a month and preached twelve times a week, for no adequate reward merely temporal, could be given for such indefatigable labour" (2: 123). Boswell also notes that Johnson praised Wesley's conversation but regretted that the Methodist leader was "always obliged to go at a certain hour" and that they never had the chance to have their talk "out" (3: 230). But, when Wesley's presence was denied him, Johnson apparently read some of the itinerant preacher's works. Donald J. Greene lists in an annotated guide to Johnson's library four volumes of Wesley's commentaries on the Old and New Testaments (1768), *A Compendium of Natural Philosophy* (1776), five volumes of Wesley's journal, and a collection of Wesleyan hymns (116).

On some political issues like the movement toward independence among the American colonies, Johnson and Wesley also agreed, with Wesley even being accused of plagiarizing Johnson's essay "Taxation No Tyranny" for his piece "A Calm Address to our American Colonies" (1775). As Bowmer notes, though, some "amicable understanding" must have existed between the two because Johnson would hardly have allowed such a borrowing to go unnoticed or unchallenged (20). An entry in Wesley's journal confirms that he could not consult Johnson on the matter because the Doctor was then in France (12: 145), and upon Dr. Johnson's return, Wesley sent a copy of his New Testament commentary to Johnson, apparently in appreciation. Johnson, clearly not offended at Wesley's use of his arguments, thanked Wesley for his support on the issue of colonial sovereignty, expressed pleasure at having "gained such a mind as [Wesley's]," and equated the Methodist leader with Plato: "The lecturer was surely in his right who, though he saw his audience slinking away, refused to quit the chair while Plato staid" (Letter No. 451, *Letters* 101). By 1779, Johnson apparently knew Wesley well enough and held him in high enough esteem to address to Wesley a letter of introduction for Boswell so that the two "worthy

and religious men" might meet (Boswell 3: 394). Wesley likewise had developed deep admiration for Dr. Johnson, even defending Johnson against charges that "A Tour of the Western Isles" presented unnecessarily harsh images of that region (see Wesley's *Journal*, Vol. 4, page 74). Wesley's defense of Johnson included, as well, a public statement in his Sermon 102.

Johnson's personal knowledge and acquaintance with Methodism and John Wesley apparently came later in his life. On at least one occasion about a month before Johnson's death, Wesley's visit was lengthy. In his journal entry Wesley records, "I spent two hours with that great man, Dr. Johnson, who is sinking into the grave by gentle decay" (4: 265). Although the two disagreed on petty issues like tea drinking (Brantley 149), their conversations surely centered on mutual spiritual concerns. As Bowmer concludes,

It is quite probable that they met more frequently than we know, and there is every reason to believe that the pair of them — two of the keenest intellects of the century — each appreciated and profited by the other's point of view (12).

Whatever the degree of contact between Wesley and Johnson, their theological concerns were mutual. Some of those concerns surface in the nine sermons which Richard E. Brantley lists as obviously influenced by the evangelical movement (160). Still, most of Dr. Johnson's topics are traditional, including support of the monarchy. Each sermon, based on a Biblical passage, is developed in the conventional style of pulpit oratory and is less remarkable for uniqueness of thought than for elaborate style. The critic who approaches the sermons expecting to find glaringly obvious evangelical doctrines will be disappointed. Most sentiments stem from Johnson's disapproval of trends within the Church of England — the same trends, however, which Wesley viewed with disfavor. Neither man could overlook the flaws in the clergy, non-retirement of feeble and inept ministers, dull sermons, and a nonchalant attitude toward administration of the sacraments. The Evangelists' desire to reinvigorate the Church and to promote an ecumenical attitude appealed to Johnson and Wesley alike.

On one of the most controversial religious issues of the day — salvation by faith alone — one might, though, expect Johnson and Wesley to differ sharply. The extent to which Johnson accepted this belief has long been discussed, and Johnson's apparent orthodoxy and fear of schism would lead one to assume that he recoiled in horror from the idea that individuals might find

salvation by knowing only in their hearts that they had been saved. Yet, the idea of salvation by faith is rarely explored in relation to Dr. Johnson, not because he would have necessarily rejected what became a cornerstone of Methodism, but because the doctrine itself has been misunderstood:

Scholars seem to wince at the very idea that he could have inclined to the Methodist heart of Anglican faith, and it is not that they misunderstand Johnson's belief — they apparently misunderstand Wesley's kind of Evangelical belief (Brantley 150).

In fact, throughout their sermons, both Johnson and Wesley advocate a change of heart, to accept unseen things on faith and to realize that such faith is essential to holiness as well as to eternal life.

Although Johnson was unsympathetic toward any belief in "inner" or "inward light," something he "wrongly attributed to the Methodists rather than the Quakers and mystics" (Hudson 210), he could not dismiss the individual's responsibility for personal salvation. Donald Greene points out in *The Politics of Samuel Johnson* that Johnson felt private religious experiences, which were neither mystical nor enthusiastic, could occur within the framework of orthodox Anglicanism (50-1). In Sermon 13, Johnson acknowledges that "To give the heart to God, and to give the whole heart, is very difficult; the last, the great effort of long labour, fervent prayer, and diligent meditation" (14: 143). And, Harry Belshaw contends that one of Johnson's last great efforts was in the direction of salvation by faith. He cites Johnson's reading of Clarke's "Sermon on Faith" in 1773 and his reading of Rotherham's sermon "On the Origin of Faith" on Easter of 1766 as two instances of Johnson's late interest in this evangelical doctrine (233). In addition, Johnson's concern with his own faith journey is revealed in his journal entry for March 29, 1766: "I had this day a doubt like Baxter of my state, and found that my Faith though weak, was yet Faith" (1: 106).

The faith of which Johnson speaks is a belief in both the revealed truths of religion (equivalent to *fides*) and a trust in the forgiveness of God (equivalent to *fiducia*) (Chapin 74). The relationship of such faith to reason posed a theological dilemma for Johnson and other thinkers. While Johnson was not in full accord with Luther in holding faith and reason as completely distinct, neither did he accept fully the idea of faith as "rational assent." Faith, for Johnson as for John Locke, "could not be equated with the philosophical deductions of natural religion" (Hudson 22) and need not be proved through reason or demonstration. Nicholas Hudson correctly observes that Johnson's state-

ments "suggest that he placed very little importance on faith itself" as distinguished from good works (23), but Johnson was still Anglican and Anglican theology had long emphasized the doctrine of justification by faith. Article 11 of the Thirty-nine Articles of Faith declared: "We are accounted righteous before God, only . . . by Faith and not for our own works and deservings; wherefore that we are justified by Faith only is a most wholesome Doctrine. . ." (qtd. in Ayling 92n). So wholesome was the doctrine that Greene calls it "the foundation of the whole edifice of Johnson's religion, as it was of eighteenth-century Anglicanism, and of Protestantism generally" ("Dr. Johnson's" 87). Article 11, however, was "one of the many official doctrines which eighteenth-century orthodoxy conveniently ignored" while charity (i.e., good works) remained the "chief condition of salvation" (Hudson 171).

What bothered Johnson most, as revealed in the sermons, was that good people had not yet discovered, or had forgotten, that faith alone was the foundation of Christianity. "Their religion is sincere," wrote Johnson, "what is reprehensible is, that it is partial, that the heart is yet not purified. . ." (Sermon 13, 14: 144). Johnson encourages individuals to "awaken to their eternal interest" (Sermon 10, 14: 111), a phrase most often associated with evangelical revival of the spirit. All about him, Johnson observed the seemingly pious whom he judged as devoid of religion since their salvation by faith was lacking:

Many men may be observed, not agitated by very violent passions, nor overborne by any powerful habits, not depraved by any great degrees of wickedness; men who are honest dealers, faithful friends, and inoffensive neighbors; who yet have no vital principle of religion. . . (Sermon 19, 14: 110-11).

