

SIGNATURES

VOLUME TWO

SIGNATURES

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SIGNATURES

Black Luce and the ‘curtizans’ of Shakespeare’s London

Duncan Salkeld (University College, Chichester)

When in 1592, the scabrous playwright and pamphleteer, Robert Greene referred to ‘our English curtizans, to bee plaine our English whores’, he poured scorn on the idea that England might harbour prostitutes of wealth, accomplishment and influence similar to the renowned courtesans of sixteenth century Rome or Venice^[1]. Educated English Renaissance writers had encountered courtesans often enough in the pages of Plautus and Terence which they were required to translate at school, usually in their third year. Yet this scholarly tradition was spiced still further by the celebrity of sixteenth century Italian courtesans who rose to become practically as famous (or notorious) as their classical counterparts, and it is women such as these, and their English counterparts, that Greene set out to denigrate. Lucrezia Cognati (alias ‘Imperia’), Tullia d’Aragona, Camilla Pisana, and Veronica Franco were among the most renowned and influential women in sixteenth century Italy, along with a host of lesser known women including Isabella da Luna, *Matre ma non vuol* (‘My mother doesn’t like me to’) and twin sisters known as ‘Piemontesian executioners’. All of these women emerged from a vast Italian underclass of destitute women to achieve, via sexual transgression, a degree of financial security and repute, though not, it

should be said, personal safety. Their reputation spread as English travellers like Thomas Coryat and Fynes Moryson publicised the high social profile of continental courtesans, and confirmed at the same time English suspicions about the vice and ungodliness of nations yet in thrall to the Bishop of Rome. As Greene put it: ‘Venice, why it is nothing, for they have intelligence from it every houre, & at every worde will come in with Strado Curtizano, and tell you of such miracles of Madam Padilia and Romana Imperia that you will bee mad tyll you be out of England’.^[2] Hence, while sixteenth century Europe saw a certain vogue in courtesan culture, that flourished most visibly in the cities of Rome, Venice and, to a lesser extent, Paris, it was regarded with a kind of interested contempt in Reformation England. So were there, as Greene put it, any ‘English courtesans’, prostitutes of wealth or distinction who constituted an equivalent group to their Italian or French counterparts?

I want to begin to answer that question by focusing on one specific (and these days unfashionable) controversy – Shakespeare’s putative London courtesan, his ‘Dark Mistress’ of the Sonnets, a woman who has generated much speculation

but little hard fact. This study has three limited aims: first, to outline the claims that have been made for Luce Negro as Shakespeare's courtesan; second, to identify her more precisely; and third, to identify other 'dark women' in Shakespeare's London who perhaps come closest to what Greene once described as 'our English curtizans'.

The Gray's Inn Christmas revels of 1594, printed in 1688 as the *Gesta Grayorum*, consisted of a mock entertainment entitled the 'History of the High and mighty Prince of Purpoole ... Knight of the most Heroical Order of the Helmet, and Sovereign of the Same.' A lengthy preface to this masque lists those 'Homagers and Tributaries' who hold particularly high status in this Cockayne land of Purpoole, persons special for their tenures 'admirable', their value 'inestimable' and their worthiness 'incomparable'. The third person on this list is given as follows: 'Lucy Negro, Abbess de Clerkenwell, holdeth the Nunnery of Clerkenwell, with the Lands and Privileges thereunto belonging, of the Prince of Purpoole by Night-Service *in Cauda*, and to find a choir of Nuns, with burning Lamps, to chaunt *Placebo* to the gentlemen of the Prince's Privy-Chamber, on the day of his Excellency's coronation'.^[3] The irony of the *Gesta Grayorum* allusion turns on the fact that though, as John Stow's *Survey of London* (1604) confirms, there had been a priory of black nuns at Clerkenwell since the beginning of the twelfth century,^[4] Lucy Negro was, in fact, a

