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The *Shawangunk Review* is the journal of the English Graduate Program at the State University of New York, New Paltz. The *Review* publishes the proceedings of the annual English Graduate Symposium and literary articles by graduate students as well as poetry, fiction, and book reviews by students and faculty. The views expressed in the *Shawangunk Review* are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Department of English at SUNY New Paltz. Please address correspondence to *Shawangunk Review*, Department of English, SUNY New Paltz, New Paltz, NY 12561.

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From the Editors

Volume XIX of the *Shawangunk Review* features the proceedings of the 2007 English Graduate Symposium, “The Bible and Literature,” directed by Christopher A. Link. On behalf of the Graduate Program and the entire English Department we would like to thank Professor Link for arranging an excellent program and for editing the symposium section of the *Review*. Seven of our graduate students presented essays at the symposium, and Professor Link invited the distinguished scholar Peter S. Hawkins, Professor of Religion and Director of the Luce Program in Scripture and the Literary Arts at Boston University, to be the respondent and keynote speaker. Professor Hawkins has generously granted us permission to publish his keynote address, “Lost and Found: The Bible and American Literature Now,” and we are deeply appreciative of his contributions to the symposium and to the present volume of the *Review*.

Also included herein are the two essays honored as the best student work from the New York College English Association Spring 2007 Conference, “Literature and (R)Evolution,” which was directed by Thomas G. Olsen and held at New Paltz April 13-14 of last year. New Paltz was well represented at the conference by nineteen current and former master’s students, and the two prize winners were both from our graduate program.

Heading the poetry section of this year’s *Review* are poems read by members of the New Paltz contingent to the Imagism Conference directed by H. R. Stoneback and held at Brunnenburg Castle, Dorf Tirol, Italy, July 2-4, 2007. We are especially pleased to include a poem written by the gracious host of the conference, the Countess Mary de Rachewiltz.

As we go to press, the topic of the twentieth symposium has not been determined, but a call for papers will soon be posted. The submission deadline for Volume XX of the *Review* is December 15, 2008. We welcome poetry, book reviews, and critical essays concerning any area of literary studies. Students writing theses (ENG 590) are encouraged to submit an abstract. Please see submission guidelines on page 147.

We ask readers to provide information regarding achievements of our current and former graduate students for the “News and Notes” column. For example, we would like to know the details of conference participation, publications, grants, and honors, as well as news regarding progress of our MA graduates

in PhD programs and reports about teaching and employment activities.

Many thanks to Jason Taylor for layout, typesetting, and production supervision.

I Introduction

The Bible and Literature

Christopher A. Link

On April 20, 2007, the State University of New York at New Paltz hosted its Nineteenth Annual English Graduate Symposium, devoted to the theme of “The Bible and Literature.” Each of the participants in the 2007 Symposium—seven New Paltz graduate student presenters and the distinguished keynote speaker, Peter S. Hawkins, Professor of Religion and Director of the Luce Program in Scripture and the Literary Arts at Boston University—was invited to explore this immense and complex subject in any number of ways; the results of their outstanding efforts can be seen in the remarkable and wide-ranging essays gathered together in this volume.

The Graduate Symposium event itself consisted of two afternoon sessions of student papers, followed by a response to the student essays by Professor Hawkins, who later that evening delivered his keynote address: “Lost and Found: the Bible and American Literature Now.” (More detailed remarks concerning Professor Hawkins’s address appear later in this introduction.) The first afternoon session—featuring presentations by Laurie Alfonso, Paula Sirc, Janice Holzman, and Lea Weiss—was devoted, appropriately enough, to “Biblical Texts and Literary Contexts”; this panel offered, from a wide variety of perspectives, treatments concerning both the Bible *as* literature and the Bible *in* literature. Chronologically, the texts discussed in this group of papers span nearly four millennia (roughly three thousand seven hundred years), from a fragment of ancient Sumerian love poetry predating the Song of Songs, through Milton in the seventeenth century and Melville in the nineteenth century, to the 1995 novel *Blindness* by José Saramago—an exhilarating bit of time travel for a single, hour-long panel! In sharp contrast, the second afternoon session, entitled “Twentieth-Century Responses and Re-visions,” focused exclusively on some of the diverse, significant, and innovative ways literary productions from that recent century engaged biblical materials. Presentations from this second panel by Kathryn Moskowitz, Amy Feldman, and Landan Gross treated works, respectively, by Dylan Thomas (late Modernism), Joseph Heller (absurdist postwar satire), and Gregory Corso (the Beat movement).

Given the extraordinary scope of textual subjects addressed in this set of excellent graduate essays, it is worth noting—as Peter Hawkins did in his appre-

ciative response to the papers—how often the *same* elemental imagery is revisited, with uncanny resonance, in so many different contexts. Tree and tower, forbidden fruit and *femme fatale*, martyr and messiah—these evocative key images crop up repeatedly, in some form or other, across several of the symposium papers, though often to very different effect. Above all, however, it is the Tree—from Paradise to Philistia, Lebanon to Calvary, Nukaheva to the Jarvis valley—that overwhelmingly dominates the scene throughout these critical pieces. While matters arboreal are necessarily taken up most explicitly and extensively in Katie Moskowitz’s essay on Dylan Thomas’s stunning, fable-like story “The Tree,” there are significant related treatments throughout the collection. In Amy Feldman’s paper on *Catch-22*, for example, we are invited to consider closely the wonderfully parodic yet deeply serious business of Yossarian’s imitation of Adam, as he sits naked in his emphatically biblical tree and is “tempted” to taste some very strange fruit indeed. In Janice Holzman’s treatment of Edenic imagery in Melville’s *Typee*, the trees of the lush Polynesian landscape provide, among other things, both the paradisiacal setting and the fig-leaf-like clothing of the young native “Edenic” couple glimpsed by Tommo and Toby in their first encounter with the Typee people. Thinking they have regained Paradise, the sailors come to realize, instead, that they have simply witnessed the scene of the Fall anew. On the other hand, as Laurie Alfonso importantly reminds us in her thoughtful treatment of the Song of Songs, not all biblical fruit is forbidden, nor has Paradise been altogether lost: “As an apple among the trees of the wood,” intones the biblical text’s impassioned feminine voice, “so is my beloved among young men” (2.3). “I say I will climb the palm tree,” he later responds with sexual bravado, “and lay hold of its branches. O may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the scent of your breath like apples” (7.8).

Why should the Tree—with or without its immemorial fruit—matter so much and function so pervasively as a symbol? Undoubtedly, a great deal of its potency derives from its early role in the Genesis narrative, where it is emblematic of the paradisiacal delights of Eden and, simultaneously, the chief symbol of our Exile from that happy state. In Christian typology, furthermore, this same Tree has been closely linked to, and sometimes explicitly identified with, the Holy Rood, the wood of the Cross upon which Jesus was crucified; thus John Donne, for example, would write (in the context of an extended and rather poignant geographical conceit) “that *Paradise* and *Calvarie*, / *Christ’s* crosse, and *Adams* tree, stood in one place” (“Hymne to God My God, In My Sicknesse,” lines 21-22). By extension, it sometimes seems that nearly every literary patch of greenery in the Western canon owes something to—or else must struggle hard against—the manifold spiritual connotations of paradise, exile, loss, and redemption signaled by the biblical Tree, or rather by the Bible’s several celebrated trees, each one serving, in turn, as a kind of deep-rooted and broad-branched mythic World Tree and

axis mundi.

But are we already in danger of losing the rich, multivalent meaning that, in former times, was so readily achieved through reference to such biblical images? Are the vagaries of cultural relativism and biblical illiteracy threatening the very notion of anything like a textual *axis mundi*—i.e., that common center of cultural reference which the Bible, for so long, had been in the West? These are some of the pressing questions posed by Peter S. Hawkins in his sensitive, sweeping, and inspiring address on the Bible and contemporary literature.

Beginning anecdotally, Professor Hawkins paints an amusing but also troubling picture of the Bible's diminished and fragmented role in contemporary life. He makes the striking, jocular observation that (in public life, at least) "It remains important to cite the Bible if not actually to have read it," and realizes the likelihood—after a daunting, dizzying trip to the crassly consumer-driven Bible section of a Barnes and Noble—"that a great many more Bibles are owned than are ever read." Given the marketplace's proliferation of "tailor-made" translations of Scripture, Hawkins argues that there is "no single text (like the King James of yore or the German of Luther's Bible) that can take root in memory and thus be known by heart." Attempting to assess the impact of such developments on the relationship of the Bible to recent literature, Hawkins claims that "one has only to contrast the worlds of Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare, George Herbert, John Milton, or even the skeptical Mark Twain—taking into account all that distinguishes them one from another—to assess the extent of the sea change between their 'then' and our 'now.'" Usefully, Hawkins gives his readers a substantial look at this "then," offering an insightful, if necessarily foreshortened, meditation on "Dante's profound relationship to the Bible." Refusing, however, to make a mere straw man of "our 'now,'" he turns, in the last portion of his paper, to a captivating story by contemporary author Tobias Wolff, noting—incisively and optimistically—its deep affinities with the language and themes of the biblical prophets.

This shorthand description of Professor Hawkins's keynote address, I hasten to add, fails sufficiently to convey the excitement, charm, fluidity, and energy of his reading at the 2007 Symposium, marked by brilliant and often moving asides—including, at one point, an awe-inspiring impromptu recitation in full, from memory, of Psalms 114-115 (i.e., Psalm 113 in the Vulgate): "When Israel went out of Egypt." These performative touches lent special weight to his central argument that the Bible remains a text worth knowing and knowing well; otherwise, in our reading of any number of literary works, old or new, devout or satirical, "much will be lost through ignorance of the once canonical text."

In many ways, this particular sentiment was the implicit refrain of the Symposium as a whole. Paula Sirc's essay, for example, does a fine job of measuring the meaningful distance between Milton's *Samson Agonistes* and the biblical Samson of Judges. Her thoughtful treatment reminds us that, these days, not ev-

ery reader of Milton is necessarily a reader of the Bible (and even those who *do* know the Bible well need to give the memory its occasional jogs!); it is not a certainty that students will know Milton's subtexts, let alone know them well enough, in detail, to recognize all the complex and important ways in which they are being transformed (or why). Clearly, "much will be lost," indeed, in reading such works without significant recourse to that other "once canonical text"—but this fact is not restricted to an obvious case like Milton. In a very different context, Lea Weiss's paper on Genesis 11 and Saramago's *Blindness* shows, too, how the old canonical stories still speak to us in the new; her sophisticated study links, synesthetically, the "blinding" confusion of language in the biblical story of the Tower of Babel to the sightlessness—literal and moral—in Saramago's recent novel. In so doing, Weiss indicates the remarkable staying power of the old etiological legend, the brilliance, relevance, and difficulty of which seem only to have increased in modernity, especially since the post-structuralist critical turn and the advent of deconstruction. (Derrida, perhaps unsurprisingly, has written at length on this biblical narrative, most notably in his essay "*Des Tours de Babel*.") Seemingly simple stories—known to many from childhood and dismissed, therefore, by some as childish—are seen, when revisited, to open up with extraordinary depth and complexity. This reminds us, of course, that, for many—and certainly in times past—knowledge of the Bible and its various narratives can readily precede literacy. As Peter Hawkins writes in his address, speaking of the broad medieval apprehension of the Bible, "Scripture was available in a variety of forms that did not require Latin or, indeed, literacy. This 'People's Bible' was known through ritual, pageant, and drama; in the iconographic programs of church façades and stained glass; in hymn and song." It is quite fitting, therefore, that, in the final student presentation of the Symposium, Landan Gross devoted some attention to the significant role of representational art as an important third party in the interplay between the Bible and its literary responses. The progression of Gross's analysis through three poems by Corso is positively musical: starting with a light Edenic theme, "There Can Be No Other Apple for Me," moving through darker strains in "The Frightful Difference," and reaching its crescendo in the treatment of "*Ecce Homo*," which circles back to combine imagery of the wounds of Christ with the old Edenic transgression of Adam (those "earlier wounds" in the history of humankind suggested by the poem). Corso's "*Ecce Homo*"—a twentieth-century poem inspired by a fourteenth-century painting of the Christ based, in turn, on the first-century (scholars quibble) Gospel of John—provides apt proof that serious consideration of the Bible and literature turns out to be very much an interdisciplinary pursuit, involving (in Hawkins's phrase) "a complex symbolic network that extend[s] far beyond the reach of words." Knowing the Bible well, it turns out, means knowing also, at least in part, all that it has inspired.

Thus, though it might, from a certain modern critical perspective, be re-

garded reductively as but one collective work of classical “world literature” among many, the Bible nevertheless holds a unique status in the cultural history of West. It has been (and remains) the source of an incredibly broad range of religious ideas and practices; it has served as the basis of many of our most foundational social and legal constructs, as well as many of our most progressive social movements; it is the pretext for a whole world—or, rather, worlds within worlds—of representational art and music; and, without doubt, the Bible continues to maintain a complex intertextual relationship to virtually every work of Western literature (and significant examples of non-Western literature) produced in its wake.

As director of the 2007 Symposium, I, of course, deemed this expansive subject to be one full of tremendous promise, interest, and relevance, though I also recognized it to be just the sort of topic that, unfortunately, can sometimes engender divisive feelings and misgivings (or, alternately, careless presumptions) that one cultural or religious bias or another will dominate the proceedings. Thankfully, I sincerely think that our Symposium not only fulfilled its great promise but also succeeded marvelously in representing a diverse array of perspectives: social, cultural, religious, and literary, Western and non-Western (see especially, in this last regard, Holzman’s fine essay). The dazzling success of the Symposium, of course, depended foremost upon the extremely high quality of the presentations. For this reason, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all of the graduate student participants for the truly tireless labor they devoted to their respective projects. I wish also to extend special thanks to my friend and mentor Peter Hawkins who, knowing full well that, in academia, April is indeed “the cruellest month,” nonetheless agreed to participate in our Symposium. After his own (undoubtedly late-running) Luce event the night before, he left Boston bright and early that springtime morning to join us, bringing to the event his astonishing intellect, enthusiasm, grace, and generosity of spirit. I cannot express fully enough the heartfelt pleasure I took in Peter’s visit, but a good part of my joy stemmed, I know, from seeing how much my pleasure was shared also by all who heard and met him. (Intimations of all those reflecting mirrors in *Paradiso*?) Additional thanks is owed to all who contributed to the success of the Nineteenth Annual SUNY New Paltz English Graduate Symposium, especially Stella Deen, Dan Kempton, Thomas Olsen, Thomas Festa, A.M. Cinquemani, and the indefatigable Ethel Wesdorp. And, finally, I would like to acknowledge the indispensable assistance of my wife Nina Link, who aided me in practically every aspect of the event’s organization and was particularly instrumental in the development and production of its splendid posters and programs.

As a final word of introduction to this wonderful collection of literary and interdisciplinary scholarship, I would like to propose for contemplation the image of yet one more biblical tree: specifically, the Tree of Life that appears in the heavenly New Jerusalem described toward the conclusion of Revelation, the last

book of the New Testament:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (Revelations 22.1-2)

In *Fahrenheit 451*, Ray Bradbury’s famous novel of a society stripped of its literacy and, thus, of its soul, it is this particular biblical passage that concludes the work, as one of the fleeting textual passages the book’s protagonist has managed to commit to memory. In this context, of course, there is no doubting what is meant by the phrase “*the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations*” (Bradbury 165) since whatever healing could be given to the dystopian world of *Fahrenheit 451* would necessarily come in the form of very specific “leaves”: i.e., the pages of books. But even in its original biblical context, this allegorical meaning can just as easily be inferred; after all, the Bible, preeminently, is a Book of Books—one which recognizes explicitly the power and value of the Word. “Give a man a few lines of verse and he thinks he’s the Lord of all Creation,” says the villainous rhetorician of Bradbury’s novel, denouncing precisely this magnificent power of the Word in biblically inflected terms: “You think you can walk on water with your books” (118). As all good readers know, however, the poor fellow didn’t recognize how close he was to the miraculous truth about all literature. Indeed, the very real role of our most beloved books and that of the Tree of Life—which gives perpetual sustenance and heals—is often one and the same.

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II | Keynote Address

Lost and Found: The Bible and American Literature Now

Peter S. Hawkins

Anyone starting up a program in “Scripture and Literary Arts”—my mission for the last few years at Boston University—faces from the outset a disturbing bit of received wisdom: the Bible is on the endangered species list. This is most obviously a cause for alarm among those who venerate a *Holy Bible*, but it is also troubling to the more secular minded who see the Good Book as the cornerstone of “The Great Books.” For what could be more “core” to Western culture than this voluminous work that has undergirded not only our great literature but also our American public discourse, from John Winthrop’s 1630 “city set on a hill” sermon, to Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address or Second Inaugural, to Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream”? Whether or not the Bible is taken to be religiously authoritative, it has always been there as a subtext, informing the imagination and providing a stock of narratives, images, and cadences.

Until now, that is, when biblical literacy is said to register at an all time low, and especially among the young. I say this despite the political power of the Religious Right in American politics and the presence of a Bible-studying, “born again” president in the White House. I say it also despite the frequency with which our American politicians invoke the sacred texts, especially at election time, though very often to comical effect: George Bush famously counts Jesus as his favorite philosopher, John Kerry referred to the “Book” of Matthew, and former Democratic contender Howard Dean named Job his favorite portion of the *New Testament*. It remains important to cite the Bible if not actually to have read it.

Furthermore, the word on the street, or at least on the college campus, is that even this skewed biblicism is falling on deaf ears. For instance, the first year I came to BU I learned at a congress on the future of Religious Studies that there was not a single undergraduate among 250 religion majors at “a certain university” who could name all of the Ten Commandments. A disconcerting number of them were even under the impression that the first commandment was not, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20.3) but, rather, “Love yourself.” Maybe the door was closing on the text that I was being hired to open up. What sense would it make to explore the “afterlife” of Scripture in literature if there were no knowledge of Scripture in the first place? Was my whole project doomed from

the start?

This discouraging scenario seemed corroborated by a minor event that took place during my initial job interview at Boston University. In what I thought to be a sign of warm interest in my candidacy, I was lodged next to the Harvard Club, on elegant Commonwealth Avenue, in the tasteful Eliot Hotel. No Holiday Inn for me! Once comfortably settled in my suite there, and going over my lecture notes in anticipation of the evening's "audition," I began to wonder about the accuracy of a certain biblical citation in my talk. Was it in fact Psalm 9 that Dante was quoting in *Paradiso* 25? What to do?

Although I do not travel with my Vulgate, Dante's own biblical translation, surely I could resort to the next best thing. This was, after all, an American hotel; there was a bedside table with its requisite top drawer; and inside that drawer there would inevitably be a copy of the King James Version of the Scripture, placed there by the indefatigable Gideons. Since 1899, after all, this organization has been on the move, each year distributing more than 59 million Bibles throughout the world; to quote their website, this "averages one million copies of the Word of God every six days, or 120 per minute." Surely that familiar embossed cover was just a reach away.

Wrong! Whereas every hotel I have ever visited in the United States has provided the weary traveler with the bedside Bible—now supplemented in the Marriott chain with the Book of Mormon—the upscale, "European-style" Eliot did not do likewise. Perhaps they assumed that scented soaps, thick towels, and nighttime chocolates were all the spiritual comfort a guest would need? Or was this absence of the Bible the wave of the future—a sign that "Scripture and Literary Arts" would be about the past, about heritage and nostalgia, rather than about a living presence?

A call to the hotel's front desk disabused me of the notion that the Gideons had passed me by or that Bible thieves had looted only *my* room. I was told that because the Eliot Hotel's clientele was "global," and because no single faith (indeed, faith of any kind) was to be considered normative, Bibles were not placed in any of the hotel's rooms. Instead, they were available at the front desk "upon request."

For whatever reason, it turned out that the desk clerk could not locate the single house Bible. And so, still wanting to verify that citation from the Psalms, I made my way just a few blocks away to Barnes and Noble. What I discovered there was a retail feast in vivid contrast to the hotel's famine. Overflowing shelf after shelf were all manner of Bibles—the perennial King James, of course, but a score of other translations that all turned out to be post-World War II: the Revised Standard and *New* Revised Standard, the New English, Good News for Modern Man, the Jerusalem and New American, the New International Version, as well as the paraphrase Living Bible. Although leather or leatherette "gift" editions were readily available, eye-catching, up-to-date formats were far more plentiful. In-

deed, there did not seem to be a market niche that wasn't filled to overflowing. Even the venerable King James was packaged in a boxed set of individual booklets with striking monochromatic photo covers worthy of sophisticated fiction, and introductions written by ostensibly secular celebrities ranging from Doris Lessing on Ecclesiastes to Bono, of the rock group U2, on the Psalms.¹

Browsing the well-stocked shelves, I saw Bibles targeted for men, women, and teenagers, but also, even more particularly, for "Moms," "Dads," and a subset identified as "Extreme Teens." The Promise Keepers Bible promised to help men be all that they could be whereas in the "Women of Destiny" Bible, we were told, "women mentor women." For those Christians anxious about the usefulness of the Hebrew Scriptures, there was the "Knowing Jesus" volume that offered a "one year study of Jesus in every book of the Bible." Other study texts claimed to foster African Heritage, Spiritual Formation, and Spiritual Renewal. I paused for more than a moment before the "Ultrathin" and "Slimline" Bibles until realizing that they were aimed at those for whom a highly portable Scripture is all-important, not aimed at pious weight-watchers. Finally, although the fool hath said in his heart, "There is no God" (Psalms 14.1), it turns out that Dummies have a text just for them, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to the Bible*.

Jews were accorded no discrete "Bible" section, but within the cornucopia that constitutes "Judaica" I found several copies of the 1985 Jewish Publication Society's Tanakh, along with Everett Fox's more recent translation of the Torah. Now there is also Robert Alter's superb rendering of the Pentateuch. The flood of religious books then continued unabated. Not only were there sections devoted to "Christianity," "Islam," and "Eastern Religions" (among which someone had thought it appropriate to include *The Tao of Pooh*); there was also shelf upon shelf of what might collectively be called "Spirituality": displays devoted to "Inspirational Fiction," "Magic," "Astrology," "Metaphysical Studies," and (my personal favorite) "Speculation."

What is one to make of the perceived biblical illiteracy of contemporary America and this proliferation of Bibles and customized study guides? It may be, of course, that a great many more Bibles are owned than are ever read. The proverbial best seller may well be the equivalent of the latest piece of fitness equipment—purchased, tried out, and soon abandoned. Yet, biblical ignorance is evidently something many people *want* to overcome; it is also, just as obviously, big business. Unlike the non-profit Gideons, publishing houses do not give their Bibles away—they sell them. As a result, the availability of Scripture and the way it is presented depend on the marketplace and its values. Here, as everywhere else in our culture, the consumer has options and with them, the need to purchase further guidance. "How do you choose the Bible that's best for you?" asks a guidebook that promises just such a tailor-made solution, and for only \$4.99.² Different translations compete with one another over accuracy, readability, and consumer

interest, so that there is no longer any particular version in people's minds. As a result, no single text (like the King James of yore or the German of Luther's Bible) that can take root in memory and thus be known by heart.

I believe that the implications of this present-day grab bag are enormous, for writers and readers alike. Also important is the religious plurality of present-day America, in which what I have been referring to parochially as "Scripture," whether of the Jews or of the Christians, is but one holy writ among many others. True, Barnes and Noble gives pride of place to the majority population's religious canon, but the post-modern shopper is implicitly encouraged by these megastores to move effortlessly from all sorts and conditions of Bibles to the Qu'ran, the Bhagavad-Gita, the Tibetan Book of the Dead, and then, on the very next shelf, to the latest *Celestine Prophecy* or Tim La Haye *Left Behind* apocalyptic thriller. The Bible differs from other sacred texts in number but not in kind. It has no essential priority in the marketplace.

This wide plurality of scriptures strikes me as something we have not faced before in the United States. On the other hand, the economics of publication and the simultaneity of different biblical translations are by no means new issues: think of Gutenberg, and the impact of moveable type not only on Reformations both Protestant and Catholic, but on the triumph of many vernacular languages. Yet, one has only to contrast the worlds of Dante, Chaucer, Shakespeare, George Herbert, John Milton, or even the skeptical Mark Twain—taking into account all that distinguishes them one from another—to assess the extent of the sea change between their "then" and our "now."

Take Dante, for instance.³ For him the Bible was not an ancient text placed on a bookstore shelf crowded with other equally valuable spiritual guides. Nor was it subject to "Higher Criticism" or the weekend deliberations of the Jesus Seminar. The Bible was none other than *God's* own Book. As the sacred text of the church, Scripture was the primary source of all authoritative proclamations, from Pope to parish priest; more importantly, it also provided the fundament of the church's liturgy and could thereby enter the memory and imagination almost subliminally, in part making up a person's mother tongue.

Furthermore, the Bible constituted a complex symbolic network that extended far beyond the reach of words. Long before it appeared in vernacular translation, Scripture was available in a variety of forms that did not require Latin or, indeed, literacy. This "People's Bible" was known through ritual, pageant, and drama; in the iconographic programs of church façades and stained glass; in hymn and song. Therefore, no matter how important the actual biblical text may have been for clergy, monastics, or the educated layperson, the Bible was far more readily seen and heard than it was ever read. Its story was always *already* known, and known by ordinary people who, whatever the extent of their learning or the depth of their piety, were (in Jean LeClerc's phrase) its "living concordances."⁴

Much of my published academic work has been an exploration of Dante's profound relationship to the Bible—his debt to its pages and his attempt in the *Commedia* to write third testament for his own time and place. One moment at the beginning of the *Purgatorio* can perhaps best illustrate this intimate connection between the divine text and the poem written in its image and likeness. A third of the way into the pilgrim's journey through the afterlife, at the foot of the Mountain of Purgatory, Dante observes a luminous boat heading for shore. As it comes closer, he realizes that neither sail nor oar propels it; rather, the boat races to shore by the fanning of an angel's "etterne penne" ("eternal wings" 2.35). Just as the vessel makes landfall, he hears the hundred souls on board—souls who died in a state of grace—all chanting the words of Scripture as they head toward purgatory:

At the stern stood the celestial steersman, such, that
blessedness seemed to be inscribed upon him; and
within [the boat] sat more than a hundred spirits.
"In exitu Israel de Aegypto" all of them were singing
with one voice, with the rest of the psalm as it is written. (2.43-48)

One canto earlier, in the opening lines of the *Purgatorio*, the poet presented himself as a seafarer and his poem as a ship; both had survived the *Inferno*'s "cruel sea" to set forth over "miglior acque," "better waters" (1.1). Now we begin to understand what this change in watery element, this new setting forth, actually means. It is not only that an angel rather than a demon commands the first boat we come upon in the *Purgatorio*; it is also that everyone gathered in the vessel is singing the Lord's song. Because Dante identifies this scriptural text by its *incipit*, "In exitu Israel de Aegypto"—and then says outright that the souls continued to sing "with the rest of that psalm as it is written"—our attention is drawn to the entirety of Psalm 113 as it appears in the Vulgate, a sweep of verses that in present-day Bibles is divided between Psalms 114 and 115. The Vulgate psalm begins, "When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a barbarous people: Judea was made his sanctuary, Israel his dominion. The sea saw it and fled: Jordan was turned back" (1-3); it ends, "The dead shall not praise thee, Lord: nor any of them that go down to hell. But we that live [shall] bless the Lord: from this time now and forever" (17-18).⁵

These verses of Scripture provide a gloss on the new reality of the *Purgatorio*. Whereas *Inferno* introduced us to a kingdom of death where none of the damned could speak God's name—let alone "bless the Lord"—here we are put in the company of those who, however imperfectly at first, still "live" in God, as the psalm has it, "from this time now and forever." Dante also emphasizes that everyone in the angel's boat sings the Scripture "ad una voce," "with one voice." In hell, whether the damned spoke in eloquent monologue or only uttered gibberish, all

were in some radical sense soloists doomed to repeat their own private stories, to sing only a song of the self. Here, as the angel speeds the redeemed to the beginning of their spiritual transformation, the souls discover how private speech becomes the corporate Word of God.