That vital principle was, as Johnson expressed in Dodd's sermon to the convicts (Sermon 28), a belief in salvation by faith, obedience, and repentance. Such emphasis on faith was advocated by Wesleyan Methodists and, perhaps, influenced Johnson to comment that condemned criminals should be attended by a Methodist preacher or Popish priest because Anglican ministers would "probably not impress their minds sufficiently" (Boswell 4: 329).

John Wesley had begun preaching the doctrine of salvation through faith as early as March of 1738 (Ayling 91), but even among the Methodists, the doctrine was misunderstood, as Wesley pointed out in his Sermon 106. Listeners wrongly assumed that faith alone guaranteed salvation and that the most righteous whose hearts had not been awakened were doomed to damnation:

Indeed, nearly fifty years ago, when the Preachers, commonly called Methodists began to preach that grand scriptural doctrine, salvation by faith, they were not sufficiently apprized of the difference between a servant and a child of God. They did not clearly understand, that even one "who feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him" (7: 199).

Wesley concludes his sermon by assuring the angry, frustrated, or unenlightened members of his audience that not knowing their sins are forgiven makes them servants of God but by no means children of the devil. Just as Johnson is sometimes considered as one who would reject salvation by faith, Wesley is sometimes misunderstood as one who will admit no salvation except by faith. In fact, both men stood firm on the middle ground.

As Hudson points out, "In *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* (1743) Wesley denied that faith could ever 'contradict' reason, but he did insist on the entire helplessness of reason without preliminary faith" (23). Like Johnson's "faith," the faith of which Wesley spoke was not provable by reason: "It is where sense can be of no farther use, that faith comes in to our help; it is the grand desideratum; it does what none of the senses can..." (Sermon 113, 7: 259). For Wesley, faith was imperative before good works qualified as a means of obtaining God's favor. Following the teachings of Article 11, Wesley insisted, "There must be something good in the heart before any of our works are good" (Ayling 91). On this point Wesley and Johnson differed, for Johnson contended that good works gave rise to faith (Hudson 24).

Still, among his neighbors, Wesley saw the same people whom Johnson saw, people pious in action but completely unaware of true religion. Faith in the grace of God was, once again, the missing ingredient:

A man may be orthodox in every point, he may not only espouse right opinions, but zealously defend them against all opposers . . . and yet it is possible he may have no religion at all, no more than a Jew, Turk, or Pagan... and may, all the while, be as great a stranger as he to the religion of the heart (Sermon 7, 5:78).

But Wesley's admonition to have a "a heart right toward God and man" (Sermon 7, 5: 80) was too often interpreted as dangerous enthusiasm. Wesley, like Johnson, detested enthusiasm (an issue too complex to explore in this short paper) and insisted that one could be awakened to a faith which was more than an outward change in behavior, a faith which could be instrumental in assuring salvation. Simply "not to curse or swear, not to lie or

slander, not to be a drunkard, a thief or a whoremonger, not to speak or do evil" (Wesley, Sermon 134, 7: 456) did not entitle one to enter heaven. These behavioral changes were not enough for those who, like Wesley and Johnson, would endorse salvation by faith. An "inward change" was needed as well (Wesley, Sermon 107, 7: 205). Just as Johnson revealed to the convicts hearing Dodd's address that faith was the foremost but not the only means for salvation, Wesley taught that "God does not, will not, give that faith unless we seek it with all diligence in the way which He hath ordained" (*Christian Perfection* 69). Neither of these great thinkers could depart from orthodoxy enough to envision faith in God's grace as given in a sudden flash of Divine inspiration.

Faith, once attained, did, nevertheless, make salvation more probable. The heart changed by and filled with faith was not yet free from all temptation, though. Johnson feared that a Christian, having convinced himself of his inward faith, might "relieve himself of the trouble of having to maintain decent outward behavior" (Greene, "Dr. Johnson's" 81). He could become an antinomian, failing to do good for others since he knew he qualified for salvation. Greene notes that upon these grounds Wesley also warned against justification by faith alone ("Dr. Johnson's" 83), a doctrine not really equivalent to antinomianism but one which "Anglican divines of the Restoration insisted on equating . . . with antinomianism" (Hudson 195-6). Wesley often preached against antinomianism and feared the hypocrisy it generated: "Beware of Antinomianism," he warned, "— [of] 'making void the law,' or any part of it, 'through faith.' Enthusiasm naturally leads to this; indeed, they can scarce be separated" (*Christian Perfection* 117-18). As John Lawson points out in discussing Methodist discipline, Wesley and his followers were reluctant to place an inordinate emphasis on saving faith. The true test came in how that faith was applied in society, not in a moving account of personal spiritual experience (184). Wesley concluded, "The question is not concerning the heart, but the life" (*Journal* 3: 285). Johnson echoes Wesley on this point: "To live religiously, is to walk, not by sight, but by faith; to act in confidence of things unseen, in hope of future recompence, and in fear of future punishment" (Sermon 10, 14: 110). The "things not seen" (Heb. 11:1) to which Johnson refers are indeed the "rewards and punishments of the hereafter" and not Wesley's "great mysteries of God and heaven" (Hudson 23).

Still, faith was the core of the egalitarian theology of both men. For Johnson, as well as Wesley, faith was the foundation of primitive Christianity and was available to all regardless of relig-

ious sect or social position. Chapin summarizes Johnson's conviction: "Johnson, of course, held the orthodox view that the essentials of Christianity are few and simple: the illiterate peasant is quite as well off so far as prospective salvation is concerned as the most learned bishop in the land" (50).

This extension of simple faith to all was the key to Methodism's lay preaching, itineracy, and doctrines:

The theology of Methodism was democratic in its implications. Christian experience was possible to all men. Wesley declared that it came not through birth nor culture nor intellect, but through a change of heart (Edwards 179).

Faith, a change of heart, could bring to any person holiness as well as eternal happiness.

There must have been little in the actual doctrine of justification by faith against which Johnson could have voiced disagreement. Although much attention has been given to Johnson's "late conversion" in an effort to determine to what extent the conversion was evangelical,¹ the question seems immaterial for understanding Johnson's basic religious sentiments. As Lionel Basney illustrates, the true significance of Johnson's conversion is not its evangelical nature but the relief of his skepticism which resulted (89-91). Johnson did not differ drastically from any other pious individual in believing that faith was essential to salvation. If this belief brought him comfort, especially as he neared death, it only serves to confirm his deep religiosity, a trait rarely attributed to the great Doctor. Rather, as an active participant in the eighteenth century's intense examination of Christian principles, Johnson's faith has traditionally been described as "exceedingly weak," his mind as ill-fit for abstract speculation, and his argument with Christianity as colored by irrationality and prejudice (Hudson 18, 7). In reconsidering Johnson's conversion, though, Greene points out that faith in the grace of God was of prime importance for Johnson:

To assert this [that man is not saved by faith alone] is to reduce the whole of Johnson's rich religious life to nonsense: the belief was the indispensable keystone of the whole structure, the heart of Johnson's personal religious problem... ("Dr. Johnson's" 91).

Johnson like Wesley considered Christianity "a matter of the heart" or nothing (Greene, "Dr. Johnson's" 86). When the doctrine of salvation by faith was attacked as a denunciation of holiness and good works, Wesley responded as if the heart of his religious beliefs had been struck:

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It would be so, if we spake, as some do, of a faith which was separate from these: But we speak of a faith which is not so, but productive of all good works, and all holiness (Sermon 1, 5: 12).