brothel madam, and her choir with burning lamps [i.e. the pox] were prostitutes. The gentlemen of Grays Inn, the *Gesta Grayorum* implies, were among her clientele. In 1933, in a book intriguingly titled *Shakespeare Under Elizabeth*, later that year altered to *Shakespeare At Work*, G. B. Harrison suggested 'tentatively' that this Lucy Negro could indeed have been dark-skinned, and may have been the mysterious mistress of the sonnets.^[5] Harrison's hypothesis was taken up in 1964 when Leslie Hotson published his book *Mr W. H.*, in which he claimed that the Fair Youth of the poems was one William Hatcliffe, and that the Dark Lady was Lucy Negro, whom he preferred to believe was a white-skinned woman better known at Elizabeth's Court as Lucy Morgan. Hotson cited as incontrovertible evidence for this view a series of onomastic puns he was convinced Shakespeare had scattered at will (so to speak) throughout his sonnet-cycle. For Hotson, when Shakespeare wrote the words 'hath left' and 'more than' in the poems, he did so quite intentionally to encrypt the names of his two loves, Hatcliffe and Morgan.^[6]

Beside such puns, Hotson relied for his account of Lucy Negro on a poem first published in 1656, entitled 'On Luce Morgan, a Common-Whore', which begins, 'Here lies black luce that pick-hatch drab/ Who had a word for every flab/ Was lecherous as any sparrow/ Her quiver ope to any arrow.' The poem continues in biographical vein, adding that she caught

the pox, and concluding, ‘Unto the Romish faith she turn’d;/ And therein dy’d and was’t not fit/ For a poor whore to dye in it.’[7] So Hotson triumphantly claimed that Black Luce’s real name was Morgan, and further that she was identical with a Luce Morgan he found listed in the Queen’s accounts as one of the Court ladies in waiting. This Luce Morgan, Hotson claimed, must somehow have fallen from courtly favour in the 1580s and thereafter become the woman over whom Shakespeare anguished circa 1594.[8]

It is not my intention to present in this article a ‘revealed at last’ solution to the Dark Lady puzzle, after the manner of Hotson, or, more infamously, the Lanyerite A. L. Rowse. Quite the reverse, I shall be confined to showing that, whoever the Dark Mistress was, she was not Black Luce, and that whoever Black Luce was, she was not Luce Morgan. And this brings me roundly to my second objective, which is to identify Lucy Negro more precisely.

In the winter of 1576, the Court of Governors of the London Bridewell prison set about cracking a loosely organised gang of pimps, escorts and prostitutes, operating on the North side of the Thames. The routine work of the Court was to arrest, examine, whip, imprison and set to hard labour all rogues, vagabonds, wanderers, idlers, loiterers, runaway apprentices, fornicators, prostitutes, their pimps and clients, as brought in

under warrant by the beadles and constables of the City and its suburbs. The gang broken up by the Bridewell authorities had at its core a few unsavoury individuals, including Gilbert East and his wife Margaret who ran a brothel in Turnmill Street, Mary Donnelly their most select prostitute, Anthony Bate a notorious pimp, Henry Boyer and William Mekyns their panders or escorts, Thomas Wise a surgeon, and his wife Dorothy, who kept a brothel in Whitefriars, and Black Luce who ran her own brothel in Clerkenwell. East, Bate, Mekyns, Boyer and Luce first came to the Bridewell Governor’s attention on 26 June 1576, in witness statements made by one Mrs. Thomasine Breame who operated as a brothel madam from Worcester House, and who, probably to mitigate her own plight, testified that ‘wise fetched one megge Goldsmyth from Black Luce at Clerkenwell wher she laye and she saieth that the said Luce is an arrant whore and a bawde’.[9] Later, we learn more about the kind of clientele they received. East and Mekyns deposed on 17 December against ‘Litle Kathryn’ [Jones] and Alice Furre, two prostitutes who served ‘ingraunt’ [immigrant] strangers, including Captain Augustyne, the French Ambassador’s steward, and a Seigneur called Prosper[o]. East testified that one Mandrell lay with Alice Furre at Black Luce’s ‘this last summer and gave her a dogge with silver bells and gave her xxs ... and he had thuse of her body’. Mekyns stated that ‘Margarett Goldsmyth laye at Black Luce’s a great while and greate companye resorted to her and

black luce has much gayne by keyping of her and was lewde to her and knewe yt well that she was noughte Gilbert East brought her to Seignr Prosper from black luces and black luce sent her her apron and other thinges to be noughte with Prosper'.^[10]