Dante could not have chosen a biblical text better able to suggest the plentitude of Scripture's meaning or the vital connection between Bible and liturgy. To begin with, the psalm has a venerable history within Judaism, recited on all three of the pilgrimage feasts of Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot. Indeed, it is the essence of *Hallel* or praise, and its recitation at any time constitutes a *mizvah*. Medieval Christians treated the psalm as a Chinese box of interrelated significance—a stock example of how the historical events of Scripture concealed within themselves multiple senses. Thus in *Purgatorio* 2, the souls who chant *In exitu Israel de Aegypto* as they arrive on the shores of purgatory illustrate what Dante elsewhere calls the “polyvalence” of the biblical text: its literal, moral, allegorical, and anagogical significance. Leaving the “Egypt” of this mortal world behind them, setting out on a journey of moral transformation, the souls show themselves to be pilgrims bound for heaven's Promised Land. Dante recalls this exegesis of the psalm in his letter to Can Grande della Scala when he draws attention to the Bible's “polysemous” or multi-layered significance in order to clarify the multiple senses of his *own* work—a breathtaking appropriation to make, even for the self-professed author of a “sacred poem” (*Paradiso* 25.1)!⁶

The story of the Exodus and the sacrament of baptism are joined explicitly in the liturgy of Easter Eve, where Psalm 113 plays an important part in an extended fusion of the Old and New Testaments: the Hebrews' safe passage through the Red Sea becomes a crossing through sacramental waters. Nor is the Easter Vigil the psalm's only relevant liturgical setting: the text was commonly sung in the Middle Ages when a novice took vows within a religious community and when the body of the deceased was moved from home to church and then to burial. *In exitu Israel de Aegypto* suggests both the entryway of faith and the direction of eternity.

Therefore, when Dante invokes this particular biblical text in *Purgatorio* 2, he is making no casual acknowledgment of the importance of God's Book. Rather, he is drawing for his own poetic purposes on the psalm's enormous surplus of associations—exegetical, typological, and liturgical.

Where is it possible today to find anything even remotely like this kind of deep biblical literacy? Perhaps among certain kinds of Orthodox Jews or among some fundamentalist and evangelical Christians. But can it be found anywhere within whatever now passes for “mainstream America”?

My experience at Boston University teaching RN 101, “The Bible,” suggests that the Scripture is pretty much a buried treasure. In a diagnostic effort at the very first class meeting of the course in 2002, I asked for a show of hands: who

had ever heard of the Twenty-third Psalm? Surely this would be the lowest common denominator of biblical literacy. Out of some thirty students perhaps five hands went up. I then recited the text and asked my question again. This time the room was a forest of hands. Whereas almost no one knew of something called “the Twenty-third Psalm,” just about everyone recognized it when they heard it—but *not*, as it turned out, as a passage from Scripture. For the first student I called on, it was a line or two in Pink Floyd’s “Sheep”; for a second, a reference in the rapper Coolio’s “Gangsta Paradise”; for a third, a refrain in the film “Pulp Fiction” (which in fact it is not. Ezekiel 25.17 is the text that keeps showing up, but to some all Bible sounds the same). Avid consumers of popular culture, my students knew their movies and their lyrics but not the biblical source of “the valley of the shadow of death.” They were shocked when I revealed it. They were also pleased that the book many of them had never opened, the book we would study together, was already in some sense a known quantity. I saw I could not assume any familiarity with the Bible as such; nonetheless I had something to build on. And a great deal to learn from them about popular culture in America, which remains oddly connected to the Scripture however unwittingly, indirectly, or superficially.

If this is the case with filmmakers and lyricists, as my students demonstrated to me throughout that semester, it is even more the case with contemporary American writers. Of course, being “in touch” with the Bible does not necessarily mean that our novelists and poets are people of robust, let alone traditional faith. Their attachment to the sacred text may represent an ancestral legacy that finally cannot be disowned—often the case amongst Jewish writers—or it can constitute a formidable literary presence that, for better or worse, cannot be forgotten. The relationship to Scripture may be vexed and stormy; it may involve serious repudiation as well as respect.⁷

This range of reactions to Scripture among some of our very best writers is evident in several collections of essays that have appeared since the late 1980s. First came *Congregation: Contemporary Writers Read the Jewish Bible*, which brought together 37 contributors.⁸ *Incarnation: Contemporary Writers and the New Testament* followed the format of book-by-book reflections to carry on its often quite personal and idiosyncratic work.⁹ A more recent volume, *Joyful Noise: the New Testament Revisited*, anthologized what in 1997 was a group of thirtysomethings. More recently still in 2003 appeared *Killing the Buddha: the Heretic’s Bible*, touted as “not so much a rewriting of the Bible as a supercharged hip-hop makeover [by some of our hottest novelists].” Prose writers contribute most of these collected essays, but when it comes to poets who continue to wrestle with scriptural angels there is no shortage in America (to recall Tony Kushner’s play, *Angels in America*). I am thinking in particular of poets Jacqueline Osherow, Gjertrud Schnackenberg, Andrew Hudgins, Allen Grossman, Jorrie Graham, Denise Levertov, Anne Carson, Louise Clifton, Mary Oliver, Richard Wilbur, Franz

Wright, Robert Pinsky, Rosanna Warren, and Geoffrey Hill (the last three colleagues of mine at Boston University).

None of these contemporaries presupposes the Scripture as thoroughly as Dante did. Their use of the Bible is usually much less direct, far more elusive, and much harder to evaluate. It is often complicated by humor and irony, and yet is no less powerful for being difficult to pin down.

A case in point is the title story of Tobias Wolff's 1981 collection, *In the Garden of the North American Martyrs*.¹⁰ Although Wolff is perhaps best known for memoirs about growing up—*This Boy's Life*, *In Pharaoh's Army*, and, a couple of years ago, *Old School*—he draws in this particular story on his long experience in the academy, first at Syracuse University and now at Stanford. His story's protagonist, Mary, is a familiar academic type: self-conscious, wary in the extreme, an untenured assistant professor resolved never to rock the boat. She is an historian whose own scholarly monograph opens with a hesitant phrase that sums up her life and work, "It is generally believed that. . . ."

Mary always wrote out her lectures in full, using the arguments and often the words of "approved" writers so as not to risk saying anything controversial (123). Once, while talking to a senior professor, Mary saw herself reflected in a window: she was leaning toward her colleague and had her head turned so that her ear was right in front of his moving mouth. The sight disgusted her. Years later, when she was forced to get a hearing aid, she suspected that her deafness was a result of always trying to catch everything everyone else said. Wolff writes: "Her own thoughts she kept to herself, and the words for them grew faint as time went on; without quite disappearing they shrank to remote, nervous points, like birds flying away" (123).

Parallel to Mary's personal diminishment is the downhill course of her career. One job goes belly up along with the bankruptcy of a college; another is hopelessly waterlogged in the rainforests of academic Oregon. Then, suddenly, the possibility of deliverance comes out of nowhere: Louise, a former colleague, invites her to interview for a tenured position at an unnamed "famous college" in upstate New York—a campus so charming, so authentically pseudo-Gothic that it was used as the set for the 1947 film "Andy Hardy Goes to College" and a slew of later movies. Mary takes in the absurd medievalism of the place. There is the school's Latin motto that translates roughly "God helps those who help themselves"; then a chapel communion rail said to have been taken "from some church in Europe where Charlemagne used to go" (131).

Full of hope, Mary travels to a crisp, picture-postcard Northeast, and reads up on the history of the region. As a careful researcher, she knows that the campus has pre-Columbian roots, that it stand squarely in the ancient domain of the Five Nations of the Iroquois. Yet, what seems at first to be a dream come true—a real job in a real place—quickly turns out to be yet another nightmare. Shortly af-

ter her arrival, Louise lets it drop that as part of her interview process Mary must give a formal lecture. With nothing prepared, nothing in hand, she panics.

“But what will I do?”

“Relax,” Louise said. “Just pick a subject and wing it?”

“Wing it?”

“You know, open your mouth and see what comes out. Extemporize.”

“But I always work from a prepared lecture.”

Louise sighed. “All right. I’ll tell you what. Last year I wrote an article on the Marshall Plan that I got bored with and never published. You can read that.

Parroting what Louise had written seemed wrong to Mary, at first; then it occurred to her that she had been doing the same kind of thing for many years, and that this was not the time to get scruples. “Thanks,” she said. “I appreciate it.” (128)

One revelation leads to another. In the course of a campus tour, Mary’s male student guide mentions offhandedly that while the college appears to be old-fashioned, in reality it is not. “They let girls come here now,” the guide says, “and some of the teachers are women. In fact, there’s a statute that says they have to interview at least one woman for each opening” (131).

When her subsequent meeting with the hiring committee proves to be absurdly perfunctory, Mary realizes that she has been had. They were never really considering her for the position; they already knew whom they were going to hire; she’d merely been brought to campus to satisfy a rule. With these facts corroborated by Louise, Mary is led off to her martyrdom in a lecture hall where students are already spilling into the aisles and professors sitting in the front row with their legs crossed. We can all, I think, imagine the scene.

Louise called the room to order. She introduced Mary and gave the subject of the [Marshall Plan] lecture. But Mary had decided to wing it after all. Mary came to the podium unsure of what she would say; sure only that she would rather die than read Louise’s article. The sun poured through the stained glass on to the people around her, painting their faces. Thick streams of smoke from [a] young professor’s pipe drifted through a circle of red light at Mary’s feet, turning crimson and twisting like flames.

“I wonder how many of you know,” she began, “that we are in the Long House, the ancient domain of the Five Nations of the Iroquois.”

Two professors looked at each other.

“The Iroquois were without pity,” Mary said. “They hunted people down with clubs and arrows and spears and nets, and blowguns made from elder stalks. They tortured their captives, sparing no one, not even the little children. They took scalps and practiced cannibalism and slavery. Because they had no

pity they became powerful, so powerful that no other tribe dared to oppose them. They made other tribes pay tribute, and when they had nothing more to pay the Iroquois attacked them.”

Several of the professors began to whisper. Dr. Howells was saying something to Louise, and Louise was shaking her head.

“In one of their raids,” Mary said, “they captured two Jesuit priests, Jean de Brébeuf and Gabriel Lalement. They covered Lalement with pitch and set him on fire in front of Brébeuf. When Brébeuf rebuked them they cut off his lips and put a burning iron down his throat. They hung a collar of red-hot hatchets around his neck, and poured boiling water over his head. When he continued to preach to them they cut strips of flesh from his body and ate them before his eyes. While he was still alive they scalped him and cut open his breast and drank his blood. Later, their chief tore out Brébeuf’s heart and ate it, but just before he did this Brébeuf spoke to them one last time. He said—”

“That’s enough!” yelled Dr. Howells, jumping to his feet.

Louise stopped shaking her head. Her eyes were perfectly round.

Mary had come to the end of her facts. She did not know what Brébeuf had said. Silence rose up around her; just when she thought she would go under and be lost in it she heard someone whistling in the hallway outside, trilling the notes like a bird, like many birds.

“Mend your lives,” she said. “You have deceived yourselves in the pride of your hearts, and the strength of your arms. Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, thence I will bring you down, says the Lord. Turn from power to love. Be kind. Do justice. Walk humbly.”

Louise was waving her arms. “Mary!” she shouted.

But Mary had more to say, much more; she waved back at Louise, then turned off her hearing aid so that she would not be distracted again. (134-35)

On one level, it is easy to see—and to relish—what Tobias Wolff is up to. He knows his collegiate setting well: knows the debilitating caution of academics; the terror of being forced, unprepared, to “wing it”; the pathos of those who want teaching jobs and the arrogance of those in a position to give or withhold them. With Wolff, we savor the sweetness of revenge, as Mary finds a desperate joy in rocking the boat, in setting a crowded lecture room on fire with scandal. Nor are we baffled by Wolff’s play with magical realism. When a faux Gothic lecture hall morphs into the smoky Iroquois Long House, or when Mary, standing in a stained glass “circle of red light,” becomes one with the Jesuits on their funeral pyre, we understand the method of the author’s madness.

All of this is easy enough to figure out, but what are we to make of that moment when Mary, at the end of her facts and on the brink of drowning in silence, suddenly hears “someone whistling in the hallway outside, trilling the notes like

birds, like many birds”? Earlier, Wolff said that Mary replaced her own thoughts and words with those of others, so that they “shrank to remote, nervous points, like birds flying away.” Now, as she “wings it” for the first time in her life, those words return to her, trilling en masse, and taking possession of the horrified lecture hall.

What then shall we say to all this “winging”? Is it the result of a hearing aid gone haywire? Are we witnessing a woman going mad? Or are we watching someone who went deaf after listening too intently to other people speak, now discovering the sound of her own voice and refusing to be distracted by any others? This interpretation is appealing in many ways, and yet for those “with ears to hear” it has its limitations. For what Mary actually says when her facts run out—the trilling birds she releases when she puts words in the dying Brébeuf’s mouth—is none other than the language of the Hebrew prophets. Her judgment against those who soar aloft like the eagle and make their nests among the stars; her injunction to do justice and walk humbly—everything that she says is derived from Amos and Hosea, Obadiah and Jeremiah, and, most especially, from the prophet Micah: “[The Lord] has showed you, o man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (6.8).

Mary’s “text” is not some boring lecture on the Marshall Plan, but it is also *not* her own speech. Rather, by telling her college audience to “Mend your lives,” she becomes Micah denouncing the corruption of a proud Jerusalem. Or she becomes Jean de Brébeuf—who knows?—speaking “one last time” to the Iroquois chief about to eat him alive. Willy-nilly, then, the former parrot becomes an apostle, the anxious plagiarist a prophet going for broke.

Do we simply laugh at this character transformation or does it also bring us up short with a discourse that cuts through the smoke and mirrors of academic life? Wolff’s tone in this story is satirical and tricky, which makes it difficult in the end to speak with confidence about the role that Scripture plays here. After all, a witty revenge comedy sits uneasily with a jeremiad, and the smart critic does not want to make too much of a good thing. Still, “In the Garden of the North American Martyrs” shows us how Scripture is present in contemporary literature—how it can generate new fictions and in turn be reinvigorated by them.

Just think of this exchange. Tobias Wolff finds a quirky way to tell the truth in a world in which almost no one says what she means or listens to what anyone else says. The biblical words detonate within that decorous lecture hall, and although we may laugh at the chaos that follows, no one can deny that something happened. Something truly new was said, even though Mary’s incendiary words were in fact already ancient and canonical at the time that Jean de Brébeuf may (or may not!) have spoken them.

The prophet Micah also gains a new context in which his challenge can be

heard again, not in synagogue or church, but in an academic lecture hall inscribed within a contemporary American short story. Wolff gains the moral weight that modern speech seems everywhere to have lost, while Micah gets a chance once more to ruffle feathers, shock and assault, to disturb the complacent and comfort the afflicted. We encounter the Bible afresh because we encounter it unexpectedly, out of the confines of its familiar context. It does not matter that the story is funny and the Scriptures cited are not; the humor disarms defenses and lets the words themselves both wound and heal.

What was Tobias Wolff expecting of his readers when he wrote this story? It is unlikely that most people who come to it—and certainly the vast majority of my undergraduates—will recognize the voice of the Hebrew prophets when they read Mary’s speech. Because of this, much will be lost through ignorance of the once canonical text, until in some future moment a teacher or an editor adds a footnote and thereby accords Wolff what Dante has also come to require—a connection made between citation and source.

But not all will be lost, for the ancient words of the Bible have an extraordinary ability not only to speak to readers who may not yet have heard them, but also to reach the rest of us who recognize the prophetic injunction but nonetheless stand in need of hearing it again—out of context, in a fresh assault, and as if for the first time. “Mend your lives. Turn from power to love. Be kind. Do justice. Walk humbly.”¹¹

Notes

1. The Pocket Canon Series, published by Grove Press (New York, 1999).
2. Philip W. Comfort, *The Complete Guide to Bible Versions* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1996).
3. The classic English-language study of the medieval Bible is Beryl Smalley’s *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (1958). See also my *Dante’s Testaments: Essays in Scriptural Imagination* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999), esp. chapters 1 and 2.
4. Jean Leclercq, OSB, *The Love of Learning and the Desire of God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. C. Mishrahi (New York: Fordham UP, 1961), pp. 93-94. “The memory, fashioned wholly by the Bible and nurtured entirely by biblical words and the images they invoke, causes [the monks] to express themselves spontaneously in a biblical vocabulary. Reminiscences are not quotations, elements of phrases borrowed from one another. They are the words of the person using them; they belong to him.” Joan Ferrante, “The Bible as Thesaurus for Secular Literature,” in Bernard S. Levy, ed., *The Bible in the Middle Ages: Its Influence on Literature and the Arts* (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1992), pp. 23-50, reminds us that the biblical literacy of the cloister was paralleled in the secular populace.
5. I am quoting the Douay/Rheims translation of the Vulgate.

6. The Letter to Can Grande (*Epistolam X ad Canem Grandem della Scala*), paragraph 7, in *Literary Criticism of Dante Alighieri*, trans. and ed. Robert S. Haller (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1973), p. 99.
7. The extent to which some of our finest living writers are engaged with religious experience and scriptural imagination can be seen in the now four-volume series edited by Paula J. Carlson and me, *Listening for God: Contemporary Literature and the Life of Faith* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress).
8. *Congregation: Contemporary Writers Read the Jewish Bible* (New York: Harcourt, 1987).
9. *Incarnation: Contemporary Writers on the New Testament*, ed. Alfred Corn (New York: Viking Penguin, 1990).
10. *In the Garden of the North American Martyrs* (New York: Ecco Press, 1981). For more on Wolff's consideration of the "North American Martyr" Jean de Brébeuf, see his essay "Second Thoughts on Certainty: Saint Jean de Brébeuf among the Hurons" in *A Tremor of Bliss: Contemporary Writers on the Saints*, ed. Paul Elie (New York: Riverhead Books, 1994), pp. 177-85. In it Wolff acknowledges a debt to Francis Parkman's *The Jesuits of North America*.
11. An earlier version of this essay was published in *Religion and Literature*, Vol. 36.1 (Spring 2004): 1-14.

III | Symposium Papers

The Song of Songs and the Poetic Creation of Eros

Laurie Alfonso

Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is as strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. . . .

—*Song of Songs*

In the Song of Songs, Eros is the muse of the beloved and her lover. The poetic quest for love and beauty, however, can be traced back through many pre-biblical cultures, the influence of which can be seen in the Song of Songs. In Sumerian sacred marriage texts (dating from 1700 BCE), the beginning of the pastoral tradition can be found, according to scholar David M. Halperin, in the “conflation of erotic and agricultural imagery” (104). One such Sumerian text concerns the god Dumuzi and the goddess Inanna, in which Inanna’s body is described as a field that provides nourishment for Dumuzi: “Oh Lady, your breast is your field, / Inanna, your breast is your field . . . I will drink it from you” (Halperin 106). An early Babylonian love lyric, neglecting pastoral imagery altogether, frankly reveals the thoughts of a young woman seeking the affections of her faithless male lover:

I sense my beauty spots:
My upper lip becomes mo[ist],
While the lower one trem[bles].
I shall embrace him, I shall kiss him,
I shall look [at him];
I shall obtain victory. . . . (Pope 79)

The woman’s longing for love’s fulfillment in this Babylonian text, Marvin Pope notes, parallels the potent poetic power of love’s expectation found in the Song of Songs (78). Early Egyptian love poetry was among the first to use the listing of bodily parts as a mode of magical incantation, representing the creation of verbal love rituals, a general literary pattern which would influence later poetry (80). Influences from all these ancient texts can also be seen in the Greek pastoral tradition, whose form, Halperin suggests, is deeply influenced by the transmission of Sumerian culture and ideas into the ancient Near East, including ancient Mesopotamia, Palestine, and the Aegean. Due to this shared cultural and liter-

ary currency, one may notice similarities between the Song of Songs and Greek pastoral poetry of the third century BCE. Sappho, as early as the sixth century BCE, was composing her epithalamia, or wedding songs, showing an early Greek tendency of linking one's beloved to a naturalistic symbol: "I thought to myself. / What are you like, sweet bridegroom, what? / Like a tender sapling, bridegroom, *that*" (Sappho 85). But as Halperin notes, it is Theocritus, in the third century BCE, with his self-conscious discovery of the landscape's metaphorical value, who transforms simple bucolic lyricism into elevated pastoralism (116). Within this broad tradition of ancient love poetry, the Song of Songs is "the only surviving instance of purely secular love poetry from ancient Israel" (Alter 185). To view the Song of Songs as secular poetry influenced by an ancient tradition of pastoral and love verses is to examine how its techniques of repetition, parallelism, evolving pastoral metaphors, and responsive verses between the two lovers create love poetry's desired end: namely, the manifestation of love through language.

The flowing lyricism of the Song of Songs stems from the union of the two lovers through language. Francis Landy notes: "The lovers are two persons, with presumably their own separate biography, but the poem is their composite speech, expressing a common personality to which they both contribute, to which each is opened up, and which is experienced in relation to the other" (305). Their linguistic union begins early in the poem, when the beloved and her lover compliment each other's beauty with parallel use of metaphor. The man says of his beloved, "As a lily among brambles, so is my love among maidens" (2.2). She returns his admiration with a parallel metaphoric structure: "As an apple among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among young men" (2.3). The idealized beauty that each lover sees in the other finds illumination in the archetypal and primal symbols of the natural world. Because of the intrinsic allegorical emphasis in the pastoral convention, the Song of Songs, with its prominent metaphorical use of landscape, is often interpreted symbolically as an account of the love between God and Israel (Coogan et al. 959).

To find love's expression in the natural world is something that the poet of the Song of Songs relies upon to create the lyricism of the lovers' song. Repetition of key bucolic images figures very heavily into each lover's continuing description of the other, as well as adding to the sense of linguistic communion within the song, as each lover relies on the metaphor of the other to add to the ongoing dialogue between the two. For example, the woman states: "My beloved is mine and I am his; he pastures his flock among the lilies" (2.16). Since she has been compared to a lily, this repetition links his livelihood, both as shepherd and lover, to her fertility. The man, relying on her imagery, responds by calling her hair "a flock of goats," and her teeth "a flock of shorn ewes" (4.2). He thus adds metaphorical value to her use of flock by using it to connote her abundant locks and white teeth. As the structure of his language becomes more figurative and complex,

the linguistic symbiosis between the two becomes greater and their connection stronger. Alter refers to this stylistic device as “incremental repetition,” whereby “the lover adds some item of enraptured admiration to the repetition” (188-89).

Responsive verses are a stylistic device used in many pastoral poems. T. V. F. Brogan defines a responsive poem as one where “verses, couplets, or stanzas are spoken alternately by two speakers. The second speaker is expected not only to match the theme introduced by the first but also to improve upon it in some way” (221). In the most physically descriptive and ekphrastic passages of the *Song of Songs*, the lovers describe each other’s physical beauty in parallel verses in which there are metaphoric comparisons of bodily parts, using shared images and sculptural language. The woman describes her lover’s body as “ivory work, encrusted with sapphires” (5.14); the man praises her neck “as an ivory tower” (7.4). Similar descriptions of a lover’s body can be found in Egyptian love songs of the New Kingdom (1570 to 1070 BCE), such as the following:

The mouth of my girl is a lotus bud,
Her breasts are mandrake apples,
Her arms are [vines],
[her] eyes are fixed like berries. . . . (Pope 74)

Ancient Egyptian cult hymns involved the ritual identification of bodily parts as part of a healing magic (Pope 73). While the *Song of Songs* may not rely on magical incantations, the verses referring to the lovers’ bodies distill the many metaphors running through the poem and create a powerful and striking example of poetry that enchants the listener, weaving a linguistic thread through repetitive language.

The woman, to begin her lover’s bodily appraisal, describes his eyes: “like doves beside springs of water, bathed in milk” (5.12). Before this moment in the poem, her male lover has already used a similar description of her eyes, “Your eyes are doves behind your veil” (4.1), as well as having referred to her as a “garden fountain, a well of living water and flowing streams from Lebanon” (4.15). The female’s verse thus condenses several of the male’s previous metaphors into one extended simile. Her luminous metaphor not only captures the image of the dove, but, because she is speaking of sight, also subtly adds the reflective quality of water, thus mimicking her hope that his eyes shall behold her image. The beloved implicitly understands the power of the eyes to transfix her lover, silently revealing the intensities and beauties of her desire. And certain images, such as the dove, intrinsically contain layers of feminine deification and eroticism in their figurative meanings. Doves are associated with depictions of goddesses in Egyptian art dating to the middle Bronze Age (Keel and Uehlinger 29), and “the dove’s prodigious erotic propensities made it powerful medicine in love magic, from ancient to recent times” (Pope 400). Thus, by using her lover’s feminine image for

her, the dove, and metaphorically transforming it into a description of his eyes, the beloved has cleverly linked his masculine gaze to her feminine potency. Later in the poem, when the male realizes her skillful charm and desire to subsume him in her passion, he cries:

You are beautiful as Tirzah, my love,
Comely as Jerusalem,
terrible as an army with banners.
Turn away your eyes from me,
for they overwhelm me! (6.5)

According to Pope, “the ravishing effect of beauty, especially the effect of the eyes and the effect of a single glance is a common feature of love poetry” (480). Certainly, in the Song of Songs, the gaze or sighting of one’s lover is fraught with formidable eroticism and power, perpetuating Eros’s quest for fulfillment. Through the lovers’ sophisticated creation of mixed metaphor, their fervent desire for communion, both actual and imagined, continually perpetuates itself.

Another erotic symbol which blends male and female principles is myrrh. The woman first refers to her beloved as “a bag of myrrh that lies between my breasts” (1.13). This evocative use is then paralleled by the male who develops his metaphorical devouring of the woman in a series of richly desirous pastoral images associated with the ingestion of wine and honeycomb, and with the gathering of myrrh (5.1). Francis Landy notes the garden “represents the body of the Beloved—the woman as a source of sex appeal” (312). Figuratively, the gathering of myrrh is the male lover’s gleaning of the woman’s sexuality. Myrrh itself is highly aromatic, prized for its perfuming of lovers’ couches (Proverbs 7.17) and its purification of girls for the king’s bed (Pope 350), and therefore associated by its fundamental essence with sexual purification, in this case, the beloved’s maidenhood. The confluence of metaphorical suggestiveness reaches its climax when the woman transforms myrrh into a metaphor of her own sexual and spiritual yearning, a yearning which has not yet found fulfillment in the male, its object:

² I slept, but my heart was awake.
Listen! My beloved is knocking.
“Open to me my sister, my love,
my dove, my perfect one;
for my head is wet with dew,
my locks with the drops of the night.”
³ I had put off my garment;
how could I put it on again?
I had bathed my feet;
how could I soil them?

⁴My beloved thrust his hand into the opening,
 and my inmost being yearned for him.
⁵I arose to open to my beloved,
 and my hands dripped with myrrh,
 my fingers with liquid myrrh,
 upon the handles of the bolt.
⁶I opened to my beloved,
 but my beloved turned and was gone.
 My soul failed me when he spoke.
 I sought him, but did not find him;
 I called him, but he gave
 no answer. (5.2-6)

The language's dualistic connotations, her brimming sensuality and its subsequent lack of gratification, lead to the darkest moments in the poem—those of her forlorn abandonment, in which she describes herself as “wounded” and even as viciously beaten (5.7). As the lover beckons the beloved from her sleep, only to disappear at the moment she expects consummation, both her misery and her seeking of him intensify. The male lover's elusiveness charges their near-encounters with unpredictability and emotional distress. This momentary anguish suggests that erotic pursuit, though inherently imbued with peril and occasional disappointment, is a necessary and vital precursor to erotic fulfillment, as their metaphorical game finds supreme reconciliation a mere seven verses later in her description of his lips: “His lips are lilies, distilling liquid myrrh” (5.13). This image suggests a union, a kiss, as his lips distill and breathe her essence, myrrh. She is satisfied through him, and in a moment of ephemeral consummation, her primal spirit enters his being via the transfiguration of myrrh's metaphorical structure.

Metaphorical consummation between the lovers has been continually building through a series of sensuous and natural images, but most illuminating is the last set of responsive verses in the poem. Reintroducing the poem's early reliance on arboreal metaphors, the male compares the female to a palm tree: “⁸I say I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its branches. O may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the scent of your breath like apples, ⁹ and your kisses like the best wine that goes down smoothly, gliding over lips and teeth” (7.8-9). The beloved has already been likened to a garden (5.1). The climbing of the palm, another metaphorical extension of her body, may indicate a harvesting of her fruits, the act of loving. Since she has previously called him an apple tree (2.3), he now transforms her original metaphor into the essence of her body, the breath of apples. Thus, she poetically breathes him in, and through metaphorical integration, there is a commingling and expectant sharing of the lovers' figurative bodies, the union of love.

The woman's responsive verse alludes to this communion. The latent possibility of their love's fruition is seen in her beckoning of her lover: "11 Come my beloved, let us go forth into the fields, and lodge in the villages; 12 let us go out early to the vineyards, and see whether the vines have budded, whether the grape blossoms have opened and the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love" (7.11-12). She is in possession of a vineyard, full of budding and blossoming, thus giving way to the "kisses like the best wine" (7.9), the kisses that her lover hopes for in the earlier verse. The woman also repeats her lover's metaphorical use of the pomegranate. As he has described her cheeks as slices of pomegranates, a common practice of Near Eastern poets, she may obliquely be using the pomegranate to denote her breasts, another convention of Egyptian love poetry (Polk 464). The pomegranate is also a holy potent symbol, as it is found on priestly garments and on temple pillars belonging to Yahweh (Keel and Uehlinger 360). Thus, its connotation can be seen as both fecund and sanctified. The beloved and her lover, their cardinal metaphors combining, enter into a complex linguistic union, which spurs the beloved to vow her love, using the symbolic tropes of the pastoral landscape.