If this was the faith shared by both men, then they were companions in evangelism, an evangelism that addressed the greatest theological controversy of the century by stressing faith *and* good works as the means of attaining salvation. Wesleyan salvation by faith never excluded good works; Johnsonian benevolence never excluded faith. While Johnson and Wesley may have taken divergent paths toward accepting the concept of salvation by faith, those paths converged in the last years of Johnson's life. The surviving sermons confirm that Johnson accepted and shared some Wesleyan ideas, including this one crucial to the religious life of his age. Perhaps, then, James Boswell's comment is not so incredible that "in a dignified manner, [Samuel Johnson] was a Methodist" (1: 458).

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Notes

¹Two principal discussions of Johnson's so-called "evangelical" conversion can be found in *Johnsonian Studies* [Ed. Magdi Wahba. Cairo: Oxford UP, 1962]. Chester Chapin's study "Samuel Johnson's 'Wonderful' Experience" (pp. 51-60) and Donald Greene's article "Dr. Johnson's 'Late Conversion': A Reconsideration" (pp. 61-92) provide contrasting opinions on the subject.

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Human reflection in Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*

In his *Life of Samuel Johnson*, James Boswell records the following comments from Johnson on the comparative merits of Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding:

there is all the difference in the world between characters of nature and characters of manners, and there is the difference between the characters of Fielding and those of Richardson. Characters of manners are very entertaining; but they are to be understood by a more superficial observation than characters of nature, where a man must dive into the recesses of the human heart (qtd. in Moore, 162).

The same distinction seems implicit in Johnson's other, even more well-known comment (also recorded by Boswell) regarding the two novelists: "... there was as great a difference between them as between a man who knew how a watch was made [Richardson], and a man who could tell the hour by looking at the dial-plate [Fielding]" (Moore, 162).

One might paraphrase Johnson's argument as follows: Richardson creates "characters of nature," Fielding "characters of manners"; characters of nature are better than characters of manners because they require a more penetrating knowledge of human nature; therefore, Richardson's characters are superior to Fielding's. This argument is probably the origin of what has become a well-established critical convention: Fielding is a novelist who concentrates exclusively on "exteriors" — that is, on the physical and material causes and consequences of behavior in his characters — while for the most part ignoring their "interiors" — the psychological and emotional processes by which they come to hold a belief or choose a course of action.

Critics sympathetic to Fielding have long been vexed by this argument, and have developed a particular kind of response to it, what I shall call the "argument from aesthetics." One early version of this argument is offered by Ian Watt, who freely acknowledges that *Tom Jones* is not an especially well-developed character. But for Watt, this lack of psychological development in Jones — far from being a defect — is appropriate, indeed essential for Fielding's art:

[Fielding] is not interested in the exact configuration of motives in any particular person's mind at any particular

time, but only in those features of the individual which are necessary to assign him to his moral and social species. He therefore studies each character in the light of his general knowledge of human behavior, of "manners", and anything purely individual is of no taxonomic value. Nor is there any need to look inside; if, as Johnson said, Fielding gives us the husk, it is because the surface alone is usually quite sufficient to identify the specimen (110).

Watt believes, then, that Fielding's literary art, which "allotted characterization a much less important place in his total literary structure," demands a less well-developed kind of character, and so to accuse him of failing to create what would never have answered his purposes is unfair (105).

Much the same argument emerges from Maynard Mack's comparison of *Joseph Andrews* and *Pamela*. The difference in how the two writers handle characterization, Mack asserts, is a function of the difference between the "comic" and "tragic" modes of fiction. The tragic mode (of which Richardson's novels are examples) stresses "...the uniqueness and finality of human experience, as man the transient individual moves through his world from a situation which is datum to a destiny developing from himself" (56). The comic mode, in contrast, emphasizes:

... the permanence and typicality of human experience as projected in persistent social species whose sufficient destiny is simply to go on revealing themselves to us. For this reason, the great comic characters in literature, whether Shakespeare's, Fielding's, or Dickens', do not *essentially* change. They are enveloped in events without being involved in them, and they remain immutable like Fielding's lawyer... (57).

Here again, the basic argument concerns artistic intentions. Fielding's art is comic, and psychologically complex characters would add nothing to the comedy. Thus, to condemn Joseph Andrews or Parson Adams for being less complex than Pamela is comparable to condemning Puck or Bottom for being less complex than Hamlet. In neither case is the criticism terribly relevant.

More recently, Claude Rawson has approached this issue from a rather different direction, focusing on the way in which the two writers handle dialogue. Both exhibit a keen ear for "the cadences and vocabulary of the actual spoken language", but while Fielding prefers "readily recognizable social idiom," particularly "cant phrases which reveal moral and social attitudes," Richardson tends towards "the living accent of colloquial speech," towards "those singular ... usages in expressive common speech

which come from the need to express a particular feeling more exactly" (284-87). As innovative and useful as this approach is as a means of distinguishing the two writers, however, its implications for how they handle characterization point in an entirely traditional and familiar direction. The speech of Richardson's characters seems to reflect a real individual attempting, albeit clumsily, to say something genuine about how she perceives the world. The speech of Fielding's characters reflects no such individuality; it is, instead, the highly stylized and abstracted speech of a general social type, and it shows "Fielding not only capturing those cliché phrases which typically reveal certain attitudes, but collecting them in the abstract — that is, outside of actual conversations" (291).

Broadly speaking, then, the critical tradition which Watt, Mack, and Rawson represent has sought to challenge Johnson's judgment of the two novelists while largely accepting the dichotomy on which it is based. The critics argue that Fielding's art and vision of life are comic, and thus do not require characters with an extensively developed "inner" life; indeed, such development would be out of place in his world, and would only detract from his art. Fielding's technique of characterization certainly makes him a different kind of novelist than Richardson, but hardly an inferior one.

I can think of no more appropriate response to this argument than to quote Fielding's own comment in *Tom Jones* on the view that virtue necessarily leads to happiness. It is, he observes, "a very wholesome and comfortable doctrine, and to which we have but one objection, namely, that it is not true" (*TJ*, 695). In calling this argument false, I want to make clear that I wholeheartedly agree with these critics that it is unfair to judge all writers (especially two as different as Fielding and Richardson) according to a single criterion. Both have their virtues and shortcomings, and it is absurd to reject one simply because he is unlike the other. Nonetheless, the traditional defense of Fielding assumes that his characters never reflect, that we never see their inner life. This is not the case. In both *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* there are a number of instances in which we *do* go inside a character's mind, and observe directly the process by which he or she reaches a decision.

A good example of this occurs in *Joseph Andrews* when Lady Booby has dismissed Joseph from her service after he has rejected her amorous advances:

The poor lady could not reflect without agony that her dear reputation was in the power of her servants.... But

what hurt her most was, that in reality she had not so entirely conquered her passion; the little god lay lurking in her heart, though anger and disdain so hoodwinked her that she could not see him. She was a thousand times on the very brink of revoking the sentence she had passed against the poor youth. Love became his advocate, and whispered many things in his favour. Honour likewise endeavored to vindicate his crime, and Pity to mitigate his punishment. On the other side, Pride and Revenge spoke as loudly against him. And thus the poor lady was tortured with perplexity, opposite passions distracting and tearing her mind different ways (*JA*, 36).

The point at which Fielding leaves this internal debate would suggest a stalemate, though since Lady Booby never does call Joseph back, we know (eventually) that "Pride and Revenge" emerge as the winners. The outcome, however, is less important than the terms on which the debate takes place. Honor and pity, two noble sentiments, have a small part in it, but their role is minor compared to that of pride, revenge, and love, the name Fielding (ironically) gives to Lady Booby's lust. And the real moral point of the matter — that she has unfairly dismissed a dutiful servant simply because he refused to sleep with her — is hardly visible amidst all this passionate wrangling.