Another prominent North London pimp, John Shaw testified on 2 January 1576/7 that Sir Owen Hexton's second son 'resorteth much to his house this quarter of a yeare and he hath had thuse of the body of little margaret and Elizabeth Jane ffullers mayde'. Margaret now resided, he said, at the Bell beyond Shoreditch and was there kept by one Lawrence Dutton, a player. According to Shaw, Black Luce's house had recently been raided at midnight, and its occupants forced to flee to one Stalles at Westminster where Stalle's wife (said to be 'full of the pox') operated as both 'a whore and a bawd'.^[11]

The clearest information about the structure of this racket emerges in the testimony of Elizabeth Kirkham, another of East's prostitutes, roughly a year later. On 15 January 1577/8, Elizabeth appeared before the court charged alongside Rose Brown 'for that Rose Browne is a bawde and a whore to the said Elizabeth Kirkham and others Elizabeth sayeth that the same Rose had dyvers & many blackamores and other psons resort to her house while this Elizabeth dwelt ther'.^[12] Six days later, she testified against Gilbert East and Mary Donnelly,

saying that she had lived at East's for three months of the previous year, and there met Mary and other prostitutes, including one Bess Cowper. East, she stated, would force his wife to 'play the harlot' and 'gett money'. Mary had a silk gown, and was kept 'especially by gentlemen and welthyemen with velvett gaskens and rich apparel and not for the common sorte'. She further testified that, 'Black Luce of Clerkenwell did agree with East and his wyfe that when Blacke Luce had any gret geste that this exaiet or such other women as East had should get them to Luces house and were Mary Donnellys gowne and Luce Bayntham should have thone halfe of the money and East thother halfe of the reste this exaiet went to Black Luces and ther at other tyme a gent a straungr of the imbassadors house in fflete strete had thuse of her bodye Luce had then halfe and Easts wiffe had then halfe of the rest she were then Mary Donnellys gowne and attire'. Something of East's violent temper, and Margaret his wife's distress emerges in the clerked deposition recorded. Elizabeth told how 'East would be very angrye with his wiffe when she did wepe and was lothe to play the harlott and bid her goe and earne monye with commyttinge whoredome and thrust her upstaires comenly everydaye when ther was not other to serve, many prentises came thether some brought halfe a finger loffe and the gests sent for so much wyne and good chese they had rather drink bere than wyne'.^[13] The two brothels, East's and Black Luce's, split their profits half-way: they shared prosti-

tutes, and would find business for them in brothels elsewhere as circumstances allowed, even fitting them out to suit the social class of particular clients. Elizabeth Kirkham's statement continues: 'And this exaiat sayeth that Black Luce is a vilde bawde and lyveth by it and East and his wiffe and she agree together and devide the monye that is geven to the harlots and helpe to tryme them up with swete water and calles and cotes and thinges for the purpose fitt for the degree of them that use them'.^[14] The two brothels, like so many others, catered for any who could afford their services, from 'prentises' and 'ingraunts', to 'gentlemen', 'welthyemen' and members of the aristocracy. Even Mr. Brecke, the 'hy constable of Clerkenwell' spent a night with Mary Donnelly (he happened to be East's landlord).^[15] As for Mary, she made a full confession, stating that 'East and his wiffe are to abhominable and lewd psons, none worse in the world'.^[16] She was imprisoned for six months and delivered on 24 July 1578. Despite the raid of her house at midnight, there seems no record of Luce ever being arrested or examined before the court of Governors. The last references to her in the Bridewell archive occur on 1 and 5 August 1579 in statements referring to 'Baynam Luce's husband' and 'one Baynam of Clerkenwell'.^[17] Unfortunately, the Bridewell archives are missing for the period 1579 to 1597. Yet there is, I suggest, enough in the Court Minutes to establish Black Luce's actual identity. In each of the Bridewell references to her, she is named in the margin by the clerk as 'Luce