A love as strong as death must also be a love as strong as life, and as desire is the opposite of death, it is no surprise that the Song ends as a testament of Eros's insatiability, its fire, and its supreme value:

6 Set me as a seal upon your heart,
As a seal upon your arm;
for love is strong as death,
passion fierce as the grave.
Its flashes are flashes of fire,
a raging flame.

7 Many waters cannot quench love,
neither can floods drown it.
If one offered for love
all the wealth of one's house,
It would be utterly scorned. (8.6-7)

Through the stylistic devices of ancient love poetry and pastoral conventions, life abounds in the lovers' shared and coalescing use of symbols and poetic technique. Physical beauty abounds throughout the Song of Songs, and it is through the poet's use of parallel structure, enchanting repetition, responsive dialogue, and increasingly complex creation of metaphor that the idea of the lovers' eternal quest is created. Just as the beloved and her lover are anaphoric manifestations of love, so are the lovers' verses derivative reflections of each other. Poetry which seeks to communicate love's desire must ultimately seek to capture its constant evolution, as it moves from bliss to abandonment and back to bliss

yet again. For the beloved and her lover, their shared song is a testament to the supreme beauty and intense emotional range that love gives to those who delve into its intricacies. Thus, the fact that the song ends with the beloved's beckoning of her lover suggests that the erotic supremacy of the chase, its liberating fire, far overshadows its perils:

Make haste, my beloved,
and be like a gazelle
or a young stag
upon the mountains of spices! (8.14)

The beloved longs for her lover to be like a virile, wild animal, just a few steps ahead of the huntress, yet still within her sights.

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Catch-22 and the Edenic Narrative

Amy Feldman

Throughout the pages of Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, set during World War II, death haunts the novel's protagonist, Yossarian, in literal and figurative ways, from the dead man called Mudd in Yossarian's tent to the soldier wrapped head to toe in white gauze at the hospital to Doc Daneeka's bureaucratic living death. Most significantly, Yossarian fixates on the horrific death of Snowden, a soldier he barely knew, in shadowy remembrances that repeat a mysterious, secret message about Snowden's death. At Snowden's funeral, a naked Yossarian watches from a distance, perched in a tree that is explicitly linked to the fateful tree of Eden. Indeed, Heller's treatment of the scene incorporates several motifs from Genesis 3, augmenting a theme that appears repeatedly throughout the novel: namely, how to find meaning in life when faced with the existential reality of pain and suffering culminating in death. Through his modification of the biblical narrative, Heller universalizes the particular and extreme circumstances of his main character, Yossarian. As a result, the novel speaks not only to the absurdities and violence of war, but of human experience harkening back to the days of Adam, the first man.

For Yossarian, a self-professed Atheist, the belief in the goodness of God presents itself as contradicting the course of human experience:

Good God, how much reverence can you have for a Supreme Being who finds it necessary to include such phenomena as phlegm and tooth decay in His divine system of creation? What in the world was running through that warped, evil, scatological mind of His when he robbed old people of the power to control their bowel movements? Why in the world did He create pain? (189)

His beliefs regarding God before actively fighting in the war illustrate his struggle with religious dogma, which is signaled in part by his recognition of the Divine character as both creator and destroyer. For Yossarian, doubt arises not only from the paradoxical nature of God, but from the degree to which God micromanages humanity's humiliation through the humbling physical functions of the human body, from phlegm to feces.

Yossarian expresses his doubt about God's character, and about his very existence, by starting his argument from the self-evident reality of evil and suffering; in doing so, however, he is actually not far from the ground of the Bible's multiple treatments of theodicy, starting with the Edenic narrative in Genesis and moving through Job and several Psalms straight through to the New Testament. The main difference is that in Heller's world the debate takes place with Yossarian's mistress,

Lieutenant Scheisskopf's wife, herself a self-professed Atheist, who bursts into tears at Yossarian's accusation of the Divine as being not merely malevolent but a "bumpkin" (189).

The army chaplain, an Anabaptist minister, asks similar questions after seeing a naked man, whom he does not recognize as Yossarian, in a tree while conducting Snowden's funeral:

Was there a single true faith, or a life after death? How many angels could dance on the head of a pin, and with what matters did God occupy Himself in all the infinite aeons before the Creation? Why was it necessary to put a protective seal on the brow of Cain if there were no other people to protect him from? Did Adam and Eve produce daughters? (278)

It is perhaps worth noting that Chaplain Tappman's questions move from the theologically abstruse to the textually specific as he turns his attention towards some of the classic biblical cruces—those utter conundrums of logic—found in the opening chapters of Genesis. Fittingly, as several of the novel's characters search for existential answers regarding the nature of God, wittingly or unwittingly, they are obliged to do so in terms derived concretely from the biblical tradition.

The mysteries surrounding God's plans for humankind originate in the early chapters of Genesis, particularly in the story of Adam and Eve, including their temptation, disobedience, and subsequent banishment from the Garden of Eden. The story begins with the creation of Adam from the dust of the earth with God breathing life into him, causing him to come into being. God places Adam in the Garden of Eden to till the land and eat from all trees, with one exception, or catch:

¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die." (Genesis 2.16-17)

Later in the narrative, the serpent plants doubt in Adam's partner Eve concerning God's threat of capital punishment for eating the fruit:

⁴ You will not die; ⁵ for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. (Genesis. 3.4-5)

In truth, the serpent proves to be correct and God spares Adam and Eve immediate death, but denies their opportunity for immortality:

²² Then the Lord God said, "See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" — ²³ therefore the Lord God sent him forth

from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. (Genesis 3.22-23)

The “therefore” statement here, signaling a didactic lesson, provides a reason for God’s limitation of humanity: man cannot possess eternal life and knowledge. If man possesses both, he can become a god. The story fully exploits its punning wordplay between *Adam*, meaning “humankind” or “the man,” and *adamah*, which is Hebrew for ground, dust, or earth, by indicating that the man must return to the ground to till it and to eventually be buried in it. Adam’s wife, whom he calls Eve, resembling the Hebrew word for living, instigates the series of events that give Adam, and by extension all of humankind, the gift and curse of morality and mortality.

The biblical story, ripe with significance, explains some of the trademark characteristics of the human experience. For the atheistic Yossarian of Heller’s creation, however, solace from pain and death cannot be found through belief in God or through unconscious obedience, but only through independent acts of courage and self-preservation. In *Catch-22*, within the structure of the novel’s non-chronological rendering, the characters face the inherent illogical functioning of the universe through multiple manifestations of absurd behavior in language, identity, and performance. For the reader, the shifting time sequences of the novel recreate the irrationality of Yossarian’s experience. If *Catch-22* is considered by many to be a postmodern novel, preoccupied with the dissolution of absolute values, it nevertheless remains necessary to examine the book’s solidly old-fashioned biblical allusion, which casts Yossarian as an Adam-figure. Therefore, I would like to attend somewhat closely to the episode of Snowden’s funeral, which frames this particular allusion.

Still naked after leaving the plane in which he has just done battle, having been cleansed by Doc Daneeka with “cold wet balls of absorbent cotton” from the “smeared” blood of Snowden and given sleeping pills twice in twenty-four hours, Yossarian watches his fallen comrade’s funeral while perched on the limb of a tree overlooking the cemetery where the chaplain performs the service. Milo, the mess-hall venture capitalist, beckons him:

“Come on down and taste this and tell me if it’s good. It’s very important.” Yossarian shook his head. He sat nude on the lowest limb of the tree and balanced himself with both hands grasping the bough directly above. He refused to budge, and Milo had no choice but to stretch both arms about the trunk in a distasteful hug and start climbing. He struggled upward clumsily with loud grunts and wheezes, and his clothes were squashed and crooked by the time he pulled himself up high enough to hook a leg over the limb and pause for breath. His dress cap was askew and in danger of falling. Milo caught it when it just began slipping. . . . Cautiously Milo worked himself around in a half circle so

that he could face Yossarian. He unwrapped tissue paper from something soft, round, and brown and handed it to Yossarian. (271)

As shown through Heller's description, Milo, clad in an olive green uniform, seems remarkably similar to the serpent of Genesis, tempting Yossarian to ingest an improbable concoction. The "danger of falling" describes not only the state of Milo's cap, but of Milo himself, and ultimately Yossarian:

"Please taste this and let me know what you think. I'd like to serve it to the men."

"What is it?" asked Yossarian, and took a big bite.

"Chocolate-covered cotton."

Yossarian gagged convulsively and sprayed his big mouthful of chocolate-covered cotton right out into Milo's face. "Here take it back!" he spouted angrily. "Jesus Christ! Have you gone crazy? You didn't even take the goddamn seeds out." (271)

While this strange fruit Milo offers Yossarian resembles the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, there are some remarkable differences that should be reviewed. The fact that the cotton, although it is a natural substance, is not meant to be edible signals Heller's departure from the biblical narrative. Milo tampers with the cotton, covering it with chocolate, to make it enticing. In the biblical account, the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil looks "good" to Eve, without any tampering on the part of the serpent. The only tampering the serpent did was to tamper with Eve's opinions about the tree of knowledge of good and evil and God's prohibition.

Rather than imitating the biblical narrative, Heller draws from the biblical tradition as a backdrop for his own narrative, imbued with his own poignant imagery. The image of the white cotton ball underneath the dark chocolate symbolizes the death of Snowden. After the mission at Avignon:

Yossarian climbed down the few steps of his plane naked, in a state of utter shock, with Snowden smeared abundantly all over his bare heels and toes, knees, arms, and fingers, and pointed inside wordlessly toward where the young radiogunner lay freezing to death on the floor beside the still younger tailgunner who kept falling back in a dead faint each time he opened his eyes and saw Snowden dying. (270)

An utterly traumatized Yossarian receives medical care by Doc Daneeka, the squadron's chief doctor:

Doc Daneeka guided Yossarian inside a chair and washed Snowden off him with cold wet balls of absorbent cotton. Doc Daneeka gave him a pill and a shot that put him to sleep for twelve hours. (270)

Doc Daneeka keeps giving him pills until Yossarian refuses, remaining naked and hiding out in the tree to see Snowden's funeral.

Heller's choice in departing from the biblical representation of the fruit as natural and good to an unnatural chocolate-covered cotton ball reaffirms his narrative vision, while drawing on several motifs from the Bible. For Yossarian, eating the chocolate-covered cotton ball symbolizes death, not as a punishment for violating God's will, but as a bitter pill to swallow, literally "indigestible" and emblematic of Snowden's and his own mortality (274).

While the allusion to the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is manipulated for Heller's larger purposes, the explicit reference to both trees of the Garden of Eden highlight a pivotal moment in the text as it relates to Yossarian's character development:

He [Milo] stroked the tree affectionately. "This is a pretty good tree," he observed admiringly with proprietary gratitude.

"It's the tree of life," Yossarian answered, wagging his toes, "and of knowledge of good and evil, too."

Milo squinted closely at the bark and branches. "No it isn't," he replied.

"It's a chestnut tree. I ought to know. I sell chestnuts."

"Have it your way." (272)

For Yossarian, already struggling with the prospect of his death in the war, Milo represents a person who does not care about the outcome of the war, only with unloading the cotton cartel, without loyalty to the United States. In a sense, Yossarian admires Milo, but instead of following in Milo's footsteps of a brash and amoral capitalism, symbolized through Milo's creation of the syndicate, Yossarian seeks to find his own method of dealing with the chaos of war. Sitting in the tree naked represents Yossarian's desire to achieve a state of innocence despite his knowledge of war and death. Arguably, it is through the knowledge of the horrors of war that Yossarian seeks innocence in order to preserve his life. Yossarian calls the tree he sits in the tree of life and the knowledge of good and evil, combining the two trees in an attempt to combine immortality and knowledge, symbolically fulfilling God's fear from Genesis 3.22.

His attempt to achieve this state stems from the death of Snowden:

Man was matter, that was Snowden's secret. Drop him out a window and he'll fall. Set fire to him and he'll burn. Bury him and he'll rot, like other kinds of garbage. The spirit gone, man is garbage. That was Snowden's secret. Ripeness was all. (450)

Here it becomes clear that Yossarian is not only a modern Adam struggling with the horrors of suffering, trying not to "fall" out of his tree. He is also the fruit of the tree, for which "Ripeness was all." But what this ripeness entails, and how man

attains it, ominously remains “Snowden’s secret.” As a literal image, “ripeness” is ambiguous, suggesting that a fruit is both ready to eat, at its peak, and at the same time soon to drop and rot. Similarly, within the biblical tradition, spiritual ripeness can denote a readiness for conversion or the time of the reaping that is God’s final judgment.

The atheistic Yossarian, who acknowledges that “ripeness was all,” nevertheless seems to recognize that he himself is not yet ripe. Nor, it might be added, does he ever wish to be, shunning conversion and wishing, earnestly, to avoid death at all costs. Thus, preserving his life becomes his mission in the war, not fighting the increased number of battles Colonel Cathcart initiates in order to gain a promotion to general. The episode in the tree symbolizes an attempt on Yossarian’s part to regain his innocence without negating his experience. Heller’s positioning of Yossarian in the tree signifies the protagonist’s attempt to gain power over his circumstances, to become, in short, “like a god.” When Yossarian goes AWOL at the end of the novel, it signals a move toward freedom without compromising his beliefs. Thus, in the end, the absurd machinations of the war are flouted and Yossarian can embrace life on his own terms, as a new Adam, precariously un-fallen, thankfully unripe, and happily unredeemed.

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Wounding of the Christ: Biblical Iconography and the Image of *Ecce Homo* in the Poetry of Gregory Corso

Landan Gross

Gregory Corso remains one of the most underappreciated and undervalued poets of the twentieth-century. One of the core Beat Generation writers, his work is overshadowed by that of his friends and contemporaries Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William Burroughs. But Corso is deserving of much more scrutiny and close reading. As Michael Skau contends in his very insightful and comprehensive study of the poet, *“A Clown in a Grave”: The Complexities and Tensions in the Works of Gregory Corso*, “little critical attention has been focused on the Romantic, Transcendental, and Surreal links to Corso’s work; but then the critics have devoted little attention to Corso at all” (9-10). I would concur. One reason Corso’s work has been ignored, I suspect, is the general and pervasive misconception that the Beat ethos itself is necessarily dismissive of and sophomorically antagonistic toward religion and the greater Western tradition. This faulty view has proved detrimental to the legacy of the Beats, as it often projects upon this close-knit group of writers a cultural naïveté tantamount to blind ignorance.

If Gregory Corso and his poetry have frequently been misunderstood on many counts, I think what remains particularly unacknowledged is his perspicacity as a reader of the Bible, as well as his sophisticated awareness of religio-cultural artifacts. In a short lyrical piece entitled “There Can Be No Other Apple for Me,” for example, Corso offers a thoughtfully jocund variation on the Garden scene in Genesis, which demonstrates the poet’s great sensitivity, care, concision, and humor:

In this lovely lonely orchard
perhaps stemmed for Eve’s core
I move in applelight continuum
of no dimension no dominion

and all around are apples ripe for the picking
but I go for that out of reach one
and quite make it. (*Long Live Man* 74)

Such a poem appears innocuous—even light—on its surface, but in it Corso employs a host of Edenic motifs and concerns, from the question of Adamic “dominion” and the matter of the first man’s loneliness to the perennial human thirst for knowledge at which he winks at the end. Considering the implications of eat-

ing “that out of reach one,” the reader can discern Corso’s linguistic and thematic playfulness, hinting at both his poetic wit as well as his biblical savviness. He knows the moral weight of the story, and he knows that we do, too.

If the treatment of Eden in this poem is relatively uncomplicated, Corso’s attempts to work with other biblical imagery, specifically that of the New Testament, seems a bit more abstruse. Several of his pieces refer directly to the stigmata and more generally to the holy corpus of Jesus. His poem “The Frightening Difference,” included in *The Happy Birthday of Death*, begins:

The more I think Christ blood not blood
The bleeding brow unlike the split forehead
 of a drunk who fell
The more I think of my own blood—

Oh how sad I get if even my nose bleeds!
I feel Christ bled easier
The way I have about His blood is not
 like the feeling I get when I see maybe
 a little blonde girl sopping above the ear— (37)

This poem, a meditation on the nature of Christ’s eminence and the mortality of human beings, establishes a hierarchical relationship between the Son of God and those for whom he has died. Can there be any way within such a hierarchy, however, that the individual human may be promoted to a hallowed rank? Reverent in his tone, Corso is affirming not only the sanctity of Jesus, but more emphatically, the grace of man. The speaker (and I would speculate that it *is* Corso, himself), as a poet, acknowledges in the following lines that by identifying with Christ or at least accepting His divinity, he, too, can ascend to an ethereal and mythological status:

And thank God I’ve never seen my father bleed
And my friends, thank God, only finger accidents—

I don’t understand but
it’s a good feeling I get
 a self-sad feeling when I spit blood— (37)

Corso knew well the dichotomized nature of Jesus, both man *and* God incorporated in one body. This dichotomy drives “The Frightening Difference” forward; Corso does, in fact, privilege Christ in the initial lines: *His* blood is “unlike” that of a clumsy inebriate. Quickly, though, the speaker qualifies his statement, confirming *also* the sacrosanct vitality of his human blood. So if the reader is to take this poem as Corso’s assuredness of Christ’s mortal/immortal duality, then one must also be prepared to attest to the immortality of the Poet, also a creator and judge,

as Corso avers.

One of the most provocative and dramatic occasions of Biblical reference in Corso's verse arises in his mysterious "*Ecce Homo*." Latin for "behold the man," the title of Corso's poem is taken from the incident occurring in chapter 19 of the Gospel of John; it is the pronouncement of Pontius Pilate upon presenting Jesus to the Jewish assembly on the day of his Crucifixion:

⁴ Pilate went out again and said to them, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him." ⁵ So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" [*ecce homo*] ⁶ When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted "Crucify him! Crucify him!" (John 19.4-6)

The fundamental characteristics of this particular spectacle, the purple cloak (indicative of Christ's regality) and the bestowing of the crown (performed as a mockery of Jesus's claims to sovereignty) are conveyed also in Mark 15.17 ("And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him") and in Matthew 27.27-29:

²⁷ Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. ²⁸ They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹ and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head.

The scene has been depicted consistently throughout the Western tradition in the visual arts, most often in painting and engravings. It may be, at times, closely allied with portrayals of the Passion, or the events leading up to the death on the Cross, the context of which are of great thematic and narrative import. For example, Pilate is granted a far more detailed and dramatic presence in the Gospel of John than in Matthew, Mark, or Luke; in chapters 18 and 19, we recognize not only his judicial, but also his philosophical misgivings in handing Jesus over. A more dynamic portrait of Pilate is provided in John; he is conflicted in his legal authority to condemn Jesus, declaring "I find no case against him" (19.4). It is worth noting, also, that immediately preceding chapter 19, which depicts the trial and indictment of Jesus, as well as the Passion and Crucifixion, is the verbal exchange between Christ and Pilate in the latter's headquarters. Jesus, elucidating his earthly mission, testifies that "Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice" (18.37), to which Pilate sardonically retorts, "What is truth?" (18.38). Of course, in the Gospel of John, *truth* is Jesus himself, understood explicitly as the divine *logos* or word of God, and the Roman prefect will, in the statement *ecce homo*, answer his own cynical query, for to behold the man *is* to behold the truth. For both dramatic and theological reasons, this scene is one of the most crucial moments in the New Testament, as it affords the audience an opportunity for

acquittal: will the truth be seen, or will it not?

In “*Ecce Homo*” Corso has taken as his subject a rendition of the episode in John by Theodoric of Prague, also referred to as Magister Theodoricus, the court painter for the fourteenth-century Holy Roman Emperor, Charles IV. Corso would most likely have seen Theodoric’s piece prior to 1958, as he traversed Europe between 1956 and 1957. Corso’s poem, written both *to* and *about* Theodoricus’s painting, functions as a descriptor of the artwork as well as a commentary on the piece, as there are at points in the poem “two” voices present:

Inside the wounded hands and feet
the fragments of earlier wounds (almost healed)
like black almonds crusted
are answer enough—
the nails went through the man to God. (*Gasoline* 34)

One must pause over the cryptic quality of this first stanza: what, in fact, are these “earlier wounds?” And if this is Christ on the Cross, how might he have sustained prior injury? Perhaps the most efficacious strategy for unraveling these lines is with a historico-theological approach. Jesus, his limbs punctured and in the midst of asphyxiation, on one level, *literally* endures the pain of the Crucifixion—“the wounded hands and feet.” But given Christian signification, which Theodoricus and Corso certainly were appreciative of, the remnants, these “fragments of earlier wounds” which are “almost healed” speak to a more metaphysical element. It is imperative, then, that we are cognizant of the violent and perfidious history of human beings in the Bible; covenants are broken and Mosaic law is often disregarded. I would claim that these internal “fragments” are the scabbed-over marks of man’s past transgressions, and it is only through the mortal death of Christ, simultaneously human and divine, that true salvation can be achieved. We must look again at another scripturally poignant passage from chapter 19 of John, this time verses 29-30, to more fully illuminate just what Corso is (without flippancy) asserting. Jesus, hanging from the Cross, is dying and expresses his thirst. He is administered to by his mother and “the disciple whom he loved”:

²⁹ A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. ³⁰ When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished” [*consummatum est*]. Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

The phrase “almost healed” in “*Ecce Homo*” is a reference to the fact that Christ is not yet deceased. God’s forgiveness is conditional as well as temporal; only when the Son perishes will man be absolved of his iniquity.

The parenthetical asides in Corso’s poem suggest the *possibility* of multiple “pundits,” or at the least, artistic assessment by perhaps a critic or historian.

That is not to say, however, that this rhetorical convention operates uniformly throughout “*Ecce Homo*.” The analytical parenthesis “(almost healed)” in line two, which I attribute to the dominant speaker, demonstrates an informed ecclesiastical judgment, whereas those discursions that follow in the second stanza appear to be *aesthetic* evaluations, predicated principally on the *actual* painting by Theodoricus and not the quintessentially Christian event. I would argue that the imposition of the “art aficionado” at this point cheapens the central image and motif—Christ as the Savior and the Redeemer, pierced and brutalized by his captors—and it may serve to reduce the mortal human, Jesus, to a two-dimensional illustration. Corso, in the brief middle section of “*Ecce Homo*,” demands that we look at the hanging God:

The crown of thorns (a superb idea!)
and the sidewound (an atrocity!)
only penetrate the man. (34)

Corso is clearly stirred by the emotional potency of such an image, and in particular, the one by Theodoricus. He, like many other writers, is indebted to the poetic potential of Christ, and as such, I would venture to say that the figure of Jesus, both pre-, during, and post-Crucifixion, serves as a Muse, of sorts. The image of a ridiculed and innocent victim, self-aware of his heavenly lineage and duty (that is, to be executed for Man’s survival) moved the poet. “*Ecce Homo*” then, can be considered *Corso’s* gospel, a poetic manifesto exclaiming the sublimity of the Messiah’s earthly death.

The poem concludes in a similarly ecstatic fashion, though now the speaker, still captivated, stands at a distance, deliberating upon the thematic grandeur of the *Ecce Homo* tradition, while holding Theodoric’s presentment as the exemplar. The critical assessments included in the previous two stanzas have disappeared; effectively, it is a finale of rapture and epiphany, asserting that this version of Christ’s anguish is the literal visual transcription of the Biblical account. Its inimitability renders it beyond mere evaluation of form and artistic technique:

I have seen many paintings of this;
the same inflictions,
subject of proof; *ecce signum*
the same sad face;
I have forgotten them all.
O Theodoricus, youth, vagueness, my fault; yet yours!
What grief! This
impossible to forget. (34)

Yes, there is a proliferation of art that intends to capture the torment of Jesus, but for Corso, Theodoric’s depiction, though an imitation, embodies the spiritual

solemnity of Christ's misery and eventual crucifixion. Theodoric's *Ecce Homo* is at once a *symbol* of the tribulation of the Son of God (*ecce signum*, behold the sign); and most important, it is, as in Pilate's declaration ("Here is the man!"), also "subject of proof," a testimony to the grandeur and intrinsic Truth of Jesus.

The ethical and spiritual gravity of the punishment of Jesus is a foundational tenet of Christian belief, but the iconic and emotionally charged image of the wounded Christ has inspired much literature and artistic reproduction, both devotional and secular. Corso, brilliantly self-educated, is aroused by its considerable force and creative power. He is quite familiar with the mythological history of the Bible, and nowhere is this clearer than in his conceptual exegesis of *Ecce Homo*, a paramount scene and sequence of the New Testament. It is evident that Gregory Corso is a confident and *conscientious* poet, and as a poet, he is striving to articulate some degree of truth in his work. He has inherited the burden from his predecessor, Theodoricus, to express *his* vision of Christ's physical experience in the Gospel of John, and we ultimately understand, through Corso's "*Ecce Homo*," that to behold the man *properly* is to behold him in his agony.

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After Eden: Herman Melville's *Typee* as an Allegory of Religious Conversion

Janice M. Holzman

Herman Melville's *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life* is both an archetypal representation of the Genesis story, specifically of Adam and Eve and their fall from Eden, as well as an allegory about Christian missionaries in Polynesia during the nineteenth century. It seems Melville paradoxically uses the biblical subtext of Eden to write a criticism of nineteenth-century Christian missionaries' work in the Pacific. Upon closer reading, however, Melville reveals that it is not simply western civilization that is responsible for the fall, but rather a force that is innately and universally human.

The Edenic theme is a common archetype that turns up frequently in literature. The notion that a paradise existed in complete perfection and that humanity has consequently fallen from this ideal through its own misdeeds permeates western culture. In *Typee* the novel's protagonist, Tommo, abandons his merchant ship while it is docked at the port of Nukuheva in the Marquesan Islands. Subsequently, Tommo experiences a return to a seeming Eden that, as the novel unfolds, becomes increasingly problematic for him. In the eyes of the Typee, Tommo alternates between a god-figure and a prospective religious convert. This tension ultimately resolves itself in Tommo's realization that the Typee people, though living in paradise, are also subject to the Fall; more specifically, he recognizes as a key consequence of the Fall the universal pressure for conformity that exists throughout humanity.

After abandoning ship, Tommo finds himself in the valley of the Typee people, a group rumored to be the most vicious of cannibals; yet, upon first viewing the valley from a distance he characterizes it by stating: "had a glimpse of the gardens of Paradise been revealed to me I could scarcely have been more ravished with the sight" (49). Confronted with a concrete image of the Edenic archetype, Tommo responds instinctively—almost obsessively—to a potential return to the perfection of humanity; he is "transfixed with surprise and delight" (49).

Tommo and his fellow deserter Toby spend a significant amount of time traversing the forest in an effort to find a tribe of natives before their meager food supply runs out. When the characters finally encounter evidence of human activity, the reader is struck with a vision of Eden:

We looked about us uncertain whither to direct our steps, since the path we had so far followed appeared to be lost in the open space around us. At last we resolved to enter a grove near at hand, and had advanced a few rods, when, just

upon its skirts, I picked up a slender bread-fruit shoot perfectly green, and with the tender bark freshly stripped from it. It was still slippery with moisture, and appeared as if it had been but that moment thrown aside. I said nothing, but merely held it up to Toby, who started at this undeniable evidence of the vicinity of the savages.

The plot was now thickening. . . . Could it have been thrown down by some solitary native, who, alarmed at seeing us, had hurried forward to carry the tidings of our approach to his countrymen? . . . [I]t was too late to recede, so we moved on slowly, my companion in advance casting eager glances under the trees on each side, until all at once I saw him recoil as if stung by an adder. Sinking on his knee, he waved me off with one hand, while with the other he held aside some intervening leaves, and gazed intently at some object. (67-68)

Tommo and Toby then catch “a glimpse of two figures partly hidden by the dense foliage” (68), and the Edenic archetype—partially announced by Melville’s sly introduction of “an adder” that never materializes—is made complete with an image of Adam and Eve: “They were a boy and a girl. Slender and graceful, and completely naked, with the exception of a slight girdle of bark, from which depended at opposite points two of the russet leaves of the breadfruit tree” (68). The stage has been set as the audience meets this native Adam and Eve, viewed apparently right after the fall, as evidenced by the half-eaten shoot from a bread fruit tree “still slippery with moisture” that “had been but at that moment thrown aside” (68). The figures hearken back to Adam when he admits to God, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself” (Genesis 3.10). Indeed, Melville, as if drawing in still life the Edenic flight from God, depicts the young man and woman frozen fearfully “with one foot in advance, as if half inclined to fly from [the] presence” of Tommo and Toby (68), who act as surrogate gods in this instance. Even though the scene itself is clearly postlapsarian in its imagery, the tone of the episode, presented through Tommo’s eyes, invites readers to view the two Typee figures as possessing an undoubtedly prelapsarian innocence: “I verily believe the poor creatures took us for a couple of white cannibals who were about to make a meal of them” (69). In this sense, Tommo and Toby appear not to see what the reader cannot miss: that they are both witnesses to and unwitting agents of this newly replayed fall.