The result of such reflection is not always so unfavorable. Another example, this one from *Tom Jones*, illustrates an apparent triumph of conscience. Black George, the gamekeeper on Squire Western's estate, faces a crisis of conscience when Mrs. Honour gives him money which he is to deliver to Jones. Black George's conscience urges him to do what is right, but his avarice responds that since George has already stolen 500£ which Alworthy gave to Jones, "it was absurd, if not downright hypocrisy, to affect any qualms at this trifle" (*TJ*, 295). The debate between conscience and avarice proceeds, and Fielding tells us that:

... poor conscience had certainly been defeated in the argument, had not fear stepped in to her assistance, and very strenuously urged, that the real difference between the two actions, did not lie in the different degree of honour, but of safety: for that the secreting the 500£ was a matter of very little hazard; whereas the detaining the sixteen guineas was liable to the utmost danger of discovery. By this friendly aid of fear, conscience obtained a complete victory in the mind of Black George, and after making him a few compliments on his honesty, forced him to deliver the money to Jones (*TJ*, 295).

Fielding makes clear in this case that right triumphs not by merit, but by default. If conscience had really won the debate, Black George would be returning all the money to Jones; as it turns out, he decides not to steal only because he is afraid, in this instance, of getting caught.

Most of the examples of reflection are similar to these two in that the outcome is either a bad decision or else an acceptable decision supported by bad reasons. There is, so far as I can tell, only one instance in either novel when both the process and the result of reflection are morally sound. Tom Jones does the reflecting in this case, and the occasion of his dilemma is a love letter he has received from Arabella Hunt. Jones considers whether, given his growing poverty, his bleak financial prospects, and the remote probability of his ever marrying Sophia Western, he should perhaps abandon any further hopes of her and just accept Mrs. Hunt's offer of marriage. His thinking runs as follows:

This lady's fortune would have been exceeding convenient to him, and he could have no objection to her in any respect. On the contrary, he liked her as well as he did any woman except Sophia. But to abandon Sophia, and marry another, that was impossible; he could not think of it upon any account. Yet why should he not, since it was plain she could not be his? Would it not be kinder to her, than to continue her longer engaged in a hopeless passion for him? Ought he not do so in friendship to her? This notion prevailed some moments, and he had almost determined to be false to Sophia from a high point of honour; but that refinement was not able to stand very long against the voice of nature, which cried in his heart, that such friendship was treason to love (*TJ*, 734).

Initially, Tom's reflection carries him off toward a thoroughly misguided action in the name of "honour." The primary difference between this instance and the others is that what Fielding calls the "voice of nature" proves stronger, and brings an abrupt halt to Tom's mental gymnastics.

There are several other examples in these works of the same kind of reflection, but they vary little from those already discussed.¹ Taken together, they present a highly unflattering picture of the human mind at work, the common features of which include: a dialogue or debate between two or more competing feelings or passions; a line of reasoning on one or both sides that seems morally or logically suspect; and an outcome which almost always reflects narrow self-interest disguised as genuine moral virtue. And given the number of these instances

and the relative consistency of their structure, it seems fair to ask why critics anxious to defend Fielding have overlooked them. Several reasons suggest themselves.

First, the very consistency of the depictions helps to render them invisible. Morris Golden has argued convincingly that Fielding's own sense of divided loyalties — regarding his career, his politics, and his friends and family — are all clearly reflected in many of his novels (496-501). Though Golden does not mention any of the instances I have discussed, his interpretation would certainly help to explain the sheer prevalence of debates in Fielding's novels. Politics, education, punishment, honor, travel, classical literature, the stage — all these and more are subject of debate among Fielding's characters. Most of the debates solve nothing, and serve only to convince the disputants that their own views, which often reflect vanity or self-interest, are obviously right. That Fielding simply replicates inside his characters the disputatious structure of his world as a whole becomes, then, a reason for overlooking the interior debates. They seem like just more of the same.

Second, these depictions can seem a bit *too* consistent, which is to say a bit too stylized and mechanical, too much, perhaps, like what Rawson refers to as "set-pieces" which owe more to the tradition of farcical drama than to that of the novel (285). Moreover, the reflection that Fielding's characters engage in is random, patternless, and without apparent direction. Thus, it does not do what we have come to see as the real purpose of reflection in novels: to mark the stages of a character's development. Robert Alter has described Fielding as a novelist "...committed to perspicuity, not permeability, in the creation of character, and ... [his] refusal to render inner states is a conscious decision...made from the awareness that entering into his personages would preclude precisely the kind of knowledge of character in which he is interested" (63). There are two problems with Alter's view. It is inaccurate to say that Fielding refuses to render the inner states of his characters; we have already seen that, on occasion, he does make use of this device. It is also incorrect to say that we would learn nothing about his characters from seeing their minds at work. We do learn something, but *what* we learn is basically consistent with what we already know of them. That is, we see not a different aspect of his characters, but the same aspect from a different perspective. Still, Alter's larger point — that Fielding generally tends to depict his characters from the outside rather than the inside — is true. The fact that Alter should ignore the rendering of interior states suggests, as much as anything, the

triumph of a Samuel Johnson-like view on the true (that is, accepted) literary purpose of human reflection in novels.

Third, with the notable exception of *Tom Jones*'s deliberations, the outcome of these internal disputes suggests a rather dark view of human nature, a view which is at odds with the conventional understanding of Fielding's ethical psychology. Traditionally, critics have seen in Fielding the latitudinarian's belief in the natural goodness of mankind. The "good-natured man," as Martin Battestin puts it, "suffers with the wretched and delights with the fortunate, [and] the pain that he feels in the presence of misery urges him to take active measures to alleviate distress and promote happiness" (68-69). This description would certainly apply to Abraham Adams or *Tom Jones*, though not to characters like Blifil or Lady Booby. And it certainly does not fit the picture of the human mind we usually get when Fielding enters into a character's mind. There, the reasoning is hypocritical, the result is self-serving, and any sense of charity towards others is either hopelessly under-represented or else entirely absent from the proceedings. It is a view of the human mind and its processes which seems less like a latitudinarian than a Hobbesian.

It would be a mistake to make too much of Fielding's forays into the mental states of his characters. The examples I have discussed do not suggest some vast, undiscovered level of psychological complexity in Black George or Lady Booby; they do not render Fielding's Sophia or Fanny indistinguishable from Richardson's Pamela or Clarissa; and they do not make Fielding an adherent of a Hobbes-like ethical egoism. So the main differences between Fielding and Richardson remain largely unchanged. They do, however, make some of the traditional ideas about Fielding's technique of characterization, his interest in the inner states of his characters, and his optimism about the human condition all slightly less neat and clean. In short, they help to make Fielding the artist and Fielding the moral psychologist more complex. Such complexity is nothing bad. If it is a virtue in the characters of a novel, as Johnson has taught us, it is acceptable in the criticism of the novelists themselves as well.

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Notes

¹ See also, *Joseph Andrews*, pp. 61, 91–92, and 179; in *Tom Jones*, 323–24, 352–53, and 409.

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George Crabbe's women and the intimidations of feminist criticism

Feminist criticism, the critical movement that seeks to give presence and voice to the female in literature, literary history, and criticism, runs the risk of silencing the newly awakening woman as it strives to empower her. While it devotes itself to freeing women from the damaging effects of their misrepresentation in literature and underrepresentation as writers and readers, it tends to stratify its own critical approaches into a hierarchy that devalues those feminist strategies most accessible to the woman it seeks to serve. If the social reforms that are the goal of feminism had been fully realized, it might be appropriate to let go of the socio-historical methods that initially enabled women to recognize the disparities between their literary images and their lived experience and to focus exclusively on more esoteric concerns of theory and ideology. This would be appropriate because women would no longer be educated primarily by men in institutions that focus, for the most part, on the works of male writers. Women would not become stalled in their struggle to locate themselves in the subjects under study and the structures of learning and interpretation. There would never again be a time when a female student would realize that she was, for the same frustrations of exclusion that motivated Virginia Woolf (31), sketching in anger an ugly Professor Von X.