Baynham' or sometimes 'Bayntham'. In an entry recorded for 7 June 1578, she is referred to as 'Baynam's wife' and the brothel she ran as 'Baynams'.^[18] In 1575, a Henrie Baynam had come before the court for fornication with one Mawdlin Johnson, though he seems to have been discharged without punishment, and does not – to my knowledge – appear subsequently in the Bridewell minutes. By 1576, then, Luce Baynam was married, possibly to a Henry Baynam, and running a successful brothel on the outskirts of the city in Clerkenwell. She may indeed have been a black woman, since there were several 'blackamores' dwelling around Aldgate at this time, and some, as we have seen, are noted among the prostitute clientele.^[19] But she was certainly not the Gentlewoman of the Queen's Wardrobe, Luce Morgan, listed in the Queen's accounts between 1579 and 1581.

Hotson may, however, have been partially right about a Luce Morgan who fell from courtly grace to the squalid back-streets of London, and thereafter to the grim conditions of prison. The Bridewell records for 3 May 1598 have the following entry:

Luce Morgaine sent into this house by vertue aforesaid saieth that she lyeth at the house of Edward Tilsley and keepled the saime at Picket hatch Att the upper end of Aldersgate London by the space of one yeare and more nowe past and that the said Tilsley cometh thither to his

house Att Picket hatch once a fortnight and sayeth that they are assured Together as man and wyfe before witnesses and that the said Tilsley doth maintaine her and further saieth that there cometh no resort unto her neither men nor women but such as be the friends of the said Tilsley and saieth that he alloweth her three shillings a weeke for her maintenance and that the said Tilsley doth paye the rent of her house and further sayeth that Sr. Mathew Morgaine doth allowe her x li a yeere when he is in England and that he sent her v li by his boye at Xxmas last whose name was Goffe.[20]

Three shillings a week was considerably less than the usual five shillings a time charged in many of the liaisons recorded in the Bridewell minutes, yet payment of her rent and a generous annual allowance clearly marked Luce Morgan out as a woman of means. There is no record that she was detained at this interrogatory, and it is likely, given her genealogy and in the absence of corroboration or a confession, that she would have been discharged, perhaps upon sureties for her good behaviour. But she could not have been free for long, for on 15 January 1599/1600, Luce Morgan was brought before the Court of Aldermen on a charge of prostitution, adjudged guilty, and thereafter committed to Bridewell.[21]

Luce Morgan was, however, far from being London's highest earning 'curtizan'. For those who could avoid arrest, the rewards of prostitution could be very great. According to the Bridewell evidence, Ann Levens established herself over a three-year period ending in December 1576 as one of London's most active and successful prostitutes. She offered her services especially to 'strangers' and 'cortyers', and testified at her summons that a French gentleman named Mandreant frequented her at a widow's house in Grub Street, and elsewhere, and 'he gave her large monye about xxx or xl lis'. Levens earned enough to lend Mathias Vanbargen of the Steelyard the sum of ten pounds. Another of her earlier customers, Henry Cortsell gave her a gold chain and twenty nobles, and a stranger named Adams paid her 'xxs at a tyme'.^[22] Clerked and formulaic as many of the Bridewell depositions were, occasional hints of the *ipsissima vox* of the defendant seem to emerge. In her study of women's depositions in court, Laura Gowing notes how the narratives presented 'were shaped not just by clerks and proctors but by their narrator's own strategic and unconscious reshapings'.^[23] In recalling her clients and lovers, Levens remembers that 'he that had the first use of her bodye was a gent named Syprian velotell and it was in a garden about Simon and Jules dayes'. She further recalls, 'a verie fayre youthe with a perfect gallows leade' who gave her 20 shillings.^[24] Like many of the women brought before the bench, Levens was an itinerant worker,

moving between a total of seventeen bawdy houses in pursuit of trade. Even with the half-share paid out to the brothel owners, Levens found prostitution a lucrative business. Although she was committed to the prison after this hearing, her confession was entered almost two years later, when on 10 December 1578, she was finally released with sureties on condition that she depart the city within three days.[25]