Almost immediately, Tommo and Toby “throw cotton cloth across their shoulders, giving them to understand that it was theirs” (69)—a gesture of goodwill toward the strangers. In the Genesis story, God similarly “made garments of skins for the man and for his wife and clothed them” (3.21), a key detail for comparison since Melville repeatedly points out that the westerner’s access to novel commodities like fabric and tobacco engenders a god-like reverence in the Typee people. Thus, in bringing western influence (the cloth), Tommo and Toby appear

to advance further the allegorical fall from Eden for the Typee people. In the biblical passage, in contrast to the famous fig leaves with which Adam and Eve clothed themselves in shame, God provides clothing for the couple in an act of divine care, anticipating their need in exile. In *Typee*, however, it may be argued that Tommo gives the cloth to the cover the half-naked youths because of his own painful consciousness of their nudity; in any case, it is certain that the Typee youths do not stand in any need of the additional garments. The Edenic subtext of this detail is made explicit later in the novel when Tommo describes the apparel of his female companion Fayaway, who typically wore “the primitive and summer garb of Eden . . . as [had] the two youthful savages whom we had met upon first entering the valley” (87). If this initial encounter represents something like an opportunity to return to Eden, then the first thing Tommo accomplishes in his gift of clothing is injurious to the near perfection he thinks he has discovered.

The Edenic subtext in *Typee* underscores both the Marquesan natives’ innocence as well as their potential susceptibility to corruption. While the Fall seems, by suggestion, already to have occurred, as evidenced by their garb and the eaten fruit, they have not yet been expelled from the Garden. What then stands in for the biblical “tree of knowledge” in this extended metaphor? According to Tommo, in the beginning of the novel, it is explicitly “the white man” who brings suffering and misfortune: “Thrice happy are they who . . . have never been brought into contaminating contact with the white man” (15). Tommo’s first impulse—a sympathetic one—is to view the corruption of paradise as necessarily coming from without; he states that “the penalty of the Fall presses very lightly on the valley of the Typee. . . . Ill fated people! I shudder when I think of the change a few years will produce in their paradisiacal abode [when] the magnanimous French will proclaim to the world that the Marquesas Islands have been converted to Christianity!” (195). It is at this point that Melville makes the allegorical meaning of *Typee* explicit and suggests the immediate source of expulsion from Eden for the Polynesians. For Melville, it is not simply western culture or its imperialism, but rather, specifically, organized western religion and the culture of conversion that it represents which is responsible for the fall of humanity. In *Typee*, Christian missionaries—the proverbial snakes in the garden—and their ensuing corruption of indigenous peoples are represented effectively, though ironically, through the Judeo-Christian myth of the fall from paradise. As the story progresses, however, it becomes clear that it is not western culture alone that heralds the fall. The tables are turned on Tommo when he discovers among the Typee a culture of conversion as threatening to him as that of the Christian missionaries is to the islanders. Thus, Melville’s allegory of a paradise about to be lost subtly shifts its focus to portray the Typee people as cannibal missionaries. That adder, it turns out, has been here all along.

When Tommo first arrives, he is baptized. Suffering from an injured leg due

to his trek through the forest, Tommo is carried to a nearby stream by a “friend” who is apparently assigned to him to minister to his comfort. When Tommo appears somewhat resistant to bathing because he feels uncomfortable surrounded by numerous witnesses, his friend Kory-Kory rebukes him, “enjoining [him] by unmistakable signs to immerse [his] whole body” (89). According to Tommo, “to this I was forced to consent; . . . the honest fellow regarding me as a forward, inexperienced child, whom it was his duty to serve at the risk of offending” (89-90). Kory-Kory acts as a kind of Typee “godparent” and oversees Tommo’s conversion, bearing responsibility for his cannibal soul. After Tommo is bathed, or “baptized,” he is unable to “avoid bursting into admiration of the scene around [him]” (90), indicating that the experience has been appropriately revelatory and transformative. Thus, the first step in Tommo’s conversion to cannibalism has been secured by Kory-Kory. As Sujit Sivasundaram has observed in an essay on “missionary work in the Pacific Islands,” baptism was very important to the Christian missionaries working in Polynesia during the nineteenth century, because it was “the evangelical equivalent of putting someone on display: the baptism . . . functioned as a public announcement of [the native’s] conversion” (16). At this point, the native also received his or her Christian name, much as Tom receives his “cannibal” name “Tommo” in Typee (72). Though Melville is never overt about this imagery, Tommo’s Typee “baptism” significantly parallels and inverts the work of the Christian missionaries active in Melville’s time. This baptismal event is followed by Tommo’s growing enthusiasm and unmistakable admiration for the Typee way of life.

After spending a significant and very pleasant length of time residing with these seeming innocents, however, Tommo admits with trepidation, towards the novel’s conclusion, that “king Mehevi and several of the inferior chiefs now manifested that I should be tattooed” (219). As a people, the Typee are covered in tribal tattoos, literally head to toe, which denote their rank within the tribe. Tommo, however, is certain that tattoos on his face will prohibit him from ever reintegrating into western society. He resists as best he can and finally discovers that “the whole system of tattooing was . . . connected with their religion; and it was evident, therefore, that they were resolved to make a convert of me” (220). Thus, it is made explicit that the Typees’ interest in him parallels the Christian missionaries’ interest in converting the Polynesian “heathens.”

Tommo begins to become suspicious of the Typees’ obsession with integrating him into their culture, much as the indigenous population would have been with respect to Christian missionaries’ efforts to convert them. He is distrustful of their intentions and longs to return to the western life he is familiar with. Tommo’s growing distrust elevates to outright dread when a “mysterious feast” occurs after a second fight with a completing tribe from the other side of the valley, the Happers. While Tommo arrives in the valley understanding that

the Typee have a reputation for cannibalism, he has not yet encountered any activity that supports this claim. After numerous “assurances which the Typees have often given me, that they never eat human flesh” (233), Tommo discovers a vessel which holds “the disordered members of the human skeleton, the bones still fresh with moisture, and with articles of flesh clinging to them here and there” (238) the day after the mysterious feast he was excluded from occurs. This frightening description of human bones “still fresh with moisture” closely recalls, nearly 200 pages later, the specific language used to describe the discarded fruit found “still slippery with moisture” in the novel’s earlier passage, just before the young Typee “Adam and Eve” were first glimpsed. The reader is encouraged by this subtle connection to observe that these idyllic and quasi-Edenic natives, too, are fallen and flawed.

For Melville, however, it is important to note that the evangelical cannibals are not that far removed from their Christian counterparts. In Jesus Christ’s last supper, after all, he states after breaking bread: “²² ‘Take; this is my body.’ ²³ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. ²⁴ He said to them, ‘This is my blood’” (Mark 14.22-24). While the biblical passage clearly deals only in the symbols of flesh and blood, the message could be easily misinterpreted literally: human flesh is eaten. By this proximity of symbol and savagery, it becomes obvious to Tommo that there is little difference between the two cultures. It is the Typee society’s pressure to conform that proves to Tommo that the people he has encountered have indeed fallen.

According to Northrope Frye, “The unity of a work of art . . . has not been produced solely by the unconditional will of the artist . . . it has form and consequently a formal cause” (1448). In Melville’s novel, the Edenic subtext and the allegory regarding Christian missionaries are intimately connected. The people of Melville’s allegorical Eden—Polynesia—are expelled from their near perfect garden. Tommo admits “not until I visited Honolulu was I aware of the fact that the small remnant of the natives had been civilized into draught horses and evangelized into beasts of burden” (196). These unfortunate people are literally subject to God’s threat after Adam and Eve fall: “¹⁷ cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; . . . ¹⁹ By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground” (Genesis 3.17-19). Prior to the European infiltration, the people of Polynesia lived an Edenic lifestyle. After the fall, they toil like the rest of the western world. For Tommo, it is sincerely lamentable that “the abominations of Paganism have given way to the pure rites of the Christian worship—the ignorant savage has been supplanted by the refined European” (196). Yet, by the end of the novel it is obvious that there is no large difference between the two sensibilities.

While much of the western tradition suggests that the fall from Eden is connected only to humanity’s overtly sinful nature, *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian*

Life suggests something quite different. It is also humanity's desire to assimilate and to privilege the familiar, demanding conformity and conversion over individual freedom and difference, that expresses our fallen nature, no matter what the culture. The Typee people, by pursuing the religious conversion of Melville's Tommo, prove that they are not all that different from the Christian missionaries. Thus, Tommo's initial perception of the paradise of Polynesia must eventually take into account that this Eden, too, is subject to the same human flaws that permeate western culture. Indeed, it seems that virtually every society and culture has imagined that paradise, if it is to be regained, must be a paradise of sameness; but this drive to eradicate difference through conversion or compulsion is precisely, Melville seems to tell us, what keeps Eden forever out of reach.

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Mosaics of Biblical Mythology in Dylan Thomas's "The Tree"

Kathryne A. Moskowitz

*The wisemen tell me that the garden gods
Twined good and evil on an eastern tree;
And when the moon rose windily it was
Black as the beast and paler than the cross.
—Dylan Thomas, "Incarnate devil"*

The collected works of Dylan Thomas embrace as well as complicate the tenets of Christianity by adopting and adapting for new use materials from the larger biblical tradition. In both poetry and fiction, Thomas manipulates diverse symbols from the Judeo-Christian tradition into fresh mosaics of natural imagery, tableaux in which, as in the poem "Altarwise by owl-light," "Jack Christ" can occupy the same space as "Jonah's Moby," and one sees "Genesis in the root . . . / And one light's language in the book of trees" (140). Even in his earliest works, Thomas constructs his own personal mythology, distorting biblical images and narratives to mirror more closely his instinctual understanding of the physical and spiritual world. In Thomas's early short story "The Tree," first published in 1939, the author transforms traditional typological links between Adam and Christ into a disarming critique of religious literalism gone wrong. At the same time, however, inherent in the author's playful confusion of biblical imagery, from Eden to Bethlehem to Calvary, is the sincere suggestion that while humans consistently repeat the Adamic fall from grace, there is always a possibility for redemption.

Thomas opens the brief, parable-like short story "The Tree" with the image of a tower staring out over "twenty miles of the up and down county" (5). From a village in the valley of the Jarvis hills, the narrator tells us, "the light in the tower window shone like a glowworm through the panes; but the room under the sparrows' nests was rarely lit" (5). This tower, attached to a house occupied by a young boy, belongs to the garden from which it rises; it stands "for the day-birds to build in and for the owls to fly around at night" (5). The boy who lives here is intimately familiar with both house and garden, "but he could not find the key that opened the door of the tower" (5). This key is kept by an old gardener who lives in a shed among potted flowers; he often joins the boy to sail "broken flowers" on the garden lawn or to ride garden brooms and "fly wherever the child wished" (5).

The garden tower overlooking this fond playfulness is employed by Thomas in "The Tree" to recall, at moments, the Edenic tree of knowledge, though, as such, it seems to have been confused with something like the Tower of Babel

as well; nevertheless, later in the story, it stands explicitly as a “tree of stone and glass over the red eaves” (10). Similarly, in Thomas’s poem “Altarwise by owl-light,” the Garden of Eden has “two bark towers” (142)—ostensibly, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. For Thomas, therefore, it may be asserted that tower and tree resemble each other and speak for one another in a kind of symbolic overlap. Moreover, tower and tree are bound together by biblical narrative, both suggesting the fall of man, conjuring images of both Eden and Babel, inviting a complex meditation on temptation, sin, and punishment. By this curiously conflated imagery, Thomas is evoking, symbolically, more than he says outright. The light like a “glowworm” in the tower window, for example, comes to suggest, subtly, the snake in the biblical garden; it glows seductively and somewhat deceptively, a beacon “for the owls to fly around at night” (5). In his poetry, Thomas often replaces the snake with the worm, thereby focusing on the symbol’s naturalistic and regenerative senses; turning again to “Altarwise by owl-light”—arguably, a key poetic “subtext” of “The Tree”—Thomas refers to “the tree-tailed worm that mounted Eve” (138) and goes on to envision a strange apocalyptic endtime: “. . . that Day / When the worm builds with the gold straws of venom / My nest of mercies in the rude, red tree” (142). By conflating worm and Edenic serpent—elsewhere called “The maggot that no man can kill” (“Find meat on bones,” 68)—Thomas emphasizes how life arises from decomposing matter and how sexuality, birth, and death are intertwined, each aspect necessitating the others; thus, even the worm’s “venom,” by the end of “Altarwise,” is transformed into a “nest of mercies” (142). Further comparison between poem and short story shows also the symbolic meaning of those owls encircling the story’s garden tower; the poem’s central figure, a mythic “gentleman” descended from Adam, is first seen “Altarwise by owl-light in the halfway house / . . . graveward with his furies” (137). For Thomas, the owl (though not an Edenic figure) suggests not only twilight in the natural world, but also the twilight time—that “halfway house”—between life and death: the point before salvation, purgatory, damnation, or oblivion. The events and characters of “The Tree,” therefore, are perhaps best seen by this “owl-light,” positioned somewhere in between this world—that is, the natural world—and the world of spirit.

As “The Tree” continues, the tower remains central. God’s hidden presence in the story seems to secret itself in the shadowy, unlit tower room where “corners keep their secrets” and “claw marks in the dust” speak of the sparrows’ visits to the lonely room (5). The room is neglected, with “webs spun over its unwashed ceilings” (5). The nests of the sparrows shadow the room, veiling it from the village people who only see the “glowworm” light in the upper window, reminiscent, as I have argued, of “the tree-tailed worm that mounted Eve.” The webs in the room speak to the neglect of, or perhaps the impenetrable nature of God’s message, but the tower itself suggests the omniscience of God, who sees all, as if from

the vantage point of some divine panopticon. On Christmas Eve, as a gift to the boy the gardener unlocks the door to the tower; he believes, we are told, that he has unlocked the secrets of the universe. In contrast, the boy is disillusioned; he explores the barren room, kicking up dust and feathers, looking for a “colorless trap-door” (10). Empty corners undermine the child’s faith in the magic of religion; he cries because “there [are] no secrets” (9) hidden beneath the dust. In his essay “Dylan Thomas and the Biblical Rhythm,” William T. Moynihan discusses “the major symbolic role of the Earth, or ‘dust,’ which manifests itself, especially in the later poems, as an image of recreation or universal renewal” (626). Given this understanding of the image of dust, Thomas seems to acknowledge in the story the possibility of redemption residing within every blind, earthbound sinner, just as the room of shadows hides beneath the one that glows. In this way, the tower can be seen to house both sin and salvation, serpent and God.

As the story proceeds from its initial description of the tower, Thomas introduces the unnamed central characters of “the gardener” and “the child.” The boy child loves to listen to the gardener, who knows “every story from the beginning of the world” (5), bringing each story fully to life in the midst of the garden:

“In the beginning,” he would say, “there was a tree.”
“What kind of tree?”
“The tree where that blackbird’s whistling.” (5)

The reader is told explicitly that

[t]he gardener loved the Bible. When the sun sank and the garden was full of people, he would sit with a candle in his shed, reading of the first love and the legend of apples and serpents. But the death of Christ on a tree he loved most. . . . [H]is God grew up like a tree from the apple-shaped earth. . . . (5)

The child listens, trustfully and enchanted, to the old man’s beloved Bible stories. He believes that the gardener’s “long, thick beard, unstained and white as fleece” is “the beard of an apostle” (8).

The old man’s faith, perhaps not unlike the faith of the author himself, is spun from flowers, feathers, and the branches of trees. He knits stories of Calvary and Eden into a rough magic carpet. Inspiration from the old man’s stories carries the boy on the wings he wished his rocking horse could have. Obsessed by the tale of the first tree, the boy changes; his introduction to religion sparks him like a first love. This love is focused on a singular elder tree: “He said his prayers to it, with knees bent on the blackened twigs the night wind fetched to the ground” (7). Signs to which the gardener has pointed are misinterpreted by the boy; he sees the tree itself as God. One winter night in the shed, the boy becomes fanatical and irritated as the gardener tries to explain that the elder is as good as any other tree. The gardener says, “pray to a tree,” and the boy shouts, “I pray to that tree. . . . The

first tree you told me of. In the beginning was the tree” (8). The boy mistakenly has taken all the gardener’s stories to refer to one single, specific tree.

The boy thus cloaks the tree with portentous meaning. When the old man tells the boy how “they hoisted [Christ] up on a tree, and drove nails through his belly and his feet” (8), the boy imagines that the elder tree is the tree of Calvary: “As he unfolded the story of the twelve stages of the cross, the tree waved its boughs to the child” (8). Transforming the elder into the burdened symbol of the tree of life and death allows the boy to recreate the whole span of Christian mythology in his own garden. He perceives “the blood of the noon sun on the trunk of the elder, staining the bark” (9). This symbolic literalism permeates the boy’s mind and when the gardener tells him, for example, that Bethlehem is “in the East” (6), the boy assumes that he means the Jarvis hills, which stand to the east of the garden. By the story’s conclusion, however, this biblical literalism is anything but childish as the boy appears dreadfully intent on recreating some of the stories he has so often heard.

On Christmas morning, a character identified only as “the idiot” wanders into the garden, ragged and “weak for the want of food” (10). This figure, in fact, recurs throughout Thomas’s poetry and prose in the form of various outcasts and wandering lunatics. Like other lost souls in Thomas’s writings, the idiot in “The Tree” is isolated from society, his survival dependent upon charitable offerings. Like the story’s gardener, he, too, is close to nature, his blood the same sap that fruits the trees: “The life of the Jarvis valley, streaming up from the body of the grass and the trees and the long hand of the stream, lent him a new blood” (9).

His connection with the natural world separates the idiot from civilization. Besides the immediate connection to Christ that Thomas will confer upon him at the story’s end, he stands for all vagabonds, outcasts, and displaced people. The idiot does not question the voices that he hears in nature urging him on: “He could not tell why he had come; they had told him to come and had guided him, but he did not know who they were” (10). Looking down from the Jarvis hills, he names the valley he sees below “Bethlehem,” suggesting that he has a particular destination in mind at the end of his journey. It is unclear just how far he has already traveled, “bearing the torture of the weather with a divine patience” (11), but on Christmas morning, having descended from the distant hills, he rests beneath the boy’s elder tree and gazes up at the tower standing over him “like a tree of stone” (10). Tower and tree stand side by side like sentinels, and they mark the idiot’s entrance into a space where time is unraveled and myths overlap.

The idiot remains sheltered under the tree, “his mouth set in a sad smile,” when the boy finds him and asserts to himself that “[t]he gardener had not lied, and the secret of the tower was true; this dark and shabby tree . . . was the first tree of all” (11). Then quickly, in terse dialogue and descriptive prose, the story hurtles towards its dark conclusion:

“Where do you come from?” [the boy asks]
 “From the Jarvis hills.”
 “Stand up against the tree.”
 The idiot, still smiling, stood up with his back to the elder.
 “Put out your arms like this.”
 The idiot put out his arms.
 The child ran as fast as he could to the gardener’s shed, and, returning
 over the sodden lawns, saw that the idiot had not moved but stood, straight and
 smiling, with his back to the tree and his arms stretched out.
 “Let me tie your hands.”
 The idiot felt the wire . . . close round his wrists. It cut into the flesh, and
 the blood from the cuts fell shining onto the tree.
 “Brother,” he said. He saw that the child held silver nails in the palm of
 his hand. (11)

Here, Thomas abruptly ends the short story, leaving the reader to imagine the “crucifixion” subsequently inflicted upon the sympathetic character of the idiot. In so doing, he renders ambiguous the meaning of the story, which functions both as an allegorical retelling of the Passion and as a critique of religious literalism and zealotry. If the vulgar crucifixion of the idiot highlights the barbarism inherent in much biblical narrative, it also, paradoxically, gives voice to the redemptive connection between the material and spiritual world.

Above the garden, the young boy has seen earlier in the story “a star, brighter than any in the sky, burn[ing] steadily above the first bird’s tower, and shin[ing] on nowhere but on the leafless boughs and the trunk and the traveling roots” of his beloved tree (7). This star gazes over nature, timeless over all points of creation. This star marks the incarnation of man, and in Thomas’s warp of biblical space and time, it follows our course of destruction and redemption from the fall in Eden through the birth of Christ in Bethlehem to the sacrifice on the wooden cross on Calvary. In his poetry, Thomas states that “In the beginning was the three pointed star” (“In the beginning,” 109). He equates the birth of Christ with the birth of a new universe; the beginning simultaneously refers to the birth of man, in Adam, and the birth of Christ as man.

In the poem “Today, this insect,” Thomas refers to the “[m]urder of Eden and green genesis” (145) that occurs in his writing because his “symbols have out-elbowed space” (145). In many works, his peculiar combination of images involves the reader on a journey that disassembles and reconfigures the iconography of Christian faith, often by transferring its spiritual meaning to the natural world. In “The Tree,” Thomas’s vulgar reinvention of the crucifixion highlights the physical horror of the event, and the reader is forced to re-evaluate the meaning of Christ’s sacrifice, while reflecting on a human connection to nature. The divine appears

in strange places and faith seems to doom the follower to a narrow vision of the world, failing to perceive or actualize divinity. What is left at the story's poignant conclusion is the sensation that moral failure and redemption occur simultaneously, for as the boy prepares to nail his compliant victim to the tree, the idiot himself utters only one word: "Brother."

In the end, true salvation seems to rest in the figure of the gardener, who, the reader may hope, will hear the poor man's screams and coming running to the rescue. More importantly, however, the gardener represents one who seeks wisdom and "love[s] the Bible" but refuses to literalize the allegory. Laboring in the garden, he sacrifices himself daily that other small creatures and plants may thrive. The gentle sparrows live on seeds from withered flowers, and the hawk and owl devour the small rodents that burrow in the garden beds. He represents daily sacrifice in a mundane world. Appreciation of God in all of nature tempers his relationship with the biblical tales. The gardener believes "the key to the universe to be hidden in his pocket along with the feathers of birds and the seeds of flowers" (9). For Thomas, the Bible provides a key to the mystery, but it is the interpretive journey and the struggle to recognize divinity in the natural world that illuminates the secrets of the universe.

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“O Change Beyond Report”: A Comparative Look at
Samson Agonistes and the Biblical Samson Narrative

Paula Sirc

At first glance, the biblical story of Samson seems to palpitate with divine power; from the angelic annunciation of his birth to the occasions where the “spirit of the Lord rushes” over him, Samson seems to realize his destiny as Nazirite and consecrated deliverer (Judges 13.25). Closer examination of the biblical text, however, suggests that Samson’s actions are spiritually dubious: he appears no more than a strong man acting in the Israelites’ and his own interests. The Samson of the book of Judges, though blest with supernatural strength, is woefully human; he roils with fury, is driven by lust and vengeance, and rendered powerless, betrayed, and enslaved by his emotions. Lacking any internal monologue, evidence of direct communication with God, or sign of a spiritual consciousness in the protagonist, the biblical narrative raises the question of whether Samson is willfully executing God’s design or simply acting, unwittingly, on instinct. The Old Testament hero seems ignorant of his relation to God’s ultimate design and, thus unaware, blunders his way to the realization of his purpose. By contrast, John Milton’s treatment of the narrative depicts Samson, slave of the Philistines, as highly introspective and passionate, offering the chorus the opportunity to enlarge upon his apparent failure and subsequent regeneration. *Samson Agonistes* is a profoundly Christian typological rendition, which features Samson as a prefiguration of Christ.

It has been argued that the violence depicted in *Samson Agonistes* is “unsanctioned by the divine guidance that the hero claims for his suicidal actions” (Festa 511). British literary critic John Carey finds the play disturbingly vengeful, a “morally disgusting” commemoration of the wanton and bloody wreckage wrought by God through his barbarian hero (335). This critique, while certainly apt, seems more applicable to the scriptural account, where the strong man’s bloodlust is harshly illuminated, than to *Samson Agonistes*, whose protagonist Milton positions under the softer light of his psychological vexation. While Samson is, without question, a fearsome and violent character, the poet tempers the beast, depicting him by the poem’s end as repentant of his sins and humbled by his weaknesses.

This transformation occurs gradually; Milton’s hero is painfully aware of the discrepancy between his promised role as God’s deliverer and his present state of humiliation. Through much of the drama, the hero and chorus lament Samson’s life as a creature of the material world and a ruthless killing machine whose superhuman prowess was manifest in his military conquests. Samson’s explosive passion erupts when Dalila visits the man she has ruined, asking permission to

touch his hand. Her bold request is met with outrage; he threatens to “tear [her] joint by joint” if she advances (*Samson* 954). Some scholars argue that Dalila visits Samson to “re-seduce him, not for the purpose of love, or even simply of lust, but as a means of bringing him back once more into her power” (Kranidas 136). By his rejection of Dalila and the temptation she represents, the Miltonic hero is able to move beyond obsessing about his own failure and toward redemption and deliverance. His rejection of both Dalila and Harapha leads him to renew his “strength sufficient” and readies him to execute his “command from Heav’n to free my Country” (*Samson* 1212-13). Samson becomes a reckoning force, bringing the Philistine temple of Dagon upon the heads of “their choice nobility and flower” (1654), until finally, God’s duty discharged, he is laid to rest, “calm of mind, all passion spent” (1758).

By contrast, the scriptural account demonstrates no transformation, no rebirth and no renewal; rather, the biblical Samson’s actions stem solely from his primal sense of lust and vengeance. Where Milton’s Samson is grounded in his faith, contrite and humble before his God, his biblical counterpart is morally ambivalent and driven by personal motive. In the scriptures, the envoy announcing Samson’s birth had stressed the importance of his consecration to Nazirite vows, yet Samson runs purposely afoul of these vows.

Where Milton’s narrative proceeds from stasis, recollection and confrontation, the Old Testament account of Samson’s story proceeds chronologically, when God’s envoy appears to the barren wife of the Danite Manoah with news of her divine pregnancy. The messenger’s commands regarding the child are quite specific: “no razor is to come on his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from birth. It is he who shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines” (Judges 13.5). That the angel appeared to the nameless woman and entrusted her alone with the vital information is a matter of some significance. Despite the importance the biblical account places on the mother, however, Milton undermines the maternal connection, transferring all of the parental duty to Manoa. In this way, Milton fully masculinizes his poem, denying the appearance of a sympathetic female character.

Whereas Samson of the biblical tradition reacts dumbly to the rush of emotion ascribed to God, Milton’s Samson is acutely aware of divine intervention in his life, even recalling the pre-natal episodes. Twice the strongman recounts the angelic proclamation of his birth, which mirrors the two visits made by the angel in the biblical story. In response to the chorus’s questions as to why he chose to wed a Philistine woman rather than abide by his clan’s custom of endogamy, Samson replies that he “motion’d was of God” (*Samson* 222). Through this divine communion, he was made to understand that the marriage was required for the deliverance of Israel (222). Milton’s chorus praises the “Heroic Nazarite,” who, “against his vow of strictest purity,” sought to marry an “unclean, unchaste”

woman in order “to set his people free” (316-20). The scriptural account concurs with Milton on this point, specifically noting how Samson demanded his father get him the woman at Timnah for his wife and that “his father and mother did not know that this was from the Lord” (Judges 14.3-4). Samson, in this text, was unaware of the divine influence on his selection, as well.

According to both of the narrative accounts, Samson’s marriage to the woman of Timnah was inspired by God, yet there is no indication in either text as to whether his relationship with Delilah/Dalila was divinely-sanctioned. In fact, Milton’s Samson suffers defeat precisely due to his weakness for Dalila; his only regret, despite his innumerable acts of savagery, is that he fell victim to her cunning and “unbosom’d all [his] secrets” (*Samson* 879). Samson laments his betrayal, shorn of strength and helpless at Dalila’s hand, hideously duped by “a Canaanite,” his “faithless enemy” (379-80).

Milton depicts Dalila as a type of Eve, evidenced by the Edenic references Samson makes in his speech to her, refusing to tangle with a “poysnous bosom snake” (763) and regretting the folly of committing “to such a viper his most sacred trust of secrecy” (1000). This poisonous Eve motif is also reinforced in the choral refrain: “a manifest Serpent by her sting” (997). That Milton views Dalila as treacherously evil is indicated in her final dialogue with Samson, where she provokes him to nearly murderous passion, boasting that her betrayal, though frowned on by his people, will immortalize her in the eyes of her own nation.