But those reforms have not been accomplished, and in their absence each new generation of women, each new class of students (male and female), needs at least the same opportunities for discovering themselves and their sisters in literature as were available to earlier feminists. Lillian Robinson says that "the experience of any woman who begins to inquire into her own condition recapitulates that of her predecessors" (98). That inquiry will, for many, be greatly facilitated by the socio-historical approach which, as Janet Todd says, "formed the base and condition of later study [and] was, in a way, the begetter of us all" (1).

The historical approach to feminist criticism has, however, suffered an image problem of late. As the field has developed increasingly esoteric branches and has achieved new levels of sophistication by subsuming methodologies from Marxism and psychoanalysis and incorporating aspects of language study and deconstruction, socio-historical criticism in Janet Todd's words "inevitably, like a mother, appears naive in the light of changing

modes," while "the more sophisticated readings that are now privileged derive from a time and place when certain forms of feminist and gender criticism are inevitably the preserve of the mandarin or the theoretical academic" (1).

Any school of criticism that captures the attention of some part of the literary world will develop and mature as it benefits from the dialogue it inspires among critics, establishes its dogma, and analyzes its relationship to earlier or contemporary critical theories. For feminism, however, this normal growth pattern takes an ironic twist. When its growth as a field of criticism outstrips its growth as a social reform, it leaves behind in the dust a doubly alienated group of women. They are the children of traditionally patriarchal institutions, schooled in the language and lessons of traditional literature, where women's studies are still marginal, if available. Each of these women will, even today, confront the disorienting issues of gender in relative isolation when recognition of the disparity between what she learns and what she lives becomes inescapable at a personal level. If she begins to give voice to her experience, it will most likely be in the context of the traditional studies available to her that she makes her start.

Should she begin to explore the male works on her syllabus as a female reader, she will learn that what she is doing, by virtue of its perspective, is feminist. If she then turns to the rich and varied body of feminist works to find her direction, she may find that what she is doing, by virtue of its traditional approach, is passé.

No school of thought remains static to avoid alienating newcomers. No novice should expect direct entry to the realm of the shaman. But the roads of access should be left open. Bridges should not be burned if those bridges span the abyss between social structures and the female experience.

When a student of eighteenth-century literature is awakened by the works of George Crabbe to the startling presence of women, she is on the threshold of the sort of investigation that gave birth to feminist criticism. In Crabbe's *Tales*, she will find mothers who are capable of as wide a range of behaviors, both honorable and dishonorable, as the fathers in his works. She will discover that Crabbe recognizes in woman-to-woman relationships dynamics that change the course of lives both male and female, that he sees with clarity women of middle-age and beyond, a group invisible even to most modern-day writers. This awakening student becomes aware of her own surprise at Crabbe's ability to depict women as full participants in the social dramas of life. He rejects the stereotypes that have locked them into the limited realms of the shallow, card-playing beauty or the

self-sacrificing mother and allows them the whole range of human behaviors. She begins to acknowledge her own very narrow expectations of women on the printed page when she discovers in *Tales* women-in-print who are as varied and multidimensional as women-in-life and when she realizes that, for her, the most unexpected manifestation of this is the influence females have on one another.

The student is taken aback by these women. Their presence on the page is so easy, so natural a part of the work, that she is stricken by the enormity of the injustice she feels at her own reaction. Her thrill, her open-mouthed surprise, forces her to confront the unjustifiable absence of real women from the works that have been the focus of her literary studies. She has now begun the journey into literature that was begun in much the same way by the pioneering feminists. Had the institutions that schooled her kept her abreast of their progress and the multiple directions of their followers, she could move more directly into the mainstream of their current concerns, but this has not happened.

The enthusiasm of discovery may be kept alive in her, if early in her foray into feminist criticism she encounters writers like Janet Todd, who is sympathetic to the values of the historical approach, or like Annette Kolodny who welcomes the newcomer with these understanding words:

[W]e read well, and with pleasure, what we already know how to read; and what we know how to read is to a large extent dependent upon what we have already read (works from which we developed our expectations and learned our interpretive strategies). . . . Radical breaks are tiring, demanding, uncomfortable, and sometimes wholly beyond our comprehension (154-55).

She will grow through the guidance of critics like Beer, whose focus on gender formation and the unlikeness of the past and whose articulate discussions on "re-presenting literature representing women" (68), provide a comfortable transition from the familiar to techniques influenced by deconstructionist approaches. The student is capable of finding her way into the rich and rewarding labyrinth of the field of feminist criticism if she is not repelled at its borders.

Elaine Showalter describes the development of feminist criticism to its present state as a three-stage process. In the early years it focused on "exposing the misogyny of literary practice" (5), concerning itself with the misrepresentation of women in literature and their exclusion from literary history. In its second stage it discovered and explored the literature of women, investigating

the nature of a female literary consciousness, and marshalling efforts to recover lost works by women. In its third stage it demanded "a radical rethinking of the conceptual grounds of literary study, a revision of the accepted theoretical assumptions about reading and writing that have been based entirely on male literary experiences" (8).

For women arriving on the scene during this third phase, the barriers can be formidable. If the decision to step away from the confining limitations of traditional literary studies feels risky, the risk seems to multiply geometrically when Maggie Humm points out that "every act of criticism is political in its shaping of personal as political experience" (18) and presses upon one the realization that the issue spreads beyond gender to encompass class, race, and sexual preference as well. In demonstrating the range of techniques and ideas that are now encompassed in feminist criticism, Humm suggests that it could "well be the *only* literary criticism needed by women students" (x) and goes on to say that more important than any of the concerns described by Showalter in her descriptions of phases one and two is the third phase effort "to re-evaluate the whole terrain of criticism itself as mapped out and colonized by men" (6). Evelyn Fox Keller describes the "immense subversive power" in a deconstructionist application of feminist theory and calls for a commitment to "nothing less . . . than the deconstruction and reconstitution of conventional knowledge" (67).

The student who was moved by the realism of George Crabbe's female characters may by now be reeling from her vertiginous leap into the tumultuous center of feminism. She is no doubt thrilled by its goals and awed by its practitioners, but she might also find (to her regret) that she identifies quite closely with a male critic, K. K. Ruthven, when he finds "feminist literary criticism" to be a "deceptively serene label for the contestations it identifies" (4). She probably feels a strong need to draw back and focus on some small, manageable part of the whole, to excuse herself from the broader picture where her ignorance will be exposed and where techniques familiar to her will be disdained for their patriarchal roots. Her heady pleasure at examining the women in *Tales* is tempered by a confused concern that she does some disservice by being so deeply interested in a male text. She fears that if she writes a piece that is labeled "feminist," she will naively align herself with one aspect of the movement and alienate herself from another before understanding either. She sees the project that inspired her, the discovery that awakened her, as hopelessly "phase one." She has arrived too late. Should she find herself sketching Professor Von X's female counterpart, she

would recognize not anger, but an awe that threatens to be equally silencing.

The danger of phase three is that it may become exclusionary, forcing out all efforts that could be categorized as belonging to earlier phases and establishing an elitist hold on the terrain of feminist criticism. The three stages must be allowed to continue simultaneously if the field is to remain accessible to newcomers. It must not become the exclusive province of what Janet Todd has called "theoretical modes that have killed off not only the authoritarian male author but the tentative and hardly heard female one as well" (7). Feminist criticism deepens and broadens in sophistication and scope because it has drawn the attention of brilliant, creative minds, but not because it has met the goals of its earliest efforts. It must continue to concern itself with the misrepresentation of women in literature as long as that misrepresentation is ignored or glossed over in the mainstream of literary studies. It must continue to discover and present the literature of women so that the feminine voice is as recognizable and familiar and the female presence is as genuine as the male. And when it instigates radical change in the theoretical assumptions of the literary experience, these changes should close the door on no one.