For all her wealth, Levens was unable, it seems, to buy protection or immunity from prosecution. All the more remarkable, therefore is the case of Elizabeth Evans, a former serving-girl to Elizabeth Dudley, born in Stratford-upon-Avon to one Richard Evans, a Stratford cutler who had been executed for ‘quoining’.[26] Elizabeth’s servant Marie Holmes had testified on 4 March 1597/8, before the Recorder, Mr. John Croke, that Evans had lived a lewd life with brothers Henry and John Pears, sleeping secretly with both until Henry one morning discovered her in bed with John: ‘Howe the said Elizabeth did maintaine her selfe this exate knoweth not but saith that she told her she hath three hundred pounds a yeare to live one and that this exate came from her service without her wages having before agreed for xxx the yeare’.[27] At Bridewell, on 1 April 1598, Thomas Malin explained that ‘about three yeares sithence’ one Mr. Nixon, a Cheapside silk merchant, asked him to provide lodging for Evans who was introduced to him as Elizabeth Carewe. Nixon frequently had to travel to Yorkshire,

and, in his absence, Evans was visited by certain men, including a silkman, two drapers and a draper’s apprentice. Malin grew suspicious and threw her out, whereupon she repaired briefly to ‘a house of ill resorte’ in Moor Lane, and then to another in Islington named ‘the well occupied house’, where she was visited by a similar clientele (‘of good abilitie shortly after become bankrupt and little worth’). Aware of a complaint against her for lewdness, Elizabeth fled once more while the authorities sought out those who knew her, including Joice Cowden of Seacole Lane who, as a girl, ‘went to scole with the said Elizabeth Evans’, and ‘knew her father’, and one George Pinder, of Stratford, who testified that he knew Evans had been in London ‘about three or foure yeares and he hath hard a very bad reporte of her’.[28] Croke, with the Alderman of Southwark, had gone to inordinate lengths to track her down. Yet, uniquely in the extant Elizabethan Bridewell minutes, a powerful ally also attended the hearing. The name of Sir William Howard is listed among those presiding at court, and the first (also probably latest) recorded entry in the case reads as follows: ‘Sir William Howard brother to ye Lord Admirall being in court did sewe for her enlargement and desired that she should be spared of her punishment for that he thought she was a kinne to him whereupon she was delivered to him the said William without any punishment’.[29] We cannot be sure what subsequently happened to Evans, who, if her claims were not hyperbole, was perhaps the

highest earning of all sixteenth century English prostitutes. On 10 January 1598/9, an Elizabeth Evans was arrested and punished for vagrancy and ‘for stealing of lynnens clothes out of a garden’ with one Martha Marlin. Five years later, one parson Jervis Scarborough was alledged to have raped his servant Elizabeth Evans, and his wife to have beaten her.^[30] It may be that these entries do not refer to the same person let alone the coiner’s daughter from Stratford (the name would have been very common): none the less, they point to a cycle of vagrancy, exploitation and violence that made the circumstances of any aspiring courtesan hazardous to say the very least.