In contrast to Dalila’s villainous qualities, Milton casts Samson as a tragic hero who overcomes his apparent ruin in heroic fulfillment of his spiritual mission. The chorus offers a lamentation on how great a hero Samson might have been had he not been shorn and blinded, betrayed by his own folly, noting, in particular, how he “might have subdu’d the Earth” had he only matched his virtue to his strength (*Samson* 174). Recounting the details of Samson’s martial victories, the Danite chorus celebrates the hero’s past with stories of his superhuman feats: accounts of his deeds, as when he “tore the Lion, as the Lion tears the Kid” (128), and when, wielding the “trivial” jawbone of a dead ass, he slew “a thousand fore-skins” (144). Milton defends Samson’s actions as justified by God. When Samson recounts the story of his debauched wedding ceremony, he blames his actions on the “ill-meaning Political Lords,” who “under pretence of Bridal friends and guests” (1195-96) constrained his bride to betray him. Depicting his hero as loyal only to God, Milton has Samson challenge Harapha not because the giant ridicules him, but because Harapha mocks the God of Israel.

In *Samson Agonistes*, Milton refashions the biblical strongman from a bitter, brooding character of self-lacerating introspection into a sensitive, moral, and intelligent instrument of his God’s design. The biblical Samson is reactive, volatile, and explosive, purely an agent of his own will. Consider the source of Samson’s riddle, the lion he rent asunder that produced honey in its belly. The

account in the book of Judges emphasizes the bestial uncleanness of Samson's actions in consuming the honey:

⁸ After a while he returned to marry her, and he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion, and there was a swarm of bees in the body of the lion, and honey.

⁹ He scraped it out into his hands, eating as he went. When he came to his mother and father, he gave some to them and they ate it. He did not tell them that he had taken the honey from the carcass of a lion. (Judges 14.8-9)

Nazirine law, detailed in the book of Numbers, demands that one “shall come at no dead body” (6.6) during his period of separation unto the Lord. Eating honey from the carcass of the lion and slaughtering the Philistines demonstrates a blatant disregard for Nazirite regulations. Perhaps because Samson was a Nazirite by divine appointment, “from the womb to the day of his death,” rather than by his own volition, ceremonial defilement did not effect the termination of his unique status. Samson served a life term as a Nazirite, and even when Yahweh abandoned him, the forfeiture of his superhuman powers, which were intimately tied up with his consecration to holiness, was transitory. Samson's mission as Nazirite did not end after his defilement, nor did he have to undergo ritual observances in order to be reinstated to the former position. While the biblical text fails to note any immediate consequences for his disavowal, one may surmise that Samson's steady degradation and self-destruction result from cumulative rejection of his consecrated vows.

Adopting the imagery of the “swarm of bees in the body of the lion,” Milton reworks it to suggest the hero's perturbations of mind as he struggles with himself. Samson seeks solace from the maddening rush and to garner sympathy with his repentant lamentations:

Retiring from the popular noise, I seek
This unfrequented place to find some ease,
Ease to the body some, none to the mind
From restless thoughts, that like a deadly swarm

Of Hornets arm'd, no sooner found alone,
But rush upon me thronging, and present
Times past, what once I was, and what am now. (16-22)

Milton's *Samson Agonistes* deviates from the biblical text to establish and elaborate his agonist's sense of spirituality. The divergence first occurs in “The Argument,” when Milton alludes to the intentionality of Samson's death: “Catastrophe, what *Samson* had done to the *Philistins*, and by accident to himself” (p. 575). The biblical text, however, is quite clear regarding Samson's “accidental” death and frames his motive as a matter of personal vengeance, not as seeking after God's glory:

²⁸ Then Samson called to the Lord, and said, "Lord God, remember me and strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may pay back the Philistines for my two eyes."²⁹ And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. ³⁰ Then Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines."
(Judges 16.28-30)

Milton evades the moral questions regarding revenge by carefully omitting the biblical Samson's words to God; instead, his hero inclines his head, "[a]nd eyes fast fixt he stood, as one who pray'd" (*Samson* 1637). In addition, Milton further avoids problematizing Samson's motives by positioning the hero outside the audience's direct scrutiny when he commits his final terrible act. The hero's demise is narrated, second-hand, by an eyewitness, and the Chorus of Danites commences to glorify the heroic death, while reckoning Samson's suicide to be an unintentional accident. They sing:

O dearly-bought revenge, yet glorious!
Living or dying thou hast fulfill'd
The work for which thou wast foretold
To Israel, and now ly'st victorious
Among thy slain self-kill'd
Not willingly, but tangl'd in the fold
Of dire necessity, whose law in death conjoin'd
Thee with thy slaughter'd foes in number more
Then all thy life had slain before. (1660-68)

The words of Milton's chorus glow with impassioned respect for the slain hero and hint at the notion of his accomplishment in terms of spiritual majesty. Perspective is gained on this ringing praise, however, when one considers that the chorus represents "conventional wisdom," the purpose of which is to mirror and inflate Samson's position. Therefore, Samson and his chorus believe that his death was "of dire necessity," a fate destined by God. Milton clearly absolves his hero of guilt, suggesting that Samson does indeed fulfill God's promise, which was to do "what may serve his glory best, and spread his name / Great among the Heathen round" (1429-30).

In *Anatomy of Criticism* Northrop Frye interprets Milton's Samson as a regenerative force in that despite the hero's human frailties, he does "not quarrel with the will of highest dispensation" (60-61) and ultimately rises to execute God's will: "The paradox of victory within tragedy may be expressed by a double perspective in the action; Samson is the buffoon of a Philistine carnival and simultaneously a tragic hero to the Israelites, but the tragedy ends in triumph and the carnival in catastrophe" (220-21).

The scriptural Samson, however, does not reflect the transformation that Milton affords his hero. Rather, the biblical account, in its stark brevity, allows the modern reader to consider Samson as an archetypal, ethnic bully, scarcely able to control his life and passions and intent on seeking personal revenge against the Philistines. Clearly, whether one considers the biblical or Miltonic Samson, the question of whether the strongman succeeds as a great deliverer is open to much debate. Is he a flawed human being driven by uncontrollable fury, a terrorist to the Philistines? Or is he a tragic hero, favored by God, who, after his fall, rises from degradation and servility, “[e]yeless in Gaza” (Milton 41), to realize his mission as consecrated Nazirite?

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Speech and Sight: Genesis 11 and Semiotic Difference in José Saramago's *Blindness*

Lea Weiss

All literature begins with a concordance of words. Signifiers assemble and reassemble while readers construct ephemeral edifices of meaning; and though the world's many languages increasingly converge with one another, readers and speakers persist in demarcating linguistic and cultural systems. Authors often rely upon their readers' capacity for assembling semantic value. José Saramago, in particular, textually challenges his audience's reception of language and signification. In *Blindness* Saramago, winner of the 1998 Nobel Prize in Literature, generates semiotic and thematic chaos to complicate his audience's linguistic perceptions. Saramago employs Genesis 11's themes of polyphony and confusion, in addition to other biblical motifs, to engender a narrative as semiotically tumultuous as the biblical landscape it references.

"And there was in all the land one language and words / matters one": thus opens Genesis 11's proto-apocalyptic chapter concerning the Tower of Babel and the origins of the world's many languages.¹ The passage, appearing between the Flood myth and subsequent accounts detailing Yahweh's unique relationship to Abram, depicts a moral precipice: humanity could either submerge itself in the iniquity previously instigative of Yahweh's diluvial wrath or tend the path of the monotheistically righteous, exemplified by the father-of-many, Abraham.

Genesis 11 locates a discussion of humility and communication in an allegorical consideration of language. In the account, terms such as "one," "language," and "all" are repeated, emphasizing the tale's concentration upon fluency and linguistic difference. As the chapter's first line intimates, "all" will become many as will humanity's inclinations; the passage's subtext implies that shared language is the precursor of shared purpose. The people of Babel recognize the connections among naming, existence, and empowerment: "And let us make for us a name, lest we be scattered on the face of all the land" (11.4). Yahweh follows a similar logic: "And said Yahweh, here is one nation and one language to all of them and this [building a tower to the heavens] they begin to do" (11.6). As the lines indicate, a communal sign system fosters cooperation. Genesis 11 serves the coincidental purposes of condemning pagan societies' perceived hubris and explaining the symbolic biblical etymology of "Babylon." In Hebrew, the root, *balal*, translated as "confusion," indicates language variation's dispersive consequence (Hamilton 357); humanity, like Babel's community, is fundamentally fractured into separate peoples fated, biblically and historically, to verbal, political, and social discord.²

Genesis 11 concludes abruptly. Readers, the conceptual descendents of

Babel's residents, are compelled to predict the narrative's conclusion. *Blindness*, by virtue of its characters' actions, proffers the thematic denouement of Genesis 11. Saramago considers the moment-to-moment sequelae unrepresented in Genesis as he articulates the mechanism whereby new sense and communication are forged. Saramago suggests it is collective experience—in Genesis, of speech and fluency; in *Blindness*, of sightlessness and signification—that grants sympathy. Saramago recapitulates the allegorical structure of Genesis, and the author frequently refrains from depicting linguistically specific signifiers such as names. Characters are, alternately, signaled by descriptive phrases, such as the protagonist's title, "the Doctor's Wife." By eschewing proper nouns, Saramago rhetorically counters the biblical attention to naming. Figures and locales are known by mutual circumstances and relationships. As *Blindness* suggests, when characters are proscribed from differentiating others visually, the discrete personalities signified by names are rendered inconsequential. Characters remain anonymous by virtue of their impersonal, symbolic appellations.

Saramago's allegory begins *in media res* in the current era in an unnamed city. The text opens with an automobile collision caused by a suddenly blinded driver. As the omniscient third-person narrator states: "who would have believed it. Seen merely at a glance, the man's eyes seem healthy, the iris looks bright, luminous, the sclera white, as compact as porcelain" (752). An epidemic of blindness resembling Exodus's ninth plague, darkness (*Choshech*), spreads throughout the city, nation, and, presumably, world. As Saramago juxtaposes Biblical references, readers are encouraged to consider the manner in which this blindness thematically resembles *Choshech*. Like *Choshech*, this calamity occludes individuals' abilities to differentiate one another: as portrayed in Exodus, "a man could not see his brother" (10.23). In contrast to the Egyptians, who may not see in this darkness, Saramago's characters, inversely, are blinded. *Blindness's* pandemic is one of lightness; for its victims, all is "covered in white, a continuous white, like a white painting without tonalities" (770). Characters wander their city, yet their sightlessness appears not as a punishment, but a general aberration in collective perception. This amaurosis, by virtue of Saramago's thematic appropriation and reinterpretation of *Choshech*, subsumes its victims in the resulting *balal*, confusion, of sightlessness. This blindness, conversely, symbolically connotes that this condition may afford an opportunity to return to the light of humanity or shared understanding precluded, paradoxically, by the resulting discriminatory values the privileging of sight and the information it proffers encourages. As the Doctor's Wife states, "I don't think we did go blind, I think we are blind, Blind but seeing, Blind people who can see, but do not see" (1042). The character posits that due to a common reticence to perceive the unhappy truths of their experiences, individuals are destined to solitary disparateness.

Saramago considers sight's capacity to function as a landmark capable of

anchoring meaning to a visually fixed location. Initially, blinded characters are incapable of reconciling themselves to their predicaments, and the text's prose becomes increasingly scatological as Saramago explicates the literal and metaphorical squalor and disarray—described by the Doctor's Wife as an “unbearable filth of the soul” (1000)—in which the population is initially subsumed; social law, similarly, falters and characters refer to one another as “thieving dogs” (846). Readers may appreciate by considering characters' interactions the pandemonium that likely succeeds Genesis's linguistic curse. Saramago's characters strive to form a new code of behavior, much as Babel's residents are compelled to communicate with more than words. For both societies, it is compulsory to recognize and establish a meaning distinct from a specific sign system. Saramago's usage of the visual in his reinterpretation of Genesis 11 suggests the sense's inherent importance to his narrative. Though, ostensibly, the populace in the novel might re-establish order, the epidemic engenders a complete dissolution of society and compassion (save for that exercised within groups). Saramago suggests that it is sight and the perceptions it affords, rather than speech, that support amity. In *Blindness* the actions and sentiments that may be seen and felt are more integral than what may be spoken.

By observing speakers and the world, listeners may decode language by merging the signification facilitated by speech with the information accessed by sight. In *Blindness*, Saramago explores what transpires when signifieds' visual components are obscured by sightlessness; social and verbal interactions are transformed into polyphonic events resembling those in Genesis 11. For each listener, sounds originating from uncertain sites and amorphous individuals symbolize the nebulous and abstract natures of consciousness and experience. Saramago structurally evokes Babel's cacophony by complicating readers' attempts to assign dialogue to the unnamed characters. Saramago's paragraphs, exemplifying an assembly of divergent voices, often contain both dialogue and exposition. The author does not align paragraphs to speakers' statements, but, instead, visually distinguishes remarks with capitalized letters and commas. Such passages immerse readers in a confusion comparable to that of the text's blinded characters. Readers must repeatedly decode verbal exchanges, much as characters must tactilely review objects.

In the text's first example of this polyphony, the initial victim speaks with a character who assists him home:

Have you got something in your eye, it never occurred to them nor would he have been able to reply, Yes, a milky sea. Once inside the building, the blind man said, Many thanks, I'm sorry for all the trouble I've caused you, I can manage on my own now, No need to apologize, I'll come up with you, I wouldn't be easy in my mind if I were to leave you here. They got into the narrow elevator with

some difficulty, What floor do you live on, On the third, you cannot imagine
how grateful I am, Don't thank me, today it's you, Yes, you're right, tomorrow it
might be you. (754)

This exchange syntactically reassembles the epidemic's "milky sea." Saramago refrains from separating speakers' dialogue with full stops. The blind man, for example, states, "I can manage on my own," and his companion responds, "No need to apologize, I'll come up with you." Saramago punctuates the statements with commas, which, by signaling similarity or elaboration, join, rather than divide, speakers. By forming comma splices, Saramago confounds the grammar of speech, writing, and meaning; the reader must investigate the manner whereby one character's speech approximates, replaces, or accentuates another's. The dialogue intimates that though the boundaries between characters may be strengthened by the epidemic (victims, once estranged, might not succeed in recovering one another), such borders are, ironically, concurrently invalidated. By imitating another's voice or reiterating his or her condition, one character may easily signify another: "today it's you, Yes, you're right, tomorrow it might be you."

Both texts' characters, the unnamed figures of Babel and *Blindness*, deprived of the mechanisms of meaning making, must erect a new system of signs and decorum. Saramago concentrates upon depicting characters' constructions of novel paradigms. In *Blindness*, the city's government, when the epidemic still appears containable, removes the first victims to a sanitarium; these internees build a society predicated upon equality and charity, ethics indicative of Judeo-Christian values. Quickly, however, as thousands of victims infiltrate the sanitarium, the primary group, forced to enact a strict code of group identification and protection, forms a discrete community. Though it compromises members' morality—"I can't believe this is happening, it's against all the rules of humanity, You'd better believe it, because the truth couldn't be clearer" (807)—they often must disregard others' needs to meet their own. To distinguish itself from neighboring sects, the group creates a social, semiotic lexicon of touch and smell approximating language.

Saramago depicts one figure who does not suffer from blindness: the Doctor's Wife. Acting as a conceptual *deus ex machina*, the character may serve others' needs and thus further propel the action. The figure, additionally, functions as a symbolic vehicle through which readers may experience personally the confusion Saramago describes. Though readers, not suffering from the same epidemic, may fail to sympathize with the blinded characters, they may identify with the Doctor's Wife and thus enter the text to become sighted witnesses. This character (and by extension, the readers), conversely, suffers from isolation; she may not participate fully in other figures' communal experience. She laments the responsibility and

isolation endemic to her singularity: “I’m beginning to get exhausted, sometimes I even wish I were blind as well, to be the same as others, to have no more obligations than they have” (1026). The Doctor’s Wife, recurrently resembling a prophet or savior figure, may signify Babel’s Yahweh. Though she does not curse her fellows with sightlessness, she is nonetheless the only individual who, like Babel’s deity, may interact with the intimacy and paradoxical distance of understanding. Sighted in a fictional world peopled by the blinded, the Doctor’s Wife embodies Yahweh’s three attributes: as characters’ statements insinuate, she seems omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent: “[her actions] were not the movements a blind person could easily execute. . . . the thief sensed that there was something unusual here” (797). The protagonist’s efforts facilitate others’ survival and success. She ever comprehends the text’s original language, visual information, much as the deity of Genesis understands the signifieds intimated by all signs.

Blindness ends auspiciously: victims regain their sight. This denouement is an apt departure from Genesis 11’s. *Blindness*, acting as an allegory, encourages readers to investigate the manner whereby they personally fashion signification and ethics predicated upon sense information and resulting sign and moral standards. After a cataclysmic thematic foray into society’s demise, Saramago rewards readers’ cathartic dread and dejection by depicting sight’s return, and, theoretically, order’s resurrection. This return, however, is problematic: society has fallen; individuals have been abused or murdered; and taboos have been violated. *Blindness*’s complicated close encourages readers’ reconsideration of Genesis 11’s resolution and its correlation to the text. Though Babel’s inhabitants, after Yahweh’s condemnation, likely suffer from a comparable chaos, readers may predict that, ultimately, the populace may form a new discourse until all languages eventually merge. The more differentiated languages become, enigmatically, the more similitude forms among them, as exemplified by the proliferation of pidgin dialects. As Saramago suggests in *Blindness*, individuals exiled from sense information are encouraged to construct and implement new codes based upon enhanced conceptualizations of community and responsibility. For Genesis 11’s and *Blindness*’s characters, a divorce from speech or sight may encourage more pronounced inquiries into selfhood, society, and sense. Genesis’s curse and *Blindness*’s epidemic, ultimately, propel characters’ more thorough social engagement by necessitating their immersion in the heteroglossia and coincidental homoglossia of experience and difference.

Notes

1. The translation of all Old Testament verses is mine, with attention to maintaining the original text’s semantic organization.
2. The Akkadian name of “Babylon”—“bab ilim,” “the gate of God”—in contrast, intimates

the city's spiritual primacy ("Babylon" 1).

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IV

Poetry

On “Rereading Whitman” (and Pound)

H. R. Stoneback

All students of twentieth-century literature remember the resonant opening lines of Ezra Pound’s famous early poem “A Pact” (1914): “I make a pact with you Walt Whitman— / I have detested you long enough.” In my correspondence with the Countess Mary de Rachewiltz, distinguished poet, scholar, and translator (and Ezra Pound’s daughter), we sometimes send each other new poems we are working on. Recently, she sent me a draft of a new poem, “Rereading Whitman,” and she has granted permission for its first publication in these pages.

As always, literary history has an engaging background story. In July 2007, I directed an Imagism Conference at Brunnenburg Castle in Italy. The idea for this conference grew out of conversations with my longtime friend and colleague Catherine Aldington, poet and translator (whose poetry and translations have been published in preceding issues of the *Shawangunk Review*), and daughter of Richard Aldington, who with H. D. and Pound was one of the original Imagists. Then Mary de Rachewiltz and I discussed the idea of holding a kind of Imagist Reunion at Brunnenburg Castle, involving second-generation “Imagists,” descendants of the original Imagists. This led to contacts with Marie-Brunette Spire, writer and professor at the University of Paris (and daughter of André Spire, often described as France’s leading twentieth-century Jewish *homme des lettres*).

We all gathered, then, at Mary’s home, Brunnenburg, that extraordinary castle and Pound Museum in the Tyrolean mountains, and the assembled writers and poets, scholars and conferees, included the world’s leading Imagism scholars—William Pratt (Miami University of Ohio—author of *Ezra Pound and the Making of Modernism* and other works), John Gery (University of New Orleans—Director of the Ezra Pound Center for Literature), Emily Mitchell Wallace (Bryn Mawr—author of numerous works on Imagist poets such as H. D., Pound, and Williams) and others. New Paltz was well represented at this event since the editors of this journal, Professors Kempton and Stoneback, together with New Paltz MAs and former TAs William Boyle, Brad McDuffie, and Matt Nickel presented papers and participated in conference sessions devoted to an assessment of the legacy of Pound, Aldington, Spire, and Imagism. This “Imagism Summit” (as it

was characterized in media announcements) concluded with the presentation of a volume of poems—*What Thou Lovest Well Remains: Poems c/o Brunnenburg Castle* (Des Hymnagistes Press, 2007)—to Mary de Rachewiltz, from which several poems and translations (by Boyle, Kempton, McDuffie, Nickel, Stoneback—and recent New Paltz BA Alex Shakespeare) are here reprinted. As Pound made a “pact,” a treaty in the difficult case of Whitman, so these poems represent a negotiation with the literary history of the twentieth century, with the epoch that Hugh Kenner and Marjorie Perloff have designated “The Pound Era.”

We are particularly pleased to publish here for the first time Mary de Rachewiltz’s poem “Rereading Whitman.” In her notes accompanying the poem she tells me that it grew out of her “rereading Whitman—combined with my parents—this is the result.” The poem leaves us with a striking, haunting image of her father, Ezra Pound (many decades after his “Pact”), still rereading Whitman in his last years, still annotating—albeit with faint hand—still conducting his long and passionate encounter with the great writers of the past. And as *her rereading* of Whitman and of *her father rereading* Whitman reminds us: The past is never past, all great literature is *now*, everything done well with passion and love is *simultaneous*.

Rereading Whitman

Mary de Rachewiltz

“Garrulous to the very last” you were
not. “Like a field-mouse” you slipped away,
your hand grew cold in hers, so hard
to release, she unaware you were
no longer there.

Left alone in old age there’s time
time to retrace their steps and find
the stain of a tear, an eyelash lost
the sign of the pencil ever so faint
marking a page in Whitman’s prose
to affirm unending continuity
of moods and speech, eavesdropping
in Concord or Boston Commons
revisited so late, yet always there
“disembodied, triumphant, dead” you
return to remind America
you’re determined to let the world know
in small print you are her great singer
with little specimens on record,
in periplum sailing the Divine Ship.

Song and Letter to be Delivered to Brunnenburg Castle

H. R. Stoneback

I. “Song for Maria Down from the Mountains”

Down from the mountains all down to the sea,
ride rivers of ribbons and rosaries
into the shadows of the hidden nest.
Comes the pig-tailed golden-haired shepherdess:
gondola-leaning, canal-splashing tunes
sung to unholy waters of the lagoon.
Homesick for spring-water fonts of Tirol,
earth-daughter weaned slow from the soil.

Rocks and fields—the sheep, the cows, the horses,
the chanting of ancient songs and stories

when the peasants sit by the vaulted stoves
through winters longer than strong missals, old loves.
Homesickness, yes, but there was the Bible,
read in English, on his lap, and magic fables;
city walks, clacking of cooped-hen printing press
at Santo Stefano, where the ice cream was the best.

Cantos in the evening.

And always the leaving.

Oh let the villagers bring flowers and song, with torches and drums—
For all things in every place, all things human have their homecoming.
And we only know where we are when we are home
in the country of the heart and spring-glimmering stone.

II. “A Letter for Mary from Provence”

Who needs old fairy tales fat with magic
transformations, peasants and princesses?
I come to the castle with letter and song
for the countess who might have been the girl next door
in Jenkintown or Hailey, Idaho,
or at my farm in Kentucky on Boone’s Trace
where, in another life, I was a peasant
clearing and working the land, fighting off redskins,
dreaming myself West. Then East into poetry.

In Provence, the Camargue, home of the other cowboys,
the idea started: an Imagist Reunion
at Brunnenburg, the daughters of Aldington and Pound
(who else could be found?) together in another century.
Catha and I sat in her tall hollyhock garden
in Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, talking castles.
Mary sent a poem for Catha. I made a book.
We wrote many letters, making plans.
Mary warned me about difficult access,
spiral staircase, stone courtyards and steps.
(These days I love nothing more than a wheelchair test.)
We wrote of gardens, flowers, weather, places.

Now Catha says her life has dropped down a black well.
She is unable to travel.

Each converging day, we understand better
how we are living and dying into each other
as we shape a paradise garden beyond weather.

An old country song goes: “Take a Message to Mary.”

So I bring this message to your door, with a song,
a song of place and time with torches and drums:

We who have been blessed to dwell in beautiful places
know that “out of all this beauty” comes song for the ages

The Shifty Night

for Ezra Pound

William Boyle

With my lowest breath, I have lived in the
Full flare of brightness. Caught up in your
Letters, those strangest of poems. I stepped
out carefully. Saw this: the rough king
Wrapped in chains. I too once sent a letter one
Thousand miles. It was flawed to the bare
Bone. A man held my skull and hummed.
He said, Do the Claudel thing: remember
The blessings of God and raise your voice to
Him in a hymn of thanksgiving.

So I have raised my voice loud to the long
Holy night. It's like Péguy said: the night
And my dreams bring me back to those three
Nights, the nights that Christ was a dead man
In the world of men. So the ghost was pushed out
To pulp. I lit out—half-weaving, undernourished—
for the place where difficult beauty flourished.

Micel biþ se Meotudes egsa

*And though he strew the grave with gold,
His born brothers, their buried bodies
Be an unlikely treasure hoard.*

—Ezra Pound, “The Seafarer”

Daniel Kempton

Scant help is gold before the power of fate,
Great is the Measure’s might, which makes the earth turn,
The firm ground, salt wave, and sky above.
Foolish he who dreads not fate, comes to death unprepared.
Each man should control his strong spirit, remain steadfast in pledges.
Each man should meet his friend with love,
His foe with death, with hot flames on the funeral pyre.
Fate is more mighty than any man’s thought.
Let us consider where we would have our home,
How to fare thither, hasten to find happiness,
Eternal fame in the meadhall, exalted among wonder-princes,
For all time.

The Enormous Tragedy of the Dream (“On Christ’s Bent Shoulders”)

*I would like to bring back momentum and movement in poetry on a grand scale,
to master your tremendous machinery and to carry your standard further into
the century....*

—Robert Lowell, letter to Ezra Pound

There was little distinction between etiquette and religious practices.

—Mary de Rachewiltz, *Discretions*

Brad McDuffie

I.

The Centuries turn on androgynous Cantos—
(America is Vomiting)—

“On a wet, black bough.”
‘Hang it all, Ezra Pound.’
I will show you fear in the Poet’s
Usury of Time.

II.

We pay our debts, tithe offerings, to your generosity,
(Forgive us our amnesia). New, all is new
In the anima century. Remember us Colossus
In words carved into stone. The State—
Your *Notre Dame* taxed utopia—
Coughs up blood. Everyone rhymes
But no song of prophecy sings in meter.

Come home!
Come home!

We who were weary came home, but Europe
Was sowing salt in its fields. I write to you in grain
Psalms and omit adjectives for God.
Mary’s face sails ships to the New, New World—
The Achilles heel of the Machine’s
Exchange rate. The wheat of her heart
Was your true Genesis. You, *Laufer*,
Frobenius of poetry’s *melopoeia* revival.

III.

See the Childe rising with the dawn,
In the land up from where the canals
Jettison the century’s restless push upward.
She numbers a Rosary for the soul
Born still into the turning world.
Translating Cassandra upon the Western
Wind, her mind tends to black sheep
In their fields, plays “He Loves Me”
With *The Life Of Christ* upon daisies

(plucking at God, Lucifer and Purgatory),
And cries “*Grüss Gott*” to Cities on Hills.
She speaks to us in counterpoints
From “the Hercules Columns” of her child-
hood, upon which her Father’s voice
Is the foundation—water, that flows
Faithfully, in Venetian mazes, through her lines.

The Poet Did Not Answer

for Ezra Pound

The priest did not answer

—Ernest Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*

Matthew Nickel

In paradise they do not write but sing *pour*
Le nuit, doucement, purifiez nos coeurs
Is it enough to say, you have given me paradise
In the unforgivable silence of a poem’s broken heart
In the bird’s mouth, the singing troubadour’s eyes;

Is it enough to sing a hymn of thanks, to start
In humility like worn-out pallbearer at grave’s heart
After poetry, the bitch, sighs its last breath,
To pull down despair in the care of your poem
Is it enough to say thanks in the Word’s last death—

After the frosty silence and apostle’s aimless roam,
Is it safe to praise thee, beyond betrayal’s home
To hymn to thee for lightning phrase and turn
For the heart’s twist and agony of love,
A love not breathed but for the poet taciturn,

Is it safe now to sing thy praises loud and mightily
To pull down this year’s vanity for next year’s charity
To pray at the altar of memory, without pause to lean

Like the butterfly perching on petal, above rain-tears
Moving in droplets, pooled in places never seen;

Somewhere in sands of memory and eye-clogged fear
I see a poet kneeling under blood-threat, gun-stare,
And dust stirred, settling in silence, while outside in air
Larks float gently like poetry, musing upon sunlight—
Wings of praise, and the kneeling poet in poem-prayer

Did not answer to the gun-threat and blood-fright,
Kneeling contritely, hands outward in sun bent sight,
He chants in some forgotten language a *cantico del sole*,
What thou lovest well shall not be reft from thee
And the fine old eye sees beauty rising from the sea

Then the wind spoke the interminable night litany
Is it enough to walk slowly in the paradise of your poetry—

Buying Pound's *Cantos*

Alex Andriessse Shakespeare

Escaping the heat of a sixth floor apartment,
I am not alone under St. Mark's dull vertical.
An old man picks through the garbage. Pigeons settle.