Women must find within their own backgrounds, however traditional these may be, the resources and strategies that will enable them to connect with feminist criticism at a point of contact that has meaning for them. This point of contact should lead to their growth and participation, not to more intimidation and silencing. Any aspect of feminist critical theory that, however subtly, reduces their choices or demeans their efforts does a great disservice and discourages participation as effectively as does any patriarchal power structure.

A study of the female characters in George Crabbe's 1812 publication *Tales* affords a fresh reading of a work from the traditional canon. Crabbe does not champion the cause of women. But he remains, throughout his work, doggedly determined to portray with honesty and realism the common people of the village and countryside. Francis Jeffrey, a contemporary critic who found much to praise in Crabbe's poems, felt one of his "great errors" to be that he "described many things not worth describing" (91). His lowly subjects were often considered to be unsuitable topics for poetic treatment.

But Crabbe established popularity with a wide readership in his own time and left to the modern reader unique pictures of eighteenth-century life among the masses. These pictures are of

special value in that within their frames their maker has included the fleshed-out portraits of women as clearly delineated as any of the men whom he portrays. One cannot help feeling that Crabbe describes aspects of women's relationships that few men have even observed. A look at the woman-to-woman interactions in *Tales* offers a rich sampling.

Mother-daughter relationships catch our attention first, because they differ so widely from the stereotypes and from one another. In "The Frank Courtship" we have only a brief conversation between Sybil and her mother, but it conveys in simple terms the intergenerational stresses that distance them. The mother, trying to influence Sybil to accept her father's choice of a suitor for the girl, reminds her of the father's immovable nature, saying grimly of her own marriage, "Union like ours is but a bargain made / By slave and tyrant he will be obey'd" (272-73). Yet she goes on to say that she fears her daughter will be hurt if she marries for love, mistaking what she sees and feels for some inner worth in a man who may, in any event, die before her and leave her, if she loves him, to a needlessly anguished widowhood. Here is a mother who sets her own marriage up as an example, because she cannot be overly grieved by the loss of a man who never won her heart! We do not wonder that Sybil rejects the argument. We might even find in it echoes of the convoluted arguments we have had with our own mothers and daughters.

In "The Mother" we meet a full-blown she-villain, a mother whose love of self outweighs any feeling she has for her younger daughter. In this poem we tend to find ourselves more tied to tradition than the poet, always holding to a vague expectation that Motherhood will prove virtuous, and the daughter will be saved from irreparable damage. But Crabbe is showing us a woman who gave birth without rising to motherhood, who relegates the responsibility without relinquishing the control, and whose subtle powers of destruction go unchecked. She may not be attractive, but neither is she over-dramatized, and she serves, in combination with Crabbe's other women, as a dispeller of myth.

In three poems of the *Tales*, Crabbe depicts relationships between females roughly contemporary in age who, whether their encounters are brief or lasting, are destined to have a long-term effect on one another's lives. The entanglements between female characters are of particular interest not only because they are so rare in eighteenth-century poetry, but because they seem so genuine that, had Crabbe not signed these works, we might have attributed them to a female writer. Wordsworth said in notes he dictated in 1843 that "Crabbe obviously preferred

the company of women to that of men" (120). For this reason, Wordsworth found his talk to be "in miscellaneous society . . . so much below what might have been expected from a man so deservedly celebrated" (130). Perhaps it is also for this reason that women readers can find in Crabbe's female characters voice and gesture and sentiment that still ring absolutely true 2½ centuries later.

The most dramatic conflict between women in the *Tales* is that which develops between Anna and Eliza in "The Confidant." When Anna is blackmailed by Eliza, who shares a disgraceful secret from Anna's past, the escalating anguish of Anna and the decreasing subtlety of her friend's threats are developed with such honesty and economy that the structure of the poem and the efforts of the writer almost disappear.

In "Resentment" it is the employee of the resentful lady who provides the revealing woman-to-woman interaction. The poem is nearly at its end, the lady's core of bitterness set for life beneath a veneer of charity, when Susan, her all-forgiving servant, enters the story. First in the quiet example of her own life, finally in outspoken argument, Susan moves the lady to change her behavior. But, in the troubling twist that casts a shadow across so many of Crabbe's tales, the gesture comes too late. And, with the unanticipated fillip with which he gives life to so many of his females, Susan, not her employer, closes the poem with a lament of self-recrimination.

"Arabella," one of the less satisfying of the *Tales*, within its somewhat labored lines presents still another angle on female interactions. In this work Arabella changes from a young woman with impossibly high standards in men to an older, more desperate woman, willing to accommodate significant faults in a suitor. In the height of her disdain for males, she is championed by "a virgin friend" (1985), some years her senior, who praises the single state and seeks to make Arabella her disciple. When Arabella eventually shows signs of responding to a suitor's attentions, the friend tries to sabotage the romance. Crabbe seems less comfortable with this friend than he does with his other women. He interrupts her story with some stuffy moralizing.

Why are these gentle maidens prone to make

Their sister-doves the tempting world forsake?

Why all their triumph when a maid disdains

The Tyrant-sex, and scorns to wear its chains? (266-69).

And yet, he is not confident that his readers will accept Arabella's decision to disregard her, either, feeling it necessary to footnote the story with the caveat that we can evaluate her behavior only in terms

of her motivation. It is ambiguous whether Crabbe is bothered by these women or merely concerned about reader reaction.

Crabbe also weaves into his tales older women who have a pronounced influence on young nieces or friends. John Wilson says in his 1819 review of *Tales of the Hall* that this poet "sets us down in crowds of fierce and sullen men, contending against each other . . . with all the energies of exasperated passion" (114). Perhaps it is even more remarkable that he sets us down beside pairs of intimate women, contending, together or at odds, for a suitable role in their world. When Crabbe leads an ingénue to a mentor, he develops some of his best feminine interactions. His characters again surprise us in their freedom from stereotypes. The mature women influence their youngsters with varying degrees of success, sometimes leading them toward self-understanding, sometimes inspiring disgust or disillusionment, but always broadening their realms of reference.

The wealthy, widowed friend who welcomes Jesse in "Jesse and Colin" is a skillfully drawn schemer who sets her house guests and hangers-on to intriguing against one another and plans that Jesse will spy on all of them for her. She pulls Jesse into a swirl of veiled hostility where hypocrisy keeps everyone fawning. Jesse finds her own solutions, along the way receiving from her hostess the most vitriolic lines that Crabbe attributes to any of his women of the *Tales*:

The dame replied, "Then homeless may you rove,
 "The starving victim to a guilty love;
 "Branded with shame, in sickness doom'd to nurse
 "An ill-form'd cub, your scandal and your curse;
 "Spurn'd by its scoundrel father, and ill fed
 "By surly rustics with the parish-bread! (383-88).

It is a wonderfully female curse, another example of Crabbe's willingness to allow his women the whole range of human behaviors without sacrificing their gender identity. Lucy learns from this experience what she values in life. Again Crabbe acknowledges the importance of women in women's lives.

In "The Mother" Lucy finds in her stay with her aging aunt the only contentment that she would know in her short life. Crabbe saw beyond the myth that mothering is the exclusive province of the child-bearer. Those nurturing qualities that were missing in Lucy's mother were abundantly available in the childless aunt. All she was lacking to make Lucy's life lastingly happy was the power to keep her from the woman who bore her and ultimately reclaimed and destroyed her.

But Crabbe does not idealize surrogate motherhood, either. In "Procrastination" the aunt who rears Dinah is never able to let go. She delays Dinah's marriage by playing on Dinah's sense of obligation, by dangling before her the promise of inheritance, and, ultimately, by instilling in Dinah her own materialistic values. Crabbe shows one woman, slowly, over the course of years, creating another in her own image.