As for Shakespeare’s courtesan, it seems fair to say in retrospect, and also conclusion, that for all the unrestraint of his belief that Shakespeare might have laced her surname among the ‘more than’s’ of his sonnets, Hotson was understandably misled by a seventeenth century poem that bestowed upon ‘that Pick-Hatch drab’ Luce Morgan, a nickname already made famous by somebody else. It remains possible, of course, that Luce Morgan had herself been dark-haired, adept at the virginals, and younger than Shakespeare who lamented that his mistress knew his days were ‘past the best’ (138) – but there is no evidence to support such conjectures. If it is possible to trace fragments of the lives of women who may have approximated to Greene’s notion of ‘our English curtizans’, such traces

provide the benefit only of saying who the Dark Lady was not. Beyond that, hers is a mystery that remains – appropriately – dark.

Chapter I: Notes

- 1 Robert Greene, *A Disputation Betweene a Hee Conny-catcher, and a Shee Conny-catcher, whether Therefor a Whoore, is most hurtfull in Cousonage, to the Commonwealth. Discovering the secret Villainies of alluring Strumpets. With the Conuersion of an English Courtizan, reformed this present yeare, 1592. Reade, laugh, and learne* [London, 1592], ed. G. B. Harrison (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1923), p.5.
- 2 Thomas Coryat, *Coryat's crudities : hastily gobbled up in five Moneths travells in France, Savoy, Italy, ...* [1607] (Glasgow: James Maclehose, 1905). *An itinerary written by Fynes Moryson gent ...* (London: J. Beale, 1617). Quotation from Robert Greene, *Blacke Booke's Messenger* [1592], ed. G. B. Harrison (London: John Vane The Bodley Head, 1924), p.21.
- 3 *Gesta Grayorum, or, The history of the high and mighty Prince Henry... together with, A masque, as it were presented...for the entertainment of Q. Elizabeth...* (The Malone Society Reprints, 1914), vol. 38, p.34.
- 4 John Stow, *Survey of London* [1604], ed Valerie Pearl (London: Dent, 1984), p.388.
- 5 G. B. Harrison, *Shakespeare at Work* (London: Routledge, 1933), p.310.
- 6 Leslie Hotson, Mr W. H. (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1964), pp.238–255.
- 7 'On Luce Morgan – a Common Whore' [1656], cited from *Wit and Drollery Joviall Poems Corrected & much amended with additions by Sir J. M, Fa. Sir N. D. and the most refined Wits of the Age* (London: Nathan Brook, 1661).
- 8 Hotson, pp.249–252.
- 9 Ian Archer first drew attention to these prosecutions in his acclaimed study *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge, 1991), and their details are found among the Bridewell Court Governors' Minute Books (Volume III, fos. 20^r–24^r, 27^r–33^v, 279^r–281^r), held at the Bethlem Royal Archives and Museum, Beckenham, Kent, and accessible on microfilm at the London Guildhall Library (Ms 33011). Bridewell Court Minute Book [B. C. B.], 1598–1604,

Chapter I: Notes

- Bethlem Royal Hospital Archives and Museum, Beckenham, Kent, Vol. 3 f. 52 verso.
- 10 B. C. B. Vol. 3, f. 104 verso..
- 11 B. C. B. Vol. 3, f. 120 recto.
- 12 B. C. B. Vol. 3, ff. 277 recto – 277 verso.
- 13 B. C. B. Vol. 3, ff. 279 verso – 280 recto.
- 14 B. C. B. Vol. 3, ff. 280 recto.
- 15 B. C. B. Vol. 3, ff. 280 recto.
- 16 B. C. B. Vol. 3, ff. 281 recto.
- 17 B. C. B. Vol. 4, f. 411 recto.
- 18 B. C. B. Vol. 3, f. 318 verso
- 19 Thomas Rogers Forbes, *Chronicle of Aldgate: Life and Death in Shakespeare's London* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1971), pp.3–4.
- 20 B. C. B. Vol. 4, f. 11 recto.
- 21 Hotson, p.254.
- 22 B. C. B. Vol. 3, ff. 96 recto – 97 verso.
- 23 Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women Words and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), pp.54–55.
- 24 B. C. B. Vol. 3, f. 96 recto.
- 25 B. C. B. Vol. 3, ff. 354 recto.
- 26 B. C. B. Vol. 4, ff. 11 verso – 12 verso.
- 27 B. C. B. Vol. 4, f. 11 verso.
- 28 B. C. B. Vol. 4, f. 12 recto.
- 29 B. C. B. Vol. 4, f. 11 verso.
- 30 B. C. B. Vol. 4, f. 55 recto.