Things vanish. In this neighborhood, they're raising rents
and it's too hot. I turn right into my local
leftist bookshop; my pockets jingle with coinage.

Poetry. Poe. Pound's *Cantos*. I have the sinking
feeling that I am going to buy the thing.
I know they are like a Marx Brothers routine, a
book that demands books, regenerates the age

and radiates libraries. But to concentrate, to
hold
one line and begin

to unknot the gossamer
and tangle with
text and man,

(I remember all righteous anger subsiding
the moment I saw the dusty film
of him, old, Tyrolean-hatted,
in a long coat,
wandering Venice in black and white,
exiled from exile,
like a strange bird
wrecked off the Adriatic.)

that is enough.
Off the white page
vatic ink

and one hears the aged
voice and sees through
the fine old eye.

St. Mark's lifts up,
I walk; I walk,
and one bird flies.

In the courtyard

David Appelbaum

The mist caught the web
and held fast

 its quarry snared
above the marsh-grass
flexed and militant
until the salt air
suckled dry the blades,
and freed the jailer,
so that death might weave
 again
her lovely trap.

Transmission of light outside tradition

David Appelbaum

A cloud of mirror
 a mourning
bowed in a dark ring
that held the dawn sea
in a green cup

 I imagined
pagodas and stone spires
where people talk
in solitary pairs,
their meager life counseled
by the rift
into which tears must fall.

When the grey osprey darted
at the sun's irradiant eye
the glint gave light
to that fissure, I drifted
there a phantom on unloved streets
a caul child

 to my own heart
and its vagaries.

Then a salt wind came
from beneath the water,
within reach above me
that common line
that divides one
 from no thing.

Alphabet

David Appelbaum

With the crane's flight
ages flew past also
the babble of the crib
the child's zeal
then the frown
of unfounded words
then the man
in the desert of thought
alone before temptation
bent, yielding
O why do ideas
soar so grandly
with that spoon-billed
long-necked silhouette
flapping molecular north?
Why does passion
lift so thin?
This zeal to
a lone man
emerges from a cistern's
mouth one day
into blaring sun
& their majestic brace
in which all the letters
of all the words
ever to be writ
ever to be writ
are

Mothers and Sons*

for Sparrow

*. . . Tonight we are going
Good better and better we are going
To win, and not only win but win
Big, win big.*

—James Dickey, “The Cancer Match”

William Boyle

While downriver the streets dry up,
Upriver the snow is still piled high
Against the mouths of mailboxes. He is
Taken there in a swift turn down dream
Country roads. There are things that he
Still does not understand. How. Mostly.
This. A song would be better, he knows,
Because songs carry cures and poems
Carry sicknesses. But he cannot sing for
You as you have sung for him. He cannot
Soothe you the way you have soothed so
Many. So. Many. Heavy winter. No mercy.
His mothers cry. His grandmother prays,
Keeps a wide smile, keeps her sweater
Buttoned high. Tells him about God and
How it is in His hands. How big God's
Hands are. And His heart. There were heavy
Lonesome summers where he doubted that.
But that doubt is long gone. Because mothers
Teach sons how to live. Teach them how to
Sing. Beating things is easy when you know
The secret of sitting in love. Beyond dawn,

*This poem was one of many poems and songs performed in the “Poems, Ballads, Songs: A Tribute to Sparrow” reading and concert at SUNY New Paltz, October 1, 2007.

Beyond distance, blessedness can carry. Even
In heavy winter. Even in bright blare. God
Blesses mothers who have taught sons how
To love and sing. All carrying, all weeping,
Folds in. All praying sweeps out, folds over
You. He has never been lost in your presence,
Never felt uncertainty. Only lit up with grace.
Only lifted. Only cared for. Only loved. Only sung to.

November Night Songs

Laurence Carr

1.

The wind
chimes
the wind chimes.

Aeolian breath.
Serene bell canto.
An ancient song
last to linger.

Sung by the few
over the few
remains
remaining.

2.

The geese are leaving.
 Veni
 Vidi
 Vici

And with cooling nights
their occupation ends.

They sky parade
in perfect V,
honking horns
victorious.

Winging South
with spoils-
fat with stories.

On route
They reminisce
of empire,
campaign
and ever lasting glory.

3.

The train wafts in
on whistle wind.
Alive with loco motion.
Keening its song of longing.

A streaming pulse
Of what was
what is
will be.

Her Falling Time

Laurence Carr

She stood with eyes to heavens.
Looking up the gowns of the skygods.
In that time when she was one of many.
A forest of brothers and sisters
digging in and reaching up.
Their only purpose:
To root and bark, and branch;
To sap and twig and leaf.
To move in two directions at once.

Till falling time.

The time when she is chosen
among the many.
The time that comes unannounced
but is not unknown.

She's lost count
of how many seasons she's passed.
She no longer trusts her rings
to ring true.

Bugs and birds, wind and lightning—
whittling
gnawing
layer by layer.

Until

Her digging in and reaching up
ceases.
And falling time has come.

Separation Anxiety

Joann K. Dejudicibus

Words pour into
the valley of my chest
through the cracked sternum
and cardiovascular
web of muscle,
artery and vessel-vein

suturing the folds which have
divided like continents
since your departure.

In Waiting

Joann K. Deiudicibus

My faith is a 1979 Cadillac
hung on a piece of fishing
wire around my neck and I
am expected to twirl gracefully,
to pirouette poignantly as a figure
skater does, her lithe frame spiraling
great triples and eights on the thin edge
of twin razors that flay the outer
layers of ice, casting aside clean
white shavings like old lovers.

Options

Joann K. Dejudicibus

As you lean back in the torn plaid chair
I watch through the grey door that doesn't close
unless it is locked, leaving nothing
but the openness of other doors.

Absolved

Joann K. Deiudicibus

I have been baking cookies all day,
rolling the dough into perfect shapes
even if the heat of the stove will deform them,
blur their edges, ruin their memory of perfection
the way ours, too, has been erased since the
exodus from God's great womb.

I have been washing tiles white
to make them look like heaven may look
although I have never seen it.
I imagine its disinfected countertops
and sanitized walls, its sink-drains
clear of debris.

I load the dishwasher with
the regret of leftovers.
I turn it on. The dishes
clang like church bells;
they sing repentance.
They are a hymnal of your love,

far gone yet omnipresent.
I recite prayers of leisure and art and work
as one, a trinity I cannot touch
nor see, yet belief remains
like the savior who hangs in my childhood,
whose palms I cannot touch, whose
wounds I cannot wipe clean.

She's So Badass It Hurts

Dennis Doherty

I. Magicicada

Spontaneous articulation in freedom
to exploit the dark of blinding
sunshine, the sweltering air with its
tangle of competing waves she emits
outward into ether, rebounded
back again from every surface of world—
the dented facets and crease and point
of ceaseless windblown sails of leaves
and needles green, block of trunks
and blip of bees; exotic warp of spaces
sing her to herself.

Crushed inside this ball of her own winding,
she senses in the pressure an overture
of soul: the Other? Incubus? Partner
to the song? The song is thus:
*my eyes see the mother of mystery
is beauty. My eyes sting; my eyes
are lashed and warped with shine,
involute in what I see, seek; I prism
the light through my wings: my wings
describe the inscape of my contour's cry.*

Cracked her own shell to scale this big dizzy,
shed thirteen, seventeen years safe earthen niche
for the fearful glad risk of this beech,
to sing and fall into the arms of her song.
Whose song? lives one day
to sing among millions, dies myriad
deaths and launches again, thirteen years,
seventeen, every second, every century, sole
and collective. To the throng it sounds thus:
Bleeding means. Bleeding means. Bleeding means. No,
the drone of undifferentiated tug—

work, hunger, drug—not beauty, tendril
to the trigger love, container of the perfect origins,
the perfect return, O consummate moments!

II. Tymbals

After the prime numbers of nymphs
in progress, safe from predation's even cycles,
she excavates into sky (saved from the paved
road and lot which entomb brethren's dreams).
Her torso serves—its own resonance chamber:
not the stridulated cricket rubbing of sticks,
but the membranous frequency of being,
the high wire belly dance of identity's tone.
Her fluted eyes fishlens the forest; nimble
limbs memorize the twigs; iridescent
skin enacts the whiffle of the wind. Organs
translate the audited circuit, tymbals to tympana.
What would *you* say, stepping from your crusted molt?

III. Instar

That's not what we have known? Only the male can sing?
You speak from the cradle of your crusted molt.
We call adults *imagines*. They say the first
haiku was a hermit painting grass on dew.
Hear what you see! invent the odor of emotion!
Function has delivered us beyond flight
to the new abyss and colony of maybes.
Wave to the old craft, the servile mass.

IV. What I heard

Fingers of quicksilver light, the veil that reveals
all beauty in its liberating caul, longing.
I heard the sweet click of birth's secretions
(burst of berries, slurp of fruit in drip),
the stick of willful matter pressed in kiss.

A roar in the trees, the glow beyond the hill—
city nightlife ringing, or saucered empyrean
descending—the blacksmith demon's furnace.
He fashions magic cicadas who will master him.

Fugitive

Dennis Doherty

A man sits in the turret on his neck
Observing, skewed, the movement through the room
Of the body far below him; arms swing
From squared shoulders' rote peripheral view
Clad in stiff workman's canvas jacket; knees
Jerk automatic lowers legs that plant
Successive foot platforms toward the door
And the bright of early April sunshine
Like a dumb or inbred farmhand, a numb,
Murderous clod, and he thinks, *Where to, brute?*

Zombie stalks to the tool shed for a rake
And begins the mechanics of denuding
His yard of its delinquent foliage
Littered from last autumn's impending woods.
Moving radially out in a blast
From his dead center, he tears the ground-hug
Deciduous wet layers, stroke by stroke
To the bottom clinging membranes, then rips
Them into the air along with acorn,
Cap, earthworm, and scraps of white matted grass
Into great mounds. Next, the heaving swells he
Breaks against the edge of trees, thinks, *I should*

Think. Who is it lifts the leaves, and why?
He fears this mere audit of his actions.
The rake cracks in the center; he clamps
It with his left, moves lower with his right.
Stooped now with great back pain, he hustles,
In panic, waves beyond the boles' barricades,
Thinks, feel the meaning in the madness!
The man's heated now, sweating in the chill—
Workswat, and another, more poisonous.

Among the shaded trunks he swats and sweeps
The sea of leaves, the entire forest floor,

Thinks, *I must look like . . .* but can only see
With his *eyes*, fastened to levers and limbs—
That grunting other clawing fugitive
Who works to beat himself against and through
The world: exhaustion may bring cessation,
May unify, or rid one from other,
So he'll no longer wonder who the man,
The body, the periscope of the eye.

October 30, 2007, Watching the Shawangunk Sunset and Hearing Sparrow Sing in My Mind*

Dennis Doherty

From the blazing panes of the office tower
I reflect on god, the created hour:

smolder blood sundown crowns the west slope;
silhouette goose chains sling to the east.

One such October, a solitary
sparrow alit light as leaves on my lap.

Wintertough little harbinger, she puffed,
produced from her throat loving's verities—
sang hard hearted Barbara Allen, for me.

*This poem was one of many poems and songs performed in the “Poems, Ballads, Songs: A Tribute to Sparrow” reading and concert at SUNY New Paltz, October 1, 2007.

Circus

Howie Good

Oh, how they ooh at you,
the bareback rider in the poster,
expostulate on your red match-head of hair
and cotton-candy pink costume,
your white horse whirling round the ring
like a storm of paperweight snow,
but when the ringmaster in shiny black boots
and swallowtail coat cracks his whip
for attention inside the faded and peeling tent,
they'll awake, though not sure just why.

For the Woman Who Walked Out during My Reading

Howie Good

To what should I attribute it,
an upsurge in sunspot activity
or the general decay of manners?
Please don't say it was me,
the dull sincerity of my words,
their untreated depression,
that sent you rushing off.
Let me think there was a man
(with a ponytail, perhaps),
a vase of dried wildflowers,
a bedroom wall on which
you put a hand for balance
as you stepped out of your skirt,
your micro panties, and then yourself
and delicately into a love poem.

Scarecrow

Howie Good

How's it look? I ask,
slipping my arms into the sleeves
of the scarecrow's battered coat.
Good, she says,
but I already know the truth,
and by portentous coincidence,
the sky has just turned the same
disquieting shade of gray
as various diseases of the mind.
I hold my arms out like so
and assume the somber expression,
including opalescent eyes,
of someone remembering something
he wished he didn't,
children overtaken on the road
by claw-footed shadows,
regardless of ancient promises
and the shrill little cries of the sun.

Withdrawal

Andrew C. Higgins

We'd come a long way to see the signing,
Joseph said too long—thought we should have stayed
home watching over the herd, like mother said,
and now I wonder if he wasn't right.
The city was decked in flowers and military gear when we arrived.
Casual soldiers strolled along the avenues,
snapping pictures and smiling—sure signs of occupation.
But the shop clerks went on in their dogged ways,
piling up sales while the new flags climbed the poles
each morning. In the first bar we came to,
after getting a room (barely)
in the old hotel by the town hall,
we watched the barkeep water down the beer,
then spent the night drinking,
arguing whether this was resistance or collaboration.

On Thursday we saw the King,
sullen and still fat,
in his red-gilt coach.
Stripped of his guards he seemed
just another ostentatious lawyer.
However, the civil servants have had new life
breathed into their muddy souls.
In the tax collector's office,
they fairly jumped out of their chairs
to greet you. And when I asked for an extension,
the clerk nodded, smiled, and said,
“Sure, sure, take more time.”

The fleet is still at anchor in the harbor.
The gaunt prows of warships rode
high above the harbor waves
and the clearly visible ballast lines
showed their hulls were empty.
This is what it has come to.
Tomorrow, Monday, is the ceremony,

but I've decided to follow Joseph's lead
and start back this evening.
There's a train leaving at dusk
and I've secured a berth.
I'm writing this to let you know I'm going.
Things may be calm here and back home,
but there's a vague panic in the suburbs,
and I recognize that leaving town early
could be seen as a sign
of disillusionment or fear,
either of which can get you killed.
But I want you to know it was neither;
I intended to leave for my own purposes.

The Bat Men

Andrew C. Higgins

Zebras, mountain lions, and cormorants graze
the lush dunes of the archipelago alert
hoping to avoid a ship laden with round
men dressed in leather tuxedos.
These are the bat men, men of dark violence,
turning, wheeling at the click of contact
to claim a prize, be it money, land, or love.
But you and I know well
it is rarely love. For love is a thing
not found by adventurers or imperialists,
unless on a slow day in the palace,
while the provinces melt into a new barbarism,
the captain of the emperor's guard watches
a small boy construct an aqueduct out of triangular blocks,
sheds his sword and spends the balance of his days
painting frescos on the catacomb walls.
Over and over again,
the image of a woman dressed
in a sari or pantsuit astride a thick zebra. Until
the evangelists come and sack the town and are converted
by the frescos, which they unearth
like the emperor's bowels
exposed to the broad sun to be praised
in place, and over time, fade until only two colors
remain, brown and a weak magenta.
And the woman now looks like a bird
and the zebra a cow. And the later-day-lookers
who peer at the lines imagine
a quiet civilization, tending rows of terraced corn
in a modular river valley, with an occasional
foray in search of deer or hyacinth.
And the lookers dream of such a peace
that it swallows them whole and they don
those tuxedos fashioned from the hides
of the impervious armadillo and set sail

in a small caravel stocked
with rum, salt-peter, and limes: the makings of false hope and destruction.
Only two of them know the implications of their supplies.
One is the sergeant-at-arms, a man who has traveled far and served
as slave and master, fought Saracens and French knights,
and now only desires a shack on a spit of land in an inland sea.
The other is the boy of triangular blocks.

Tor House Pilgrimage

Michael Lutomski

months after the trip
to the coast
August's hold snapped
and the season passed into
September perfection
golden days that stand still
except for the path
of the giant silent sun
new job at a book store
big collected Jeffers
at the front counter
to show a new friend
I look and realize
that Jeffers sitting there
all tall and lanky
skeleton man with a pack of smokes
does not have his talon curved body
leaned against a cliff side
he sits on the western
edge of his hawk tower
there: the inscription
beyond: the immense sadness
of the wild pacific
and my memories rush
for I have seen exactly this picture
with my own eyes
in color
without Jeffers sitting there
my pilgrimage
to touch stone Jeffers touched
to pray for the wild day moon
to feel the weight in the air
of the room of the bed
that is still by the sea window
and my moment with the cypress

that he crafted and nurtured
like poetry still standing
eighty years after
I pulled a piece of bark
to keep in my pocket
or around my neck
to remind me
that crafting and nurturing
are necessary

Granted

Michael Lutomski

Sometimes
especially when the
light first begins to linger
past supper time in early March
like a timid animal at the
edge of a clearing and the air
smells of the melt and the first mud
I catch something so fleeting
I catch something just beyond reach
it's not a smell but a thought
an angle skewed slightly
where the buildings seem
like bricks placed one by one
by careful hands and the streets
seem laid out in a chosen direction
the mourning doves coo a learned song
and somewhere spiders wake with the
memory of a crafted pattern
even the earth turns away from its
favorite star ever so slowly on
a well carved well worn groove

I become aware of the process of things
I become aware that what is here
once was not

It passes though
just a glimpse
the way a pine top
might rise above the
rolling fog for a moment
the way a passing wind
from a coming storm might
bring me ever so briefly
the smell of rain and wild scallions
scraped up from the quiet of the forest floor

The Gulls Leave Gentle Traces*

for JAS—Sparrow

Brad McDuffie

in the sky off Emerald Isle,
as Anna bobs upon the anapestic
break of the Atlantic at low-tide—slick
white-caps betray rip-tides. Miles
away the sun drowns in western waters. Its razor files
time out of the day like a pyrric
dance, before night unfolds a mystic
three-quarter moon and the smile
of Orion's sweeping sword reflects
light from years we'll never know.
The gulls bank on the unseen, white hearts
with wings half-cocked, they bullseye minnows—
white stones plumbing ocean depths. Beyond the sets,
Spanish Mackerel flash in ecclesiastical arcs—
boutants; they model the soul's loophole along the quais.
Anna wishes to make of it all a record
upon the North Star. I watch how the water lies
unbroken beyond the break and pretend
not to hear, for luck. A gull cries
over the white-wash, breaking her rubie-
slipper spells. At bed-time prayers,
she disarms me; "Daddy, why do people die?"
Once Sparrow gave her a dream-catcher,
". . . to sleep . . . to keep," the words skip in my mind. Daughter,
I wish I had an answer. The night's long declension falls
and, leaning into the wind, the fisher-
men cast out to the Old World—their final call
into blackening waters.

We're listening to the Vesper singing,
from her blue-grass state, of Hudson homes and a-liven'.

*This poem was one of many poems and songs performed in the "Poems, Ballads, Songs: A Tribute to Sparrow" reading and concert at SUNY New Paltz, October 1, 2007.

Icarus's Mother

Jan Zlotnik Schmidt

When he fell through the sky
like a struck flare
his fingers almost touched the sea the earth.
Then his body thinned to
fish scales
watching the world.

She imagined this
his falling body
his back bursting in flame
she unable to follow his course
to hear his cries seared
like burnt parchment.

Then she learned to fear nothing.

In another time
she saw the father
in his cell
watched him trace wings
of wax and feather
glaze them yellow gold.

She saw the wings
magically take flight
the boy eager to touch the
bright blue edge of the world.

Then the fall
against a vanishing sun.

And now she bends
into herself
caught in her own
labyrinth
grief and rage.

And what
she remembers

is a body alight
and glowing.

I need a new poem

Jan Zlotnik Schmidt

I need a new poem
one that doesn't
stick in my craw
expect recompense
go for the jugular
divide and conquer
split hairs
split bodies
split borders

I need a new poem
one that doesn't
tear flesh like paper or
squeeze fingers to throats
or forearms
blue marked skin
at the crease of the elbow
streaks like
sodden violet crepe

I need a new poem
one that asks for more

or says to the woman
the pregnant mother
at the market
buy mangos
figs
pears
grapes
taste the sweetness
let it dissolve on your tongue
for there are no mines
no bombs
there is only bread

I need a new poem

one that smells of
lavender and bayberry
wild onion
and freshly cut grass
and dreams of itself
as only new poems can

Analysis and Interpretation

Robert Singleton

If there is resolution, there is plot.
If there is conjuring, there are words to celebrate like portico and synecdoche.
If there are words, there is a resonance of curves,
a palatial organism in a paradox of mobility,
a ceaseless rumination
on romanticism and tragedy.

If there is a story,
there is a chain,
a point A and a point B.
If there is no chain,
there is a sonic resonance,
a silent testament to the shifting of perspective,
an inconsiderate conundrum,
a paradox of nobility,
a splendid escape in the paradise between words.

There is a death in the family,
an ancient form of suffering.
There is a collapsing heart
and a sinful dereliction,
and an inspired surrender.

If there is a story,
there is a blinding chronology,
a horrific ambivalence
but a modern leap
into a chain of resurrection.

If there is a chain of resurrection,
it ends, ends, ends
with the ring returned
to the fable's place,
with the next to last breath,
with the inability to conceive an opposite
like a determined beggar in a spineless cloud.

We conjure it, torture it, weather it, test it.

We take a second step into the catacomb,
a second step on the narrow path
to the morbid lake
to the crippling boulevard
and the legless hayloft,
to the integrated bus
and the Yukon trail
and the tip of the earth
and the café of heaven,
the subtlety and its gradation,
its algebra and rhythm.

If there is resolution,
there is plot.

If there is the passage of time,
we arrive at the end of signification,
but we also arrive at the beginning of possibility.

A felled tree rests on a growing one,
and there is meaning.
But we can always let it go.

Reunion

Robert Singleton

We are born in solitude and thrust listless and shapeless into rags of cloth; we land firmly on destiny and reappear as the ghosts of our former selves. We bear flags and medallions. We are soldiers of metal who have suddenly found our own initiation into bronze. This is our first time away from the dark and we grow afraid as our shadows solidify. We are the children of the night who grin through the skulls of cannon into our memories; we wear the robes of Pittsburgh and Lancaster County and the fields that grow machines out of rain-bowed oil. We sleep in step while we walk and drag woodcuts of dust behind us long after our dream of walking has ended. On the hillsides, our tents are grown like marble; they rise out of the sparks of cinders and the chemicals of death and surround our brothers and sisters who are also lost. We remember the parades of the initiate, and all of those flags, and the places they came from, and we will fall again among those paths whose trains once took us, more smoke and iron than the tattered flesh and bone and the wood of the fences. When we return here, all the trees we knew will be gone, but we cannot know this yet. It does not disturb our rest among the earth-movers and the serried lines of our children's children. To the right of where we lay, the July sun seems to move through the smoke and the stacked rocks bear the textures of red lace. We hear the voices of our enemies as if they were hoarse with yelling and their voices are low to the ground in the red lace and sun. We will mark this place with stakes made of our own bones. We will string them with chains and we will burn in our hope, and in the smoke of that fire the wood will turn again to iron, and the iron will turn to gods with an ego. We are here for our future. We are here to collect the debts we are owed.

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania 2007

Pulp Poetry—50 MPG

H. R. Stoneback

The editor-in-chief, the big boss
of a legendary literary press,
sits in my library, after lunch, tells
me over wine about all the books pulped
every year, sold to ethanol producers—
when I hear the facts, I'm shocked, I gulp
my wine, look nervously at my books—
she explains how the efficiency experts
fix the proper ratio of stock on hand
to sales and warehouse waste. (I'm consoled
by the thought: 'Tis better to have been published
and pulped than never to have been published at all.)
She names famous names, their rank in pulpdom,
and I feel a secret delight in this wisdom
and think of the way of all flesh and how
'tis better than never to have been pulped at all.
Late, after she leaves, I am deeply pleased
with the secret knowledge that my poems
might power cars and tractors and backhoes.

I've got a secret, I know who's being pulped:
I won't name their names—that would be betrayal—
better to let professors and their students
retain their innocence of pulped icons
and other shocking matters like the fact
that a leading university press
demanded a five-figure "subvention"
from the editor of the best *Collected Poems*
of one of our greatest poets. Let classrooms
keep their naïve and non-commercial dreams.

That night I go to sleep thinking about *pulp*—
"a soft moist mass of matter, shapeless"—
thinking that's what most poetry is, yes,
either that or *pulpit* poems. Even in sleep
I edit my etymology: *pulpa*

has a different root than *pulpitum*
(still we seek the homiletic lectern
to affirm that flesh can sustain spirit)

I dream the answer to who was most lonesome:
Descartes or Pascal or Hank Williams.
Then I wonder if records can be pulped—
can we turn songs and poems into pasta?
I see Ferlinghetti as my dreams move faster,
and I laugh at the off-rhyme with spaghetti
and think he's right that most poetry now
is prose all dressed up in typography:
food, fuel, e-motion—he should know (let it be).

Yet the dream lingers that books live forever,
endlessly resold at Library Sales and Goodwills,
used bookshops and Salvation Army thrift stores,
passed down lovingly from hand to hand,
ascend to heaven of Abebooks or the Strand.
But at last I know what the old term Pulp Fiction
means: I hold the mystic key to all ignition.

Exact even in dreams, I ask how can it pay
to ship tons of books from New York to Georgia
to be pulped? I dream of buying a truckload,
of hijacking a big rig full of unsold poets
on the Jersey Turnpike, giving away books
at every gas station all the way down I-95
to Georgia. In my dream I drive a curious hybrid
sports car streamlined like a sonnet. The model logo
reads *Corvette Petrarchan*. When the dream-scene shifts
I'm driving an understated pickup truck
with a model-blazon *Imagiste* or *Hymnagiste*—
I can't be sure due to mud-splotches. So much depends
upon a muddy pickup. (Stick it in your gas-tank, pal).
Then I drive a John Seer tractor, the *Dirt Libre* model.

I fill up at pulp stations with pumps marked
Random House Regular—40 MPG guaranteed.
Simon & Schuster Super claims 45.
New Directions Poet-Octane advertises 50.
So I fill up on high-quatrain fuel,
and, all the hijacked books given away,
drive home to finish my next book of poems,
serene and blessed in the knowledge of sure
and certain pulpdom, knowing that my lines
will someday fill the tanks of strangers driving
to nightclubs and churches, weddings and funerals,
knowing at last that poetry does make things happen,
reading the interstate signs like a faux-Baedeker,
singing and sitting on my arse poetica,
sure that the true Art of Poetry
is “To Teach and Ignite”—
a poem should not mean, but drive.

The Noodle (for Jan)

Robert H. Waugh

No noodle rides the Caspian,
only the sun and bodies
that ache in their solemnity
and stones, stones,

blue stones and purple stones
singing a purple glee
the sun abdicates in the face of,
it dreams of that single noodle

cutting between the waves
abreast of the solemn bodies
and purple stones, it rides
the Caspian light-headed.

Moodna Creek

Robert H. Waugh

The creek is no more than five feet across,
as wide as a young man of sixteen years is tall—
no more than a big toe wide in August,
a thin sweet pulse of water beneath
the trees and briars that in that month
let down a dark green flush—no more
than a shallow mirror of ice in December
when the New Year waits upon it—no more
than an hour-long flood in March—by so much
no more than nothing, you'd think its name
Moodna would years past have been no more.

Time Out

Robert H. Waugh

It was a cold day in Hell, and we were grateful, something like a late September when you slip an L L Bean sweater on and sniff a frost in the air. We had no sweaters, true, only the chains, no fashion you could boast of—still, clink clank clunk! It's a kind of music, and no screams. It was good to be rid of the screams after that roar of eternity. "How are you doing?" Some of us asked. "What do you think, asshole!" a few rasped churlishly. A few said, "So much better, thank you, how about you?" But most of us simply stood there, catching our breath and swinging our heavy melodious chains, clank clunk, for after the deluge of fire and mountains of flesh and screams you can bet we were grateful, though none of us joined in a chorus to celebrate that cold day in Hell.

Enlightening Jack

Sarah Wyman

The last pumpkin sits
bored and tan as a lifeguard in August
waiting for nothing
but the rare thrill of catastrophe
as ants go for the corn
and worms into tomatoes.

He stays cool in his slick shell,
spread slats save him from rot
in the dark woodshed corner.

Discovered one day,
a man takes him home.
The first slit in his skull,
well, the thought makes him groan,
but the pressure relief is really a boon.
Seeds come scraping out as the light filters in,
a whole world entering through star-cut eyes.

A thought grows in his stem
as he sits on the front stoop,
spilling shaped light on the street.
He wishes to move—
some legs or a wheel or a catapult seat.
The cars swim mindless below.

So fervent his wishes,
the poor Jack starts a trembling
then a crash down the hill:
a bright gash of orange
in the new fallen snow.