In "The Frank Courtship," Sybil Kindred learned to love life and stick to her convictions from her merry-widow aunt. Sybil's aunt is the most "liberated" of Crabbe's women. She lives far enough away from her family to escape their censure. She teaches Sybil to please her father on her annual visits home and to otherwise live her own life. When we see the daughter subtly deceive her father and feel pangs of conscience for it, we somehow expect Crabbe to pass harsh judgment on her.

He gazed admiring; she, with visage prim,
 Glanced an arch look of gravity on him;
 For she was gay at heart, but wore disguise,
 And stood a vestal in her father's eyes

.....
 Vain she was and flattery made her vain
 Her simulation gave her bosom pain (127-36).

But the eighteenth-century curate-poet is refreshingly free-thinking. When we believe Sybil is about to reject the wholesome life her parents wish for her, we find that she is able to embrace it fully, because she knows, and can demonstrate, that the choice is hers.

In "The Widow's Tale" we find perhaps the most charmingly and artfully drawn maiden and the most complex mentor relationship. There is amusement in Crabbe's portrayal of the delicate, educated Nancy Vale who, when she returns to her father's farm "knew not how / to pass a pig-sty or to face a cow" (3-4). Her repulsion at the hearty, heavy eating of her father and brothers is wonderfully comic. But the poet treats her tenderly and does not let us lose sympathy for a budding young woman who longs for a refined setting in which to bloom and is trapped instead in a world of rough, crude men who will value her only for strength at tasks she abhors. Katherine Rogers discusses in her study of eighteenth-century feminism the increasing willingness of women to express their wants and address their needs once they, like Nancy, are exposed to education. Crabbe recognizes the phenomenon in his own time and explores its frustration in a tiny, rural village.

The "pensive widow whose mild air and dress" (71) attract Nancy for the grace and breeding they suggest is another of

Crabbe's feminine surprises. We, like Nancy, expect to find her living a cut above the villagers, aloof in her tasteful cottage, finding refuge among her books and welcomed seclusion behind her twining jasmines. But this poet's women are not to be judged by appearances. The widow Lucinda is as full of solid, no-nonsense advice as Nancy's earthy father.

"But view me rightly, you will see no more

"Than a poor female, willing to be poor;

"Happy indeed, but not in books nor flowers,

"Not in fair dreams, indulged in earlier hours,

"Of never-tasted joys such visions shun,

"My youthful friend, nor scorn the farmer's son" (131-36).

The story of the widow's life unfolds antiphonally, Nancy resisting disillusionment with hopeful questions, Lucinda leading her gently back to reality with the unglamorous truth. Crabbe does not pass judgment on Lucinda's advice nor question whether Nancy's decision to adapt is in her own best interest. His central concern is with how it all comes about, that Nancy's contact with the village widow determines how she will spend the rest of her life.

George Crabbe knew women. He did not fail to see the implications of their interactions. Mother with daughter, friend with friend, protégé with mentor, in contacts of a few moments or entanglements of a lifetime, their exchanges are a central part of social drama that absorbed his attention and motivated his writing. The view he gives us of them enriches our understanding of his times and our own. Feminist criticism strengthens its ranks by preserving a place for the investigation of works like Crabbe's by women (or men) who can thereby add to our understanding of the treatment and mistreatment, the representation and misrepresentation of women in literature.

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Home's *Douglas* as patriotic mythopoiesis

"A people who lose their nationality create a legend to take its place." Edwin Muir, qtd. in Pittock¹

The first half of the 18th century saw the completion of a process that had begun with the unification of the Scottish and English thrones a century earlier. The Act of Union in 1707 dissolved the separate Scottish parliament, the chief emblem of Scottish political independence. In 1746, the last military expression of Scottish separatism ended in Bonnie Prince Charlie's defeat at Culloden. By mid-century, Scotland's future was inextricably bound up with that of England.

Although the political unification of the two countries was essentially complete, Scottish nationalism remained a potent force. It was nationalism with a new face: the insistence on a unique and separate national identity against the cultural hegemony of the more powerful, dominant partner in the union. Thus, for instance, both Jacobites and anti-Jacobites took part in creating the myth of the Stuarts as a counter to the sense of lost political identity (Pittock 5).

Like other small countries threatened with cultural erasure by a powerful and attractive neighboring culture, Scotland's assertion of national identity included the rediscovery of a unique national folklore and a romanticization of Scottish history. These two maneuvers merge in John Home's play *Douglas*, first performed at Canongate Theatre in Edinburgh in 1756, where it produced a sensation. While Home himself may not have realized the extent to which he was helping to weave the national myth, this mythopoiesis may help to explain the popularity and persistence on stage of an otherwise flawed tragedy — the one work for which the author is remembered, if at all.

Home was a Presbyterian minister who had served in the loyalist army during the 1745 Rising. His first dramatic effort, *Agis*, written immediately after Culloden, deals with an obscure Spartan king murdered by a rival while seeking the welfare of his people (Boas 261); the political subtext appears unavoidable, even if the sentiment is peculiar coming from an author who had, after all, taken arms against the Pretender.

Douglas reworks material from an old Scots ballad, "Gil Morrice," included in Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*. In the

ballad, Gil Morrice sends for Lady Barnard to meet him, but is betrayed by his messenger; Lord Barnard comes in her place and slays Morrice, whom he not surprisingly suspects of being his wife's lover. Only after the baron returns home with the youth's head on a spear does Lady Barnard reveal that Morrice is her son, the offspring of an illicit affair in her youth.

Home alters the story in several ways. In his account, the young Matilda was secretly married to the noble Douglas, the son of her family's hereditary enemy; soon after the marriage, both Douglas and her brother, the only witness to the nuptials, die in battle. She bears a child and sends him with her nurse to be raised in exile, to take his rightful place when it would be safe to do so; however, she believes both nurse and child to have been drowned.

Believing her chance for happiness destroyed, Matilda agrees to a loveless marriage with Lord Randolph, who has rescued her from less honorable suitors. On the eve of battle with the invading Danes, a mysterious youth appears to rescue Randolph from assassins; as a reward, the youth, Norval, receives a high place in the army. Lady Randolph discovers him to be her long-lost son, rightful heir to the Douglas name and to the lands which Lord Randolph now governs. They arrange to meet again, but Glenalvon, the play's villain, convinces Randolph that his wife has taken the youth as her lover. When Randolph and the young Douglas fight, Glenalvon treacherously stabs Douglas, who dies, but not before slaying the villain. The twice-bereaved mother throws herself from a cliff, leaving Randolph to mourn both mother and son.

This brief account should make it clear that this is not a political allegory along the lines of Yeats's *Cathleen ni Houlihan*; rather, like *The Countess Cathleen*, it dramatizes national ideals of leadership and heroism through a story that resists reduction to symbolic equivalents. The play's mythologizing character lies in its deployment of complementary echoes of Scottish folklore and of the great heroes of Scottish history, Greek myth, and Arthurian legend.

The substitution of "Douglas" for the source ballad's "Morrice" is a case in point — a double allusion, to yet another ballad, "The Douglas Tragedy," and to one of the most honored names of Scottish nobility. All that Home borrows from the ballad is the name — it tells of the abduction of a Douglas daughter by one Lord William, who slays her and is slain by her father, after which she, too, dies. The historical echoes are more significant, especially insofar as they illustrate the playwright's use of mythic rather than historic time.