Take These Words

for Yusef Komunyakaa

Sarah Wyman

Take these words
reluctant in cashmere,
hungry for wood
words like nails or better, seeds.
Say something / not glaring
over the curves of heads
for most heads are
but enough to nail these bodies down
latch a toe to the floor
or a rod through the heart.
Keep the organs in place
while fingers spider over wire cords
and all the world seems in motion
pushing us forward who crouch
even into gray strands of meaning.

Arborescent

Sarah Wyman

A fish of leaves swims
up for air
bringing a message from earth,
exploding out of humus
out of all that lies delayed,
making death look like victory's torch.

Still soft enough to bend
not dry enough to burn
the leaves lean into each other
a smooth-scaled back
a belly formed of sliding plates
a domino of letting go
as autumn starts to fall.

The fish knows
it won't find release:
a slim trunk holds it to the ground
anchored in the midst of thrust,
a puppy pulling on its lead.
Still, the golden swimmer stretches
to her highest point.
Jagged jitter of petals
a sun rays through its eye of air.

V | NYCEA Prize Essays

The Structural Revolution of Virginia Woolf's *Kew Gardens*

Marissa Caston

In Virginia Woolf's "Kew Gardens" (1919) sketched conversations establish friction between the consciousnesses of disparate individuals and the vast consciousness of the text. The opposition between the concealed and revealed culminates in a collective narrative voice that neither negates nor alters the very real implications of the emotional trajectories making their ways through the garden; the narrator instead assumes a gentle authority and demonstrates that even though fleeting reactions to external circumstances seldom offer coherence, transitory mental states, when explored as necessary parts of an enigmatic whole can, like the small ray of light that governs much of the narrative, fall "into a raindrop," and once inside the raindrop, expand "with such intensity of red, blue, and yellow the thin walls of water that one expect[s] them to burst and disappear" (Woolf 1604). The beam that enters the raindrop presents the possibility of rupture before deciding to settle upon a leaf. Like the diverse hues within the raindrop, the assertions of selves within the text do not cause walls "to burst and disappear," but they do obscure the boundaries separating the significant from the insignificant. The structural tension that surfaces in response to silent musings lends a sacred validity to the inconsequential by showing that public revolution begins with private evolution and that private evolution takes place both because of, and in spite of, the inadequacies of speech.

The shaft of light that threatens the raindrop proceeds to shine "into the eyes of the men and women who walk through Kew Gardens in July" (1604), focusing first on Eleanor and Simon. As he walks six inches in front of his wife, Simon remembers proposing to Lily in Kew Gardens fifteen years ago. His mind shifts through manifold associations; he recalls sitting with Lily in the garden by the lake and begging her to marry him "all through the hot afternoon" (1604). Contemplating his proposal to Lily, he pays homage to his past, a past with synecdochic connections to a silver buckle on a shoe and an energetic insect since "the whole of her seemed to be in her shoe. And [his] love, [his] desire, were in the dragonfly" (1604). Fifteen years after the proposal, Simon remembers not the details of his conversation with the woman he wanted to marry, but he does, with graceful clarity, equate an apparently eager movement of Lily's foot with her initial,

private reaction to his question. He also associates the behaviors of the dragonfly with his own unspoken yearnings. The dragonfly refused to remain calm as the two sat by the water; it “kept circling round [them]” (1604). He hypothesized that if the dragonfly stopped moving, Lily would say “yes”; he remembers wishing that the insect would, like the ray of light that opens “Kew Gardens,” settle “on that leaf” (1604). The dragonfly’s decision not to settle on the leaf does not necessitate eternal regret, though.

Simon remembers the dragonfly and the shoe and Lily and the lake not because he looks back in anger and despondency but because the dragonfly “never settled anywhere” (1604). In the brief seconds between Simon’s recollection of the movements of the dragonfly and his acceptance of Lily’s denial exists a fleeting sense of possibility; the dragonfly, like Simon’s thought, moves quickly and without immediate signs of rest. In the moments between the circular journey of the dragonfly and the twitch of Lily’s foot, the outcome of the situation is unknown. Simon’s mind recalls the brief stretch of time between the asking of the question and the answer, when the answer has the potential to go either way. As he walks in front of his wife and children through Kew Gardens, he basks in the glory of the split seconds between the known and the unknown. The insect never settles and Simon’s heart still beats now with that same wild fervor. His mundane experience appears anything but inconsequential, for it has power, wisdom, and truth that after fifteen years refuse to vanish from his psyche. His memory of the dragonfly does for him what the ray of light does for the raindrop: it expands his existence just enough to remind him of his own ability to use his ordinary thoughts in an extraordinary way, to harmonize the world, as he has come to know it over the past fifteen years.

To attempt to view each moment in a way similar to Simon’s view of the moments that separate the question from the answer is to embark on a silent journey of evolution. Fifteen years ago, when he begged Lily for her hand and wanted nothing more than to see the movements of the dragonfly cease, “his love” and “his desire” endured a blow that only time heals. His private thoughts, as he “kept this distance in front of the woman purposely, though perhaps unconsciously” (1604), place the ability to alter the course of a life in the fluttering of the dragonfly and the fleeting emotions that fluttering contains. The orb of Simon’s consciousness, though, appears quite separate from the consciousness of his wife, Eleanor, who walks six inches behind him and “bore on with greater purpose” (1604). When Simon asks Eleanor if “she [minds] [him] thinking of the past” and tells her that “[he has] been thinking of Lily, the woman [he] might have married” (1604), Eleanor’s response acknowledges the distance between herself and her husband while simultaneously pointing to a way in which the magnitude of that distance can shrink. Her response—“Why should I mind, Simon? Doesn’t one always think of the past, in a garden with men and women lying under the trees.

Aren't they one's past, all that remains of it, those men and women, those ghosts lying under the trees . . . one's happiness, one's reality?" (1604)—suggests that she also carries within her own mind moments consisting of unlimited promise. The garden and the beings that inhabit the garden influence the memories of both Simon and Eleanor, but Simon and Eleanor appear doomed to explore the private recollections that the natural world encourages in isolation.

In response to Eleanor's questions, Simon says nothing more than, "[f]or me, a square silver shoe buckle and a dragonfly—" (1604). Eleanor asks no more questions and Simon does not offer additional information before the narrative shifts into the consciousness of Eleanor, whose response to her own question is, "[f]or me, a kiss" (1604). Like Simon, Eleanor remembers quietly a past experience containing potential since "it was so precious—the kiss of an old grey-haired woman with a wart on her nose, the mother of all my kisses all my life" (1604). Memories of the way her hand trembled that afternoon, twenty years ago, and the way she took out her "watch and marked the hour when [she] could allow [herself] to think of the kiss for five minutes only" (1604) flow with an air of free serenity that she clings to now as she looks not to a watch but to herself, "only turning her head now and then to see that her children were not too far behind" (1604). The brief verbal exchange may appear incoherent and unsuccessful, but the internal monologues of both individuals conclude with a shared appreciation for the present, a mentioning of their children and the continuation of their walk through the garden while they pass the flowerbed. As the family strolls through the garden, their peace depends upon, as John Oakland observes in "Virginia Woolf's *Kew Gardens*," the development and acceptance of a perceptual logic in which "past and present are joined in common experiences and in the collection of other human beings in Kew Gardens . . . the consciousness of past and present, the dead and the living, in this first episode becomes more confused as the story progresses" (269). Something much larger and much more encompassing than basic speech, then, encourages the synecdochic forces that help to keep Simon's and Eleanor's memories and desires alive and valid.

The garden plays an active roll in impressing upon their minds the emotions associated with long-ago events, emotions that demand exploration and seldom assume the means required for clear and logical expression, yet Edward L. Bishop argues in "Pursuing 'It' through 'Kew Gardens'" that private exploration need not constitute certain isolation since with the spoken interaction between the first couple that passes by the flower bed, "Woolf is gently forcing the reader out of his established perceptual habits, raising questions about the nature of discourse and the conventions used to render it" (272). Walking six inches in front of his wife, Simon sorts through the private implications of the day he proposed to another woman. Walking six inches behind her husband, Eleanor remembers a kiss that carried with it an immense intensity unmatched by any other. As the

ray of light that threatens the raindrop begins to fade on the family, Simon and Eleanor and their two children, Caroline and Hubert, “walked on past the flowerbed, now walking four abreast” (1604). After their family passes the flowerbed, a description of the garden floor, through the mind of a snail about to embark on a quest, evolves the narrative by placing perceptual strength and power in often overlooked and irrelevant aspects of the natural world.

Neither Simon nor Eleanor notices the snail as they walk past the flowerbed; the progress of the snail, however, seems quite significant. The small ray of light that threatens the raindrop and shines “into the eyes of the men and women who walk through Kew Gardens in July” shines also on the snail, who valiantly journeys through “brown cliffs with deep green lakes in the hollows, flat, blade-like trees that waved from root to tip, round boulders of grey stone, vast crumpled surfaces of a thin crackling texture” (1605). The flowerbed through which the snail navigates appears unforgiving when seen through the eyes of the little creature; the snail sees “cliffs” and “deep green lakes in the hollows,” but Simon and Eleanor, as they journey through the same rough terrain, notice nothing of the sort. To Simon and Eleanor, the “brown cliffs” are probably nothing more than normal instances of uneven fertilizer or dirt, the “deep green lakes,” small puddles, the “round boulders of grey stone,” pebbles or small rocks, the “crackling texture,” dried out land in need of moisture, and the “blade-like trees that waved from root to tip,” stalks of grass that the people who pass the flowerbed have no reason to perceive as intimidating. The threats and the fear still exist, though, because “all these objects lay across the snail’s progress between one stalk and another to his goal” (1605). By changing the focus from the internal monologues of Simon and Eleanor to the struggles of the snail, the omniscient third person narration repels the thematic consequence from people since the only constant in the narrative is a snail that each person who passes the flowerbed fails to notice in thought or in speech.

By considering a creature as insignificant as a snail significant and necessary, the narrative expands the evolutionary potential of the moments that appear in Simon’s internal monologue and shows that it is not enough to consider moments of potential in isolation. The destination of the snail is just as important, if not more important, than the destinations of Simon and Eleanor. When the first pair of voices “[diminishes] in size among the trees and [looks] half transparent as the sunlight and shade [swim] over their backs in large trembling irregular patches” (1604), the significance of the couple in the grand scheme of the narrative diminishes, and the trees, sunlight, and shade assume an importance of grand consequence. The snail, which cannot talk but can certainly think and feel, begins to attempt to reveal what remains concealed during the conversation between Simon and Eleanor. When the little snail pauses its journey to decide “whether to circumvent the arched tent of a dead leaf or to breast it” (1605), it becomes

possible for the perceptions of the snail to start to establish a parallel between the natural world and the irregular tendencies of speech. If envisioned through the mind of a snail, the floor of the garden bed has many similarities to words, both spoken and unspoken, and “just as [Woolf] has placed the reader within the garden, so with each successive dialogue she moves deeper, below the flat surface of words, to reveal that, like the apparently flat flower-bed, language too has cliffs and hollows” (Bishop 272). Even though the floor of the flowerbed, like language, may appear flat and orderly, the ground is anything but one-dimensional.

A pair of men, one old and one young, interrupt the snail’s voyage and further cement the parallel between the flowerbed and language. After Simon and Eleanor diminish in perspective, an elderly man voices his plans to concoct a machine that will allow him to converse with the heavens; his companion, William, “sometimes [opens] his lips only after a long pause and sometimes [does] not open them at all” (1605). Still, the old man talks, “almost incessantly; he [smiles] to himself and again [begins] to talk, as if the smile had been an answer” (1605). The elderly man appears insane to the young man and to passersby, but the thoughts and desires of the old man compare to the thoughts and desires of the snail contemplating the dead leaf below him, because the snail accepts the existence of mountains and crevices when others do not. The old man’s wish, to talk with the deceased, automatically acknowledges the limitations of conventional discourse and pays homage to the fractures of language that the young man walking with him prefers to ignore. As “the spirits of the dead” tell the elderly man “all sorts of odd things about their experiences in Heaven” (1605), the dead experience life again for a few short seconds and the old man is at peace with himself in the garden on this very hot day in July.

The old man who walks before the same flower bed that Simon and Eleanor just left fuses life with death before having a conversation with a flower; he finds a sense of contentment and satisfaction, “until he suffered himself to be moved on by William” (1605). With the sketch of William and the old man, Woolf further depicts the difficulties of successful communication and the abilities of the text to combat those difficulties, since her portrayal of him is not only “an acceptance of the temporariness and fragmentation of the initial impressions, but also, in a time-lapse continuum, a realization of a continuing character identification composed collectively of these moments and the reactions to them, so that a wider version of self and selfhood is promoted” (Oakland 266). The old man’s successful communication with his dead friends, and the inability of William to understand the old man’s emotions, has much to do with the structural revolution implicit in the text; it illuminates the isolation of the characters within the text and of the text itself. The conversations the elderly man has with the dead, with himself, and with the flower all become necessary parts of a “wider version of self and selfhood” that combines private thoughts with not only the past and

the present and the dead and the living but also with the dragonfly, the snail, the shoe buckle, the crevices, the lake, Simon, Eleanor, William, and all of the other beings in Kew Gardens.

The “wider version of self and selfhood” is the narrative voice of the text, the voice that lends needed strength to the snail and realizes that as the snail contemplates what to do about the dead leaf that remains in his way, his struggle is an essential part of the struggle of the old man and of the text. The snail doubts he has the “effort needed for climbing a leaf, he was doubtful whether the thin texture which vibrated with such an alarming crackle when touched even by the tips of his horns would bear his weight” (1606). When the old man speaks with beings from another world, he experiences the same type of doubt the snail experiences. He fears that the energy required to make his way through the life he has come to know exists not within him; he believes that even if he does somehow manage to summon the energy, his world will not hold the weight of his woes without breaking. The texture of his environment has already “vibrated with such an alarming crackle,” a “crackle” symbolized by William, “upon whose face the look of stoical patience grew slowly deeper and deeper” (1606). Soon after the two men walk away from the view of the flowerbed, the snail, who continues to persist bravely in his trek across the shaky landscape, decides that the best way to pass the dead leaf is “to creep beneath it, for there was a point where the leaf curved high enough from the ground to admit him” (1606).

The snail begins to crawl under the leaf, but manages only to put his head under it before two other people pause on the side of the flowerbed; the two individuals, one male and one female, are “both in the prime of youth, the season before the smooth pink folds of the flower have burst their gummy case, when the wings of the butterfly, though fully grown, are motionless in the sun” (1606). Trissie and her young male companion embody the potential of Simon’s moments, the exhilaration of Eleanor’s first kiss, the passionate desires of the old man who talks to dead people and the flower, and the stoicism of William. While making their way through the garden and illustrating the curiosity and wisdom necessary to search for hidden crevices through which only snails and insane men voyage, their conversation seems quite similar to that of Simon and Eleanor. The dialogue between Trissie and her partner, though, actually accomplishes what the dialogue between the first couple does not; it establishes a palpable connection between two people and comes close to transgressing the boundaries that separate individuals from one another and from the environment within which they must coexist. During their conversation, the two discuss the value of a sixpence after the man with Trissie claims that he is glad it is not Friday, because on Fridays, it costs a sixpence to enter Kew Gardens. Trissie asks, “What’s a sixpence, anyway? Isn’t it worth sixpence?” Her companion responds with a question, asking, “What’s ‘it’—what do you mean by ‘it’?” Trissie answers with, “O, anything—I

mean—you know what I mean” (1606). As in the earlier conversation between Eleanor and Simon, Trissie and her partner speak in terse, quick language when responding to one another’s questions; unlike the earlier conversation between Eleanor and Simon, though, there are frequent pauses as Trissie and the young man speak. The word “it” causes both people to pause, and neither provides a definition; the closest the dialogue comes to explaining the meaning of “it” is “O, anything . . . you know what I mean.” The word, “it” may refer to the garden or nature or happiness or love or sincerity or a mystical combination that words cannot describe but souls can know, if souls dare.

The pauses in the dialogue, then, established with the repetitive use of dashes, suggest that deep contemplation presents itself in the conversation of the final couple strolling past the flowerbed. The narrator’s own commentary asserts that “long pauses came between each of these remarks; they were uttered in toneless and monotonous voices” (1606-07). The actual words mean very little in comparison to the pauses because thoughts intensify during the pauses and the words come out “toneless” and “monotonous”; the pauses in the discourse between Trissie and the young man revolutionize the moments between the question and the answer embraced by Simon, for an answer does not exist and the question necessitates an eternal pause that surrenders authority to the concealed. The pauses in the final conversation invite the inadequate speech of the narrative’s earlier conversations to find permanent rest amid the crevices of a dialogue greater than itself; the pauses show that “although Woolf is clearly the third person omniscient narrator who reveals as much (or as little) as she wishes . . . the individual characters, after their various exposures (together with the narrator) make up a collective theme voice, which is progressively expanded through the episodes” (Oakland 267). Revolution results from the pauses within the dialogue of a new generation coming into its own and walking through a garden that embodies the emotions of all who walked there before.

The narration does not retreat into internal monologue here; instead, a voice unheard before emerges, describing the implications of the pauses and the actions that take place during the pauses while the final young couple “[stands] still on the edge of the flower-bed, and together [presses] the end of her parasol deep down into the soft earth” (1607). As they position themselves next to the flowerbed, the young man places his hand on top of the hand of Trissie, completing an action that does not take place between Simon and Eleanor: physical contact. When the hands of Trissie and the young man touch one another and push the parasol into the earth, the text experiences an unknown representation of connection at its most powerful:

. . . the fact that his hand rested on top of hers expressed their feelings in a strange way, as these short insignificant words also expressed something, words

with short wings for their heavy body of meaning, inadequate to carry them far and thus alighting awkwardly upon the very common objects that surrounded them, and were to their inexperienced touch so massive; but who knows (so they thought as they pressed the parasol into the earth) what precipices aren't concealed in them, or what slopes of ice don't shine in the sun on the other side? Who knows? Who has ever seen this before? (1607)

No one in the text of "Kew Gardens," except the snail and maybe the man who talks to flowers and dead people, "has ever seen this before." Successful communication involves not language but the recognition of the notion that meanings might exist behind language; words have "short wings," and the "short wings" are "inadequate" to carry the "heavy [bodies] of meaning" that words contain. Trissie and her companion look at the world in ways quite similar to the snail's perception of the ground of the flowerbed. Just as the snail pauses to contemplate the crevices of the ground, Trissie and the young man pause to contemplate the precipices of language and words, as well as the precipices of their everyday physical environment. Trissie and her partner, as they look at "the very common objects" that comprise their surroundings and wonder "what precipices aren't concealed in them," honor the voyage of a contemplative snail making its way through no-longer-concealed precipices.

Like the others who pass the flowerbed, Trissie and the young man continue their walk through the garden after enjoying the brief pause. Trissie's companion interrupts their contemplation in the garden by saying, "Come along, Trissie; it's time we had our tea" (1607). The answer to the question Trissie asks in response, "Wherever does one have one's tea?" (1607), establishes an allusion to revolutionary acts that took place in Kew Gardens in 1913. Six years before the publication of "Kew Gardens," *The New York Times* printed two one-page articles; the first, "Suffragists Work Ruin in Kew Gardens: Greenhouses Smashed in and Plants Destroyed by the Militant Vote-Seekers," made front-page headlines on February 9, 1913. The brief editorial describes the havoc that took place between the hours of one o'clock in the morning and four o'clock in the morning on February 8, 1913 when a group of women began "a new phase of their campaign to give the parliamentary vote to women" (1). The second headline, "Suffragists Burn a Pavilion at Kew: Two Arrested and Held Without Bail—One Throws a Book at a Magistrate," printed about two weeks later on February 21, 1913, did not grace the front page of the *Times* but did tell of a group of British suffragettes "pursuing their course of violent attacks on property" since at three o'clock in the morning, on February 20, the women "burned the tea pavilion at Kew Gardens" (5). When Trissie asks where they will go to have tea, she has "the oddest thrill of excitement in her voice" (1607), because despite her desire to spend just a few more moments at the flowerbed, she and the young man are on their way to the tea pavilion.

The narrative offers one final and lasting image of Trissie, “looking vaguely around and letting herself be drawn down the grass path . . . forgetting her tea, wishing to go down there and then down there, remembering orchids and cranes among wildflowers, a Chinese Pagoda and a crimson crested bird; but he bore her on” (1607). That she does not want to go just yet and he forces her signifies the stubborn persistence of hegemonic forces that condition women to submit to the desires of their male counterparts and condition men to feel comfortable in positions of authority and control. Trissie’s male counterpart, however, interrupts their pause by the flowerbed after feeling as though the two-piece shilling in his pocket is “real to everyone except to him and to her; even to him it began to seem real; and then—but it was too exciting to stand and think any longer, and he pulled the parasol out of the earth with a jerk and was impatient to find the place where one had tea with other people, like other people” (1607). Neither Trissie nor her nameless companion seems “like other people,” since their perceptions and the connections they make to one another and to their environment, when compared to the others who walked by the flowerbed before them, show that they both struggle to navigate a social world with cliffs and crevices comparable to the snail’s perception of the floor of the flowerbed.

Even though the young man with Trissie takes charge, the two move in an evolutionary direction; they both know, as a result of their experience with one another and the parasol and the soft earth by the flowerbed, that precipices exist where many eyes never dare to look and that a “grass path” can be found below the flowerbed, a path that greets both Trissie and her companion. Trissie and her companion do not walk down the path; the tea pavilion to which they make their way, though, symbolizes the possibility of at least partial success since the suffragettes who destroyed the pavilion had reasons to rejoice in 1918, just one year before the first publication of “Kew Gardens,” when the fourth Reform Bill passed, allowing woman over the age of thirty to vote.

A collective consciousness renders metaphorical images of “[y]ellow and black, pink and snow white, shapes of all these colours, men, women, and children . . . dissolving like drops of water in the yellow and green atmosphere, staining it faintly with red and blue” (1607). Recalling the faint ray of light that threatens the walls of the raindrop in the opening lines of “Kew Gardens,” the closing lines of the narrative honor the mysterious strength of the ray, a strength it acquired throughout the course of the story. The walls of the raindrop that refused to burst in the beginning forced the light to focus its energy elsewhere, on the psychological stances of Simon, Eleanor, William, the elderly man, Trissie, her young male friend, and others in the garden. The beam gains intensity with each passing focal point until it can finally do for the people in Kew Gardens what it cannot do for the raindrop: dissolve boundaries that resist dissolution. The walls that keep people from one another, from themselves, and from the natural world have no

choice but to surrender to the enigmatic glories of “wordless voices” that break the “silence suddenly with such depth of contentment, such passion of desire, or, in the voices of children, such freshness of surprise” (1607-08).

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Comics, the Hypercommodity, and the Particularity of Global Resistance

Eric Hess

In the Editor's Column of October 2004's *PMLA*, Marianne Hirsch asks: "What kind of visual-verbal legacy can respond to the needs of the present moment?" (1212). In attempting to answer this question, Hirsch discusses the nature of the visual sign and the mainstream, corporate media's tendency to limit its potential for meaning: "Media representations function like euphemisms to obstruct seeing, saying, and understanding. . . . [They] shield from the 'excessive expressivity' of the visual to the point where, through the self-blinding of 'percepticide,' we can live with ourselves as we look without seeing, see without doing, understand without saying or writing" (1214). Hirsch then reads this tendency against Art Spiegelman's graphic text *In the Shadow of No Towers*, wherein he reflects on his experiences of 9/11 and its aftermath. Hirsch asserts that in *In The Shadow of No Towers* "Spiegelman mobilizes comics and the act of seeing and reading they demand in an attempt to see beyond the given-to-be-seen and to say what cannot otherwise be said" (1215).

Hirsch's argument is specific: Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* challenges the way in which the capitalist media controls our understanding and response to depictions of violence in our world. As her question implies, however, there are more general concerns that her essay begins to answer. More broadly, Hirsch considers the effects of global capitalism on the individual, the first represented specifically in her essay by the mainstream, corporate media and the second represented specifically in her essay by one's understanding of violence and trauma. This more general reading becomes more apparent if we move from reading Spiegelman's comics individually to looking at comics generally. The final five comics read in fellow panel-member Pauline Uchmanowicz's graduate seminar in the Graphic Novel—Daniel Clowes's *Ghost World*, Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*, Rick Veitch's *Can't Get No*, Jessica Abel's *La Perdida*, and Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese*—all supplement Hirsch's specific argument while also supporting her attempt to contend with the world at its present moment.

Significantly, these five comics all draw the same generic story: in each, we are presented with a protagonist who embarks on a quest for identity in the face of the alienation engendered by global capitalism. This is not to say that each story is not unique. A paradox of global capitalism is that while it alienates every individual, all alienation is individuated. The five aforementioned graphic novels bear this out; while they may all be read generically as telling the same archetypal sto-

ry, each one draws a specific, personal tale wherein alienation, produced in each text by different aspects of capitalist hegemony, is experienced and understood in different ways (Hardt and Negri).¹ Whether it be for an adolescent woman in suburbia (Enid in *Ghost World*), a thirty-something man in metropolitan Chicago (Jimmy Corrigan in the eponymously titled text), a cosmopolitan, corporate junkie (Chad Roe in *Can't Get No*), a young Mexican-American woman caught between the Windy City and Mexico City (Carla Olivares in *La Perdida*), or a boy American born Chinese (Jin Wang in, surprise, *American Born Chinese*), the forces of global capitalism are equally alienating. At the same time, the alienation experienced by all of these characters is amplified because it occurs through channels and mechanisms specific to their person.

As Hirsch hints at in her handling of Spiegelman's text, comics may be particularly adept at simultaneously expressing the specific and universal natures of an individual's alienation in the postmodern capitalist system. Perhaps the most prominent (as well as the most accessible) "voice" articulating a theory of comics is Scott McCloud, who in his graphic essay *Understanding Comics* explains the notion of iconic abstraction and how we as readers interact with the words and images we are presented. In discussing the appeal of cartoons for children (as well as others), McCloud writes: "The cartoon is a *vacuum* into which our *identity* and *awareness* are *pulled* . . . an *empty shell* that we inhabit which *enables* us to travel in *another realm*. We don't just *observe* the cartoon, we *become* it!" (36).² Though employing a different approach, Hirsch also attempts to articulate this idea, pointing to other articles in the October 2004 edition of the *PMLA* and writing: "the contributors . . . affirm the extraordinary power and what [Tobin] Siebers terms the 'excessive expressivity' of visual images" (1211).

Significantly, Hirsch writes that "Mieke Bal, Mary Ann Caws, and Siebers highlight *the detail* as the site where we enter and, indeed, 'read' images. Attention to the visual detail singles out the untranslatable power of visuality and its alternative, nonverbal, structures of meaning" (1211). She continues, pointing to "Roland Barthes's notion of the 'punctum' in his *Camera Lucida* . . . [which] allows us to imagine the 'excessive expressivity of images' as a form of wounding. Barthes describes his relationship to photographs, in particular, as an opening to the piercing quality of details that shock and disturb, grab puncture and wound" (1211). Hirsch speculates that "[i]f . . . seeing is a form of wounding and being wounded, a 'shot of the eye,' then to see, to be a spectator, is to respond through body and affect, as well as through the intellect" (1211). This passage is important and insightful as it highlights two important aspects of the epistemology of comics: the detail and the body. Understanding the first aspect—the detail—and its relation to the second—the body—allows us to begin to understand the way in which comics may "respond to the needs of the present moment," as both a literary evolution and an agent in engendering a revolutionary consciousness with

which to critique and challenge capitalist hegemony.

While each of the five texts employs its own set of varied techniques and themes to convey its protagonist's alienation, all commonly depict the same, abstract visual detail: the *hypercommodity*.³ Enid's "Goofie Gus" doll in *Ghost World*, the "Number #1 *DAD*" sweatshirt in *Jimmy Corrigan*, the Eter-No-Mark marker in *Can't Get No*, the *calaca*-marionette in *La Perdida*, and the Transformers ("robots in disguise") in *American Born Chinese* are all hypercommodities that represent, in a complex way, the relationship between Empire, alienation, and identity. While each object functions in a unique and specific way with their respective hero, all can be considered as being construed in a similar manner. Over the course of each comic, each hypercommodity functions simultaneously as a metonym for global capitalism, a symbol of alienation, and a way to begin to understand and/or reclaim one's identity.

While each text positions these hypercommodities in a matrix of identity, alienation, and Empire through unique means respective of their individual artistic vernaculars, all the texts first call specific attention to the object. Because of the time limits of our panel today, I will focus primarily on one text, Daniel Clowes's *Ghost World*, as its treatment of protagonist Enid's relationship with the hypercommodity that is the "Goofie Gus" doll illustrates the relationship between comics, the reader, and the "present moment." Clowes draws attention to the visual detail of the hypercommodity at the outset of the narrative, with "Goofie Gus" appearing just right-of-center in a drawing of Enid's bookshelf. This is a privileged position assuring that readers will take notice as they move cinematically across the series of expository frontispieces.

Attention to the visual detail is drawn again on the first page of the second chapter,⁴ as we are presented with the repeated image of "Goofie Gus." The image is repeated in each of the first three panels of the page, as a handsome man with a "trendy haircut" attempts to buy the doll from Enid at the yard sale she is holding (15). Though Enid marked the doll for sale at five dollars, she tells the man that she "changed [her] mind" and that she does not want to sell it (15). We learn from Enid's friend Rebecca that the doll, whose name we come to find out in the next panel is "Goofie Gus," was given to Enid by "David Lipton . . . in fifth grade." As Enid tells Rebecca, who can't believe Enid would sell "Goofie Gus," "I don't want him to buy any of my sacred artifacts . . . I can't **BEAR** the thought of some jerk with a trendy haircut buying 'Goofie Gus'!" (15). This page lays the foundation for us to be able to understand what happens over the course of the rest of the chapter, marking the visual detail as important not only through repetition of the image, but also in the construction of the narrative.

Over the next five pages, we follow Enid as she abandons the yard sale, only to return later. She first relates to Rebecca the story of "Bob Skeetes," whom Enid describes as "like [a] grisly, old **con man** . . . like Don Knotts with a homeless tan

..” and who tells Enid that he is “a ‘well-known astrologer’ and that [she] should call him for a free reading!” (16). The two then ditch the yard sale, leaving everything out, and head for the diner, where they encounter Melorra, a former high school classmate, who informs them that she appeared in a commercial; though the commercial was regrettably for Hampton Hayes, “a **Right Wing** political candidate,” Melorra tells Enid and Rebecca that it’s at least “good exposure” (17). Enid and Rebecca then head to the supermarket, where they contemplate the visual composition of cookie-packaging (18) before heading to Rebecca’s grandmother’s house (19), where they see Melorra’s commercial on television (20). When Rebecca asks Enid how much money Enid made at the yard sale, Enid is shown running home, where the chapter concludes with two repetitions of “Goofie Gus,” the final panel of the chapter depicting Enid hugging “Goofie Gus” and exclaiming “Thank God!” (20).

The sequence of events on these five pages depicts the way in which Enid is alienated by the forces of global capitalism. As a woman, and particularly as an adolescent woman, her body is objectified and, as such, taken from her; she is alienated from it. The initial encounter with Bob Skeetes reveals how this can happen person-to-person, as the “astrologer” Skeetes reduces Enid to little more than an “exact birthdate” and an animal, “the goat” (16).⁵ In the supermarket Enid picks out a box of “Mallow Tweens” cookies, telling Rebecca, “Will you look at this—It’s totally **Porno-Graphic!** Who do they think they’re **kidding!**?” In the next panel she asks, “Are they really so **desperate** to sell cookies that they have to show a **big dick** going into a **cunt** on the package!?” (18). Clowes letters certain words in a bolder font, forming a matrix of adolescent sexuality (“kidding,” “desperate,” “big dick,” and “cunt”) that reinforces the sexual exploitation of the capitalist market.⁶ These two panels not only connect the exploitation of adolescent sexuality with the global capitalist economy, but also demonstrate Enid’s increasing sense of alienation as she is confronted with her position in Empire as a young woman.

Enid’s alienation is further reinforced when she and Rebecca see Melorra in the Hampton Hayes commercial. Clowes establishes the television as a transmitter of the hyper-sexuality of the hypermarket in the panel preceding Melorra’s commercial. The lightning-bolt/electricity leads to a series of word bubbles (indicating that the narration is coming from a television) that present standard sitcom drivel: “you must have given him the wrong idea!” “I told him to **Pump Me** ’til I couldn’t take it anymore” “What?” “You **Guys!** My **Car** was out of **Gas!**” “**Ha Ha Ha Ha**” (19). Again, the boldface creates a matrix of sexuality and consumerism, wherein men possess what women need (“I was out of gas”) and women’s communicative “shortcomings” are to blame for rape (“you must have given him the wrong idea”). The show breaks to the commercial for Hampton Hayes, who we learn is a “good man” (20). The television presents the image of Melorra’s face,

which tells us: “This is my first time and I’m going to make it **count!**” (20). Not only has the body of Melorra, an adolescent woman, been expropriated and employed through a mechanism of Empire to support a politician who will enact legislation that will further alienate her from her body, but she is made to sell the candidacy of Hampton Hayes with her adolescent sexuality, not-so-subtly suggesting her willingness to lose her (electoral) virginity to Hampton Hayes (“my first time,” “make it”).

When confronted with this seemingly non-stop, alienating assault, it is not difficult to understand why Enid runs home and is relieved to find “Goofie Gus.” The doll is an (unconscious) embodiment of a time when Enid did not have to (consciously) contend with the patriarchal mechanisms of Empire and the alienation they engender. This, in turn, allows us to understand why Enid does not want to sell “Goofie Gus” to some jerk (i.e., guy) with a “trendy haircut” (an indicator of his heightened participation and privileged position in the hypermarket). At the same time, it also allows us to understand why Enid considered selling the object in the first place; it is a reminder of her object-status within the patriarchal economy, a mirror that simultaneously confirms what she is and what she cannot be. “Goofie Gus,” then, is a hypercommodity that simultaneously constructs Enid’s identity and alienates her as it functions within the global capitalist market.

Enid’s physical embrace of “Goofie Gus” not only heightens the attention paid to the visual detail, but also connects the visual detail (here, the hypercommodity) to the body, underscoring Hirsch’s reading of Barthes. In this way, this section of *Ghost World* can be read as illustrating almost metaphorically the effect that comics can have on “the body and affect.” Like “Goofie Gus,” comics are often (and until recently) regarded as juvenile and devoid of meaning—the kind of thing to sell at a yard sale.⁷ Also like “Goofie Gus,” comics are a hypercommodity produced in the postmodern capitalist market that simultaneously can alienate the reader as well as allow the reader to (re)formulate her or his identity. Most important is the way in which comics allow the reader to formulate identity and consciousness: by drawing attention to the visual detail, comics encourage a visceral reading that generates meaning and understanding in the body as well as in the intellect.

As David Harvey argues in *Spaces of Hope*, discourse since the 1970s has focused on “globalization” and “the body” (12). He believes that “[t]hese two discursive regimes . . . operate at opposite ends of the spectrum in the scalar we might use to understand social and political life,” but that “little or no systematic attempt has been made to integrate ‘body talk’ with ‘globalization talk’” (15). Over the course of *Spaces of Hope*, Harvey argues that to confront Empire, we must (re)connect these two poles. In addition to providing a “why,” Harvey attempts to provide a “how,” and points to others’ conceptions of “translation.” He quotes

James Boyd White, who writes:

[Translation] means confronting unbridgeable discontinuities between texts, between languages, and between people. As such it has an ethical as well as an intellectual dimension. It recognizes the other—the composer of the original text—as a center of meaning apart from oneself. It requires one to discover both the value of the other’s language and the limits of one’s own. Good translation thus proceeds not by the motives of dominance and acquisition, but by respect. It is a word for a set of practices by which we learn to live with difference, with the fluidity of culture and with the instability of the self. (qtd. in Harvey 244)

Because of the “excessive expressivity” of the visual sign, comics function in a manner that is “and/also” rather than “either/or.”

Addressing the reader in his *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud draws

[a]part from what little I told you about myself in *chapter one*, I’m practically a *blank slate!* It would never even *occur* to you to wonder what my *politics* are, or what I had for *lunch* or where I got this *silly outfit!* I’m just a little voice inside your *head*. A *concept*. You give me life by reading this book and by “*filling up*” this very *iconic* (cartoony) *form*. (37)

Comics respect the authority of both the author and the reader. Comics respect the particularities of time and place, while allowing that time and place to be situated in a universal context. Comics make connections without making exclusions: they translate. And in this way, comics can present an artistic corollary to the articulation of the challenge to neoliberal hegemony and the ghost world it continues to create: a global movement of one “No” with many “Yeses.”

Notes

¹ In *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri write: “Along with the global market and global circuits of production has emerged a global order, a new logic and structure of rule—in short, a new form of sovereignty. Empire is the political subject that effectively regulates these global exchanges, the sovereign power that governs the world” (xi).

² I italicized lettering that appeared italicized and in boldface. The ellipsis is a condensation of a pair that McCloud uses as he moves a continuous “verbal” text from one panel to a next. I point this out just to highlight some of the difficulties in writing about a graphic text and to solicit responses as to already-established conventions.

³ In discussing the hypermarket in *Simulacra and Simulation*, Jean Baudrillard circumscribes a definition of hypercommodity when he writes: “At the deepest level, another kind of work is at issue here . . . people go there to find and to select objects—responses to all the questions they may ask themselves; or, rather, they *themselves*

come *in response* to the functional and directed question that the objects constitute. The objects are no longer commodities: they are no longer even signs whose meaning and message one could decipher and appropriate for oneself, they are *tests*, they are ones that interrogate us, and we are summoned to answer them, and the answer is included in the question” (75).

⁴ *Ghost World* was originally published as a series of shorts, which were compiled into the graphic novel we are considering, hence “chapters.”

⁵ For more on the objectification of woman and its relationship to animals and consumption, see Carol Adams’s *The Sexual Politics of Meat: a Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* and *The Pornography of Meat*.

⁶ “Twens” not only plays upon the idea of “in between,” as in where the virginal, soft, sticky-sweet marshmallow of the cookie (itself a contemporary slang term for vagina) will be found and vaginally suggestive (“between her legs”), but also on the marketing/demographic term, referring to child between the ages of 8 and 12, thus reinforcing the adolescent nature of the sexuality being sold.

⁷ Which makes Enid’s refusal to sell “Goofie Gus” to the jerk with the trendy haircut even more interesting; could Clowes be commenting on the move of comics into mainstream critical acceptance?

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VI | Book Review

David Bevington.

This Wide and Universal Theater: Shakespeare in Performance, Then and Now.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

Thomas G. Olsen

This wide and universal world does not contain many Shakespearians with the editorial, critical, and personal experience that would permit them to pull off a book of this kind. David Bevington, who first started writing on Shakespeare and early modern drama in the early sixties, and who has published dozens of monographs, editions, articles, reviews, and scholarly notes, is someone who can.

This Wide and Universal Theater: Shakespeare in Performance, Then and Now announces its three-fold purpose as, first, to describe the Shakespearean stage in all its physical and human aspects; second, to demonstrate how an understanding of the early modern theater can help modern readers and viewers better appreciate the dramatic situations and language that Shakespeare puts before an audience; and third, to juxtapose these to modern renderings of the plays in theaters, on television, and as films (1-2). But the book is also vitally concerned with “performance” at a conceptual level as well. In a total of eight chapters and a short coda, Bevington surveys the performance history of most of the Shakespeare canon, demonstrating to readers how many of the characters familiar to audiences over the centuries—Hamlet, Richard II, Richard III, Iago, and Cleopatra being some of the most obvious—are highly self-conscious *actors* as well as merely characters. But he is also persuasive when discussing less obvious figures who negotiate their roles, whether assumed or imposed, with great theatrical self-awareness.

One of the most consistent (and often quite amusing) themes in *This Wide and Universal Theater* is the contrast between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century productions, with their realistic and often extraordinarily lavish staging conventions, and more modern productions, which since about the turn of the twentieth century have typically paid homage to the production styles of the early modern stage. As Bevington takes pains to remind us at many points, Shakespeare wrote for a “presentational” stage where language and gesture reigned, and not for a space well equipped for attempts at realism. His was a theater of illusion: essentially a spare platform in which the willful suspension of disbelief on the

part of the audience made the magic happen. We see this principle, perhaps most famously, in the opening of *Henry V*, in which the Chorus invites us to “piece out” the play’s limitations by means of our active imaginations. But Bevington also demonstrates that meta-theatricality is deep in the texture of plays as different from each other as *Twelfth Night* and *Henry VIII*.

By contrast, the staging conventions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were overwhelmingly realistic: productions from the Restoration through the beginning of the twentieth century were typically the work of directors and set designers bent on presenting Shakespeare’s *oeuvre* with maximum verisimilitude and/or lavishness. We learn, for example, of painstakingly literalist productions featuring cascades of running water and live rabbits on stage, or of Italian gardens complete with live grass, pathways, and working fountains. Sometimes realism was not the object, but rather a kind of sensory overload that we might typically associate with Wagnerian operatic conventions: how about a production of *Macbeth* featuring not one, not two, not the conventional three witches, but fifty of them! Or a production of *As You Like It* that featured ivy vines on the walls and ankle-deep piles of leaves on stage—that show remained wildly popular among discerning English audiences for most of a decade.

It is obvious that Bevington’s aesthetic sympathies lie with early twentieth-century pioneers like William Poel and great postwar innovators such as Peter Brook, whose spare, pared-down productions paid homage to the lively, energetic early modern stage in various ways. Sometimes they achieved their goals simply by cutting out the scene changes necessitated by hyper-realistic sets and opting instead for continuous action and simple set designs that left audiences to imagine rather than to see stories come alive. Sometimes they did so by going high concept, as in Brook’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1970), a production set inside a large white box, complete with trapeze artists and circus performers—a thoroughly self-referential performance, and one with nary a cute Victorian fairy in sight (50-51).

An underlying theme in this shift from realistic and/or lavish stagecraft to a leaner, sparer, more suggestive Elizabethan-Jacobean mode relates directly to the new technology of cinema. As the new form emerged (and Shakespeare first appeared on the silver screen in the last years of the nineteenth century!), thoughtful stage directors increasingly turned away from the highly representational, realistic modes that reached their apogee in nineteenth-century theatrical practices. In a sense, theater moved backwards, to the presentational conventions of an age that had as its theatrical technology merely costumes, hand props, a few stage props, and a very basic platform open to the sky—these always mixed with generous doses of stirring language and human imagination.

As successful as the book is in its way, however, it is not without at least three notable shortcomings. Alas, *This Wide and Universal Theater* is a project

more or less doomed at its very inception to a certain kind of superficiality that can irritate as often as instruct. It is simply not possible to give due credit to various important stage productions when the descriptions of some of them are only a few sentences long. In one notable instance, Bevington dispenses with *seven* productions of *Cymbeline* in a paragraph of just sixteen lines. It seems obvious in moments like these—and there are others—that he is racing, but against what? Obviously, a book of fewer than 250 pages, index and all, cannot give every production its full shrift, but then a sympathetic reader (and I am one, I think) ought to be permitted to ask, *so why write the book at all?* In moments of brilliance, when the book seems to deliver all that it needs to, the question seems ungenerous, even absurd. At others, it seems like the only legitimate one to ponder. Second, another rather basic problem crops up frequently across the whole undertaking: for whom is this book written? At times the author seems to employ the kind of professional shorthand that Shakespeareans not infrequently use to communicate, one specialist to another; at others, he doggedly summarizes the most basic plot details of the plays, apparently anxious that neophyte readers may not know the stories whose production challenges and stage history he describes. I am disappointed that he spends so much space in a relatively short book simply retelling what happens in *Cymbeline*, *Measure for Measure*, and even *King Lear*. One is right to ask, I think, what the real aims and purposes of the book are. Finally, though Bevington's long experience earns him considerable credibility in making aesthetic and critical judgments, some pronouncements in this book are baffling. I am not sure why, for example, social commentary and *joie de vivre* have to be opposite aims of the theatrical enterprise (59-60), nor what is "post-modern" about the Kat-Patrick love story of *Ten Things I Hate About You*, which most viewers find, I think, a pretty traditional teen film based directly upon *The Taming of the Shrew* (43).

I could offer other equally legitimate objections, but would prefer to close on a more encouraging note. Bevington's book opens with two overview chapters that have to rank among the very best short introductions to Shakespearean theatrical and performance history: in just under forty pages, he manages to acquaint even a complete novice with the principal considerations and questions for a study of Shakespeare's plays as theatrical history *and* as living texts. And he does so in a breezy, pleasant way—with polished writing that can hardly fail to get a student or general reader hooked. And there are similarly impressive moments in many other places, too. Bevington knows an enormous amount about the staging and production of Shakespeare's plays, and his erudition and experience emerge repeatedly, delivered in a casual, approachable prose style that, I think, the Bard himself would approve of.

Final verdict: there are some core problems related to what this book is trying to accomplish in such a small space, and there are some problems with fixing

on a consistent kind of reader and his or her needs. But in the end, one could do a good deal worse than choose *This Wide and Universal Stage* as a basic introduction to the performance problems and performance history of the English language's most inventive playwright. If it's a flawed project in some ways, it's also a very smart and well expressed one in many others.

VIII | News and Notes

In this column we feature news from current and recent graduate students: honors, achievements, publications, conference papers, progress in PhD programs, and other news.

1. Five of our MA students will enter doctoral programs next year: William Boyle (2006) at Case Western University; Celeste Capaldi (2006) at Dusquesne University; Katherine Hurd (2005) at the University of Louisiana, Lafayette; Jennifer Lee (2007) at the University of Rhode Island; and Brad McDuffie (2005) at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.
2. Fifteen of our MA students continue their progress in PhD programs: Eileen Abrahams (2002) at the University of Texas, Austin; Michael Beilfuss (2005) at Texas A&M University; Danielle Bienvenue Bray (2004) at the University of Louisiana, Lafayette; Nicole Camastra (2005) at the University of Georgia; D. A. Carpenter (2005) at Texas A&M University; Kevin Cavanaugh (2002), at the University of Albany (Curriculum and Instruction Program); Steven Florczyk (2002) at the University of Georgia; Timothy Gilmore (2004) at the University of California, Santa Barbara; Tina Iraca (2001) at the University of Connecticut; John Langan (1998) at the City University of New York; Nicole Myers (2007) at the University of Rhode Island; Matthew Nickel (2006) at the University of Louisiana, Lafayette; Sharon Peelor (1997) at the University of Oklahoma (Education Studies); James Stamant (2005) at Texas A&M University; Amy Washburn (2005) at the University of Maryland (Women's Studies).
3. In the past year five of our MA students accepted full-time academic appointments:

Cristy Woehling Beemer (2002) will receive her doctorate from Miami University of Ohio this spring and has accepted a position as Assistant Professor in Composition and Rhetoric at the University of New

Hampshire for fall 2008.

Lynne Crockett (1996), who received her doctorate from New York University (2004), joined the faculty of Sullivan County Community College as an Associate Professor of English.

Deborah DiPiero (2001) received her doctorate from the University of Rhode Island last May and is now an Assistant Professor of English and Director of Writing at St. Andrews Presbyterian College in Laurinburg, North Carolina.

Nicole Boucher Spottke (1996) was promoted to Assistant Professor of English at Valencia Community College in Orlando, Florida.

Meri Weiss (2006) accepted a teaching/advising/administrative position in July as an Assistant Professor at the College of New Rochelle, John Cardinal O'Connor Campus.

4. Over the past year New Paltz MAs continued their extraordinary record of professional activities and accomplishments. Information for conferences and books frequently mentioned in the entries below is as follows: American Literature Association Conference in Boston, May 2007 (ALA); the 10th Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Conference at Saint Catharine College, Bardstown, KY, April 2008 (EMR); South Atlantic Modern Language Association Conference in Atlanta, November 2007 (SAMLA); *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Essays of Discovery and Recovery*, Quincy & Harrod Press, 2008 (EMREDR); *Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Essays of Reassessment & Reclamation*, Wind Publications, 2008 (EMRERR); *Locations and Dislocations: The Proceedings of the Fourth Richard Aldington Conference*, Gregau Press, 2008 (LD).

Michael Beilfuss (2005), a doctoral student at Texas A&M University, presented papers at the SAMLA and EMR and published an essay in *EMRERR*.

William Boyle (2006), an Adjunct Instructor of English at SUNY Maritime, presented papers at the Imagism Conference in Dorf Tirol, Italy (July 2007), SAMLA, EMR, and Noircon in Philadelphia (April 2008); he published essays in *EMERDR*, *EMRERR*, and *LD*.

Danielle Bienvenue Bray (2004), a doctoral student at the University of Louisiana, Lafayette, presented a paper at the 39th American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies Annual Meeting in Portland, OR (March 2008).

- Nicole Camastra (2005), a doctoral student at the University of Georgia, presented papers at SAMLA and EMR; she published essays in *EMREDR*, *EMRERR*, and *LD*, and co-edited *EMREDR*.
- D. A. Carpenter (2005), a doctoral student at Texas A&M University, presented a paper at EMR and published essays in *EMREDR*, *EMRERR*, and *LD*.
- Laurence Erussard (1992), an Assistant Professor of English at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, presented papers at the International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, MI (May 2007) and the Binghamton Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (March 2008).
- Steven Florczyk (2002), a doctoral student at the University of Georgia, presented a paper at EMR and published essays in *EMREDR*, *EMRERR*, and *LD*; he co-edited *EMREDR* and *EMRERR*.
- Penny Freel (1995), an Instructor at SUNY New Paltz, published a co-authored essay in *Journal of Basic Writing*.
- Tina Iraca (2001), an Adjunct Instructor of English at SUNY, New Paltz, presented a paper at EMR and published essays in *EMREDR* and *EMRERR*.
- Brad McDuffie (2005), an Instructor of English at Nyack College, presented papers at ALA, the 22nd Ezra Pound International Conference in Venice, Italy (June 2007), SAMLA, and EMR; he published essays in *EMREDR*, *EMRERR*, and *LD*.
- Michele Morano (1991), an Assistant Professor of English at DePaul University, presented papers at the NonfictioNow Conference, University of Iowa (November 2007) and the MLA Conference in Chicago (December 2007). She published an essay in the spring/summer issue of *Sonora Review* and the essay "Travel Trauma" aired on Chicago Public Radio. Her book, *Grammar Lessons*, was selected by the New York Public Library as one of the 25 "Books to Remember" from 2007.
- Matthew Nickel (2006), a doctoral student at the University of Louisiana, Lafayette, presented papers at ALA, the 22nd Ezra Pound International Conference in Venice, Italy (June 2007), SAMLA, and EMR; he published essays in *EMREDR*, *EMRERR*, and *LD*.
- Sharon Peelor (1997), a doctoral student at the University of Oklahoma,

presented a paper at EMR.

Rachel Rigolino (1993), an Instructor in English at SUNY New Paltz, published a co-authored essay in the *Journal of Basic Writing*.

Arnold A. Schmidt (1990), a Professor at California State University, Stanislaus, presented a paper at the International Byron Conference in Venice, Italy (July 2007). He published an article in the collection *Beyond the Roots: The Evolution of Conrad's Ideology and Art* and a number of book reviews in *Italian Quarterly* and *Annali d'Italianistica*.

Nicole Boucher Spottke (1996), an Assistant Professor at Valencia Community College, published a co-authored essay in *EMREDR*.

James Stamant (2005), a doctoral student at Texas A&M University, presented papers at ALA and EMR; he published essays in *EMREDR*, *EMRERR*, and *LD*.

Nicole Valentino (2004), Assistant Professor of English at Valencia Community College, published a co-authored article in *EMREDR*.

Goretti Vianney-Benca (2007) presented a paper at EMR and published an essay in *EMRERR*.

Amy Leigh Washburn (2005), a doctoral student in Women's Studies at the University of Maryland, presented a paper at the DC Queer Studies Symposium, College Park, Maryland (April 2008).

Meri Weiss (2006), an Assistant Professor at the College of new Rochelle, John Cardinal O'Connor Campus, sold her debut novel, *Closer to Fine*, to Kensington Books.

IX Guidelines for Submissions

As the journal of the English Graduate Program, the *Shawangunk Review* publishes the proceedings of the annual English Graduate Symposium. In addition, the Editors welcome submissions from English graduate students in any area of literary studies: essays (criticism; theory; historical, cultural, biographical studies), book reviews, scholarly notes, and poetry. English faculty are invited to submit poetry, translations of poetry, and book reviews.

Manuscripts should be prepared in accordance with MLA style and should be submitted as an electronic file accompanied by a hard copy. Essays should not exceed 3500 words (10-12 pages), stories 3000 words, book reviews 1250 words, poems five pages, and MA thesis abstracts 250 words. With your submission please include a brief biographical statement.

Please submit material to the Department of English, SUNY New Paltz and/or kempton@newpaltz.edu; the deadline for Volume XIX of the *Review* is December 15, 2008.

X Contributors

Laurie Alfonso is an English Teacher at Briarcliff High School in Westchester County. She holds an MS in Secondary Education from the College of Saint Rose and an MA in English from Middlebury College, having finished her MA at Lincoln College, Oxford. In the summer of 2006 she participated in a 4-week NEH seminar on Petrarch in Avignon and in the summer of 2007 studied Shakespeare in Florence and Rome. She took graduate courses at SUNY New Paltz while pursuing admission to CUNY's PhD program.

David Applebaum is a Professor of Philosophy at SUNY New Paltz. He is an inveterate hiker of the Gunks and author of *Nieuw Pfalz* (Books 1 and 2).

William Boyle is an Adjunct Instructor of English at SUNY Maritime. He has published stories, essays, and poems in *Plots With Guns*, *Countries of the Heart*, and other magazines and journals, and he has recently completed his second novel, *Rough North*. He presented a paper on Georges Simenon at Noircon in Philadelphia in April 2008.

Laurence Carr is an Instructor of Creative and Dramatic Writing at SUNY New Paltz, where he heads the SUNY Playwrights' Project. He is the author of over 30 plays, which have been produced in New York City, regionally throughout the U.S. and in Europe. He has published *The Wytheport Tales*, a book of microfiction, and is the editor of *Riverine: An Anthology of Hudson Valley Writers*.

Marissa Caston earned her MA in English from SUNY New Paltz (2007) and served as a Teaching Assistant.

Joann K. Dejudicibus is an Instructor in Composition and staff assistant for the Composition Program at SUNY New Paltz, where she earned her MA in English (2003). She has read her poetry locally since 1995, and her poetry has been published in *The North Street Journal*, *Orange Review*, *Literary Passions*, *Fortunate Fall*, *Chronogram*, and the *Shawangunk Review*. Her work was selected by The Woodstock Poetry Festival in 2003.

Mary de Rachewiltz is a distinguished poet, scholar, and translator—author of numerous volumes of poetry in Italian as well as several works in English (e.g., *Whose World: Selected Poems*). Along with her award-winning translations of her father's poems (Ezra Pound's *The Cantos*) she has done Italian translations of e. e. cummings, Robinson Jeffers, Marianne Moore, H. D., et al. Her book *Ezra*

Pound, Father and Teacher: Discretions stands as one of the most distinguished literary memoirs of the twentieth century. She has lectured widely in Europe, North America, and Japan, and for over twenty years she served as curator of the Ezra Pound Archives at the Beinecke Library (Yale University). She continues to lecture in the summer programs of the Ezra Pound Center for Literature, conducted annually at her home, Brunnenburg Castle, in northern Italy.

Dennis Doherty is an Instructor in English and the Director of Creative Writing at SUNY New Paltz. He has published essays, stories, and poems. His first book of poems, *The Bad Man*, was published in 2004 and his second collection, *Fugitive*, appeared in 2007.

Amy Feldman is a student in the MAT program at SUNY New Paltz and is especially interested in twentieth-century fiction and poetry. After graduating, she will pursue a teaching career at a public middle or high school.

Howie Good is a journalism professor at SUNY New Paltz and the author of three poetry chapbooks: *Death of the Frog Prince* (2004), *Heartland* (2007), and *Strangers & Angels* (2007). He was recently nominated for the second time for a Pushcart Prize.

Landan Gross earned his MA in English from SUNY New Paltz (2007), where he is currently an adjunct instructor. He presented papers at the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society Conference in 2006 and 2007 and at the NYCEA 2007 Spring Conference held at New Paltz.

Peter S. Hawkins is Director of the Luce Program in Scripture and the Literary Arts and Professor of Religion at Boston University. Before coming to Boston University in 2000, Professor Hawkins was Professor of Religion and Literature at Yale Divinity School for twenty-four years. Among his many achievements, Hawkins is the author of *The Language of Grace: Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, and Iris Murdoch* (1983), *Getting Nowhere: Christian Hope and Utopian Dream* (1985), *Civitas: Religious Interpretations of the City* (1986), and *Dante's Testaments: Essays in Scriptural Imagination* (1999), winner of an American Academy of Religion Book Prize in 2001. Hawkins also co-edited the four-volume series *Listening for God: Contemporary Literature and the Life of Faith* (1994-2003) and *The Poet's Dante: Essays by Twentieth-Century Poets* (2002). Most recently, he has published *Dante: A Brief History* (2006) and co-edited two collections of essays on biblical literature: *Scrolls of Love: Ruth and the Song of Songs* (2006) and *Medieval Readings of Romans* (2007). In 2006 Boston University awarded Professor Hawkins the prestigious Metcalf Award for Excellence in Teaching.

Eric Hess is an English MA student and Teaching Assistant at SUNY New Paltz; he intends to pursue a PhD in English.

Andrew C. Higgins is an Assistant professor of English at SUNY New Paltz. His focus is on poetry, especially the work of Henry Wadsworth Longfel-

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