Although the action of the play is nominally set in the middle of the twelfth century, *Douglas* actually conflates references to specific historical events from the ninth to the fourteenth centuries, situating it in a kind of heroic dream-time. The Danish invasions of Scotland took place from the eighth through the twelfth centuries, but the peak period for such activity was the ninth and tenth centuries; a massive invasion, such as that described in the play, was not known to occur in the mid-twelfth century, insofar as I have been able to discover (Dickinson 38). A reference to the Crusader Godfrey (IV. 59), who thrived in the eleventh century, seems to support the play's nominal setting; but a later reference to John of Lorn (IV.109), a contemporary of Robert the Bruce, would place the time in the early fourteenth. Rather than assume Home had his chronology wrong or that he was referring to an unknown ancestor of the historical John of Lorn, as editorial footnoters have done (Nettleton et. al. 660), could it not be that we are to recognize in these references a nonhistorical time — a literary or legendary Age of Heroes outside of real chronology?

Like John of Lorn, the historical Douglas family rose to prominence with Robert the Bruce around 1300 and flourished until about 1528 (Mitchison 51, 90). If the play is indeed set in the 12th century, its Douglas must belong to a period before the family could have been known for its great deeds and power; yet Douglas, in his dying scene, talks as if his descendants were his ancestors: "O had I fall'n as my brave fathers fell,/Turning with great effort the tide of battle!" (V. 206-06). Use of the family name in this case makes mythological if not historical sense, since the Douglasses certainly were renowned for their exploits in battle; James (the Black) Douglas died in a glorious fight while bearing the heart of Bruce to the Holy Land (Dickinson 177). According to legend, when his forces were surrounded by Saracens, the Black Douglas threw Bruce's heart into the midst of the enemy and led his men on a wild, suicidal drive to recover it.

Other historical names appear anachronistically in the play, further contributing to the vagueness about time associated with mythological and legendary figures. The Randolph family, for instance, were prominent around the time of Bruce, one Thomas Randolph acting as regent to Bruce's successor on the Scottish throne, David II (Dickinson 177). The Douglas and Randolph names thus evoke the period of Scotland's greatest military brilliance, just after the victory at Bannockburn preserved Scottish independence.

Lady Randolph, Matilda, bears a name associated with the royal family of Scotland. One Matilda was the daughter of King Malcolm III and wife to Henry I of England; another, daughter of the first, was the mother of Henry II. A granddaughter of Malcolm III, also named Matilda, married another English king, Stephen (Dickinson 75). The play's Matilda is the daughter of Malcolm, another royal Scottish name; note, too, that the play's Matilda and Malcolm would have lived about the time of the historical Malcolm III and his daughter, if the mid-twelfth century setting were to taken at face value.

In the Edinburgh prologue to the play, Home draws a parallel between Douglas and the Greek tragic heroes. In the process he compares Scotland to Athens, each a small state threatened by a much larger kingdom nearby (Persia in the case of Athens and, implicitly, England in the case of Scotland ["Caledonia"]); he then comments that Scottish audiences have enjoyed many of the Greek heroes. Now, he tells play-goers, prepare for something new — your very own Scottish hero:

This night our scenes no common tear demand:
He comes, the hero of your native land!
Douglas, a name through all the world renowned,
A name that rises like the trumpet sound!
(Prologue, 21-24).

This charge to the audience, which was not included in the London production, suggests Home was to some degree at least aware of his myth-making. Similar literary comparisons of the Stuart monarchs to both classical (especially Roman) figures and to Scottish heroes like Bruce and Wallace were common in Jacobite propaganda, according to Pittock (57-59).

The play's account of Douglas's upbringing echoes the childhoods of principal figures from the Grail story, as well as of Greek heroes such as Oedipus and Heracles. The infant Douglas survives the flood in which his mother believed him drowned, to be raised by peasants as their son, only to return as an adult to a parent who had thought him long dead. Similarly, Galahad is raised apart from his father, to return unknown upon reaching adulthood; other mythic heroes who have been raised in ignorance of their true identity include King Arthur himself and the Greek hero Perseus. Douglas's story perhaps most strongly echoes the Perseus myth; Perseus, too, was saved from drowning to be raised as a peasant, finally to achieve fame as a warrior (Hamilton 143).

Douglas's immediate prowess as a warrior, despite his lack of any real training, is reminiscent of the innocent knight Percival.

Percival's mother, fearing his death should he become a knight, raises him in ignorance of a warrior's skills; nevertheless, when he goes off to fight despite her wishes, he is immediately one of the strongest and most skillful of Arthur's knights. Douglas's adoptive father, Norval, also wanted to keep him from battle, as Douglas himself states:

My father feeds his flocks; a frugal swain,
Whose constant cares were to increase his store,
And keep his only son, myself, at home.
For I had heard of battles, and I longed
To follow to the field some warlike lord:
And heaven soon granted what my sire denied
(II.43-48).

Like Percival's mother, Norval (Douglas's ostensible father) ultimately fails; like Percival, Douglas is instantly recognized as a great warrior, first saving his fellow shepherds from attack, then doing the same for Lord Randolph, all without benefit of noble training.

Home's mishmash of historical and mythic elements was immediately popular when it was first produced in Edinburgh — so much so that it was soon performed in London, at Covent Garden (Boas 269). Douglas's success was predicated on its patriotic appeal; as one contemporary observer reports, "[Edinburgh] was in an uproar of exultation that a Scotsman had written a tragedy of the first rate and that its merit was first submitted to their judgment" (Nettleton 643). Even its opponents — chiefly the more Evangelical of the Scottish clergy, who induced the Presbyteries of Glasgow and Edinburgh to condemn the play (Chitnis 54) — based their opposition on a general condemnation of the theatre rather than on any specific lapses in *Douglas* itself.

If, as I have claimed, *Douglas* is an exercise in national mythmaking, to establish specific values as part of the national ideology, what are the values it seeks to instill? As Scott would also do in the *Waverley* novels, Home seems to seek a reform or sublimation of the war spirit — a tempering of the Jacobite ardor that had led Scots to rise up against the English twice in the century. In Act I, Lady Randolph specifically urges the futility of Scottish-English border wars in a speech to her husband:

They go forth
Gay in the morning, as to a summer sport;
When evening comes, the glory of the morn,
The youthful warrior, is a clod of clay.
Thus fall the prime of either hapless land;
And such the fruit of Scotch and English wars
(I.126-31).

Such wars are contrasted to "good" wars against foreign invaders such as the Danes:

... war with foreign foes,
Whose manners, language, and whose looks are strange,
Is not so horrid, nor to me so hateful,
As that which with our neighbors oft we wage
(I.113-16).

In view of the strained relations between the British and French during the 18th century, and the historic connections between the Stuarts and the French court, it is perhaps not stretching things to see in this speech an argument about who Scotland's true friends and enemies are. In taking this position, Home is reflecting the Scottish majority. Most Scots — in particular most lowland Scots — did not support the Stuart cause in the 1745 uprising, one reason why that last gasp of Jacobitism failed. This appears to me to be characteristic of true national mythmaking, which both reflects and shapes the consensual terms of understanding national history.

The conflict between Glenalvon and Douglas, born as it is of Glenalvon's jealousy and clannish pride, is an emblem of the very reasons the Scots eventually succumbed to union with England: warfare among the Scottish clans had always prevented meaningful, persistent cooperation against outside threats. The secrecy surrounding Douglas's birth itself reflects the feuding between the clans; the house of Douglas was feuding with Matilda's family, so that her marriage had to be kept secret from everyone except her brother. Again, by demonstrating the wastefulness of such feuding, Home points a moral lesson about the path of Scotland's future.

Home thus seems to be presenting, along with a picture of the glories of the past, an argument why those glories should now be left behind. His is an appeal to Scottish pride, but it is an appeal to restore confidence for the new endeavors of trade, exploration, and learning, at which Scots would excel for the next two centuries. Let us revive our national pride, he says to his audience; but let us not revive the feuds and battles that both gave us our highest glory and took away our independent state.

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