‘The purpose of playing...’: Further reflections on the mirror metaphor in Shakespeare’s plays

Carol Banks (The University of Hertfordshire)

The metaphor most commonly used to describe the relationship between art and life in Shakespeare’s plays is the mirror, a metaphor no doubt seen as appropriate since that most famous of Shakespearean characters – Hamlet, Prince of Denmark – uses it to explain ‘the purpose of Playing’:

the purpose of Playing, whose end both at the first and now, was and is, to hold as ‘twere the Mirrour vp to Nature; to shew Vertue her owne Feature, Scorne her owne Image, and the verie Age and Bodie of the Time, his forme and pressure.[1]

Samuel Johnson used it in his ‘Preface’ to the 1765 edition of Shakespeare’s *Collected Works*, actually echoing Hamlet’s words in his claim that Shakespeare ‘holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life’,^[2] and so the metaphor has continued, right through to the present: in the 1940s Lily B. Campbell subtitled her study of Shakespeare’s history plays, *‘Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy’*,^[3] and more recently, Coppélia Kahn likewise claims that in the *Histories* ‘Shakespeare makes late medieval society a mirror of his own.’^[4]

To the average reader today, the mirror metaphor probably conveys the notion of reflected reality; certainly Johnson’s addition of the adjective ‘faithful’ suggests that the plays offer undistorted images of life, seemingly ‘natural’ images viewed as if reflected in the large, gilt framed, silver-surfaced glass mirrors which had become so popular in Johnson’s day. In pictorial art from the Renaissance right through to the nineteenth century the ability to produce ‘realistic’ pictures of life, as if reflected in a faithful mirror, was greatly admired and some artists even included reflections in glass or water within their seemingly reflected compositions.^[5] By the nineteenth century ‘realism’ had certainly infiltrated the literary arts, with dramatists framing on their proscenium stages images of life as ‘real’ as those delineated in words by their fellow novelists. And even in spite of the new wave in aesthetic appreciation, which rose at the start of the twentieth century, advocating art for art’s sake, photography, film and then television ensured that the interest in ‘realistic’ art continued, and ‘soap operas’, which purport to represent ‘real life’, are as popular today as the realist novel was a hundred years ago; furthermore, some drama documentaries now attempt to conflate art and life, so that today’s cinema or television screen may at times be

compared to a ‘faithful mirror’ in which we might believe we see ‘real life’ reflected, rather than art constructed.

But is this really what is meant by the mirror metaphor in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*? As the interest in realism rose in the nineteenth century, some critics were so convinced of Shakespeare’s skill in reproducing characters which were true to life, that they themselves confused life and art in their admiration. In 1817 William Hazlitt endorsed the view of Alexander Pope that Shakespeare’s characters are ‘so much nature herself, that it is a sort of injury to call them by so distant a name as copies of her’;^[6] likewise in 1832, Anna Jameson enthused that ‘his characters combine history and real life ... they are complete individuals’;^[7] and early in the twentieth century the actress, Dame Edith Evans, continued in the same vein, claiming that ‘Shakespearean women’ are ‘most satisfactory people’ and ‘so true’.^[8] In the second half of the twentieth century appraisals such as these have certainly been shaken, if not completely overturned, not least by critics aware of the political potential in a work of art. Hence for example, Alan Sinfield maintains that ‘Lady Macbeth is a fantasy arrangement of elements that are taken to typify the acceptable and unacceptable faces of woman’, and that Desdemona is similarly ‘a disjointed sequence of positions that women are conventionally supposed to occupy’.^[9] Although politically rather than aesthetically motivated, Sinfield’s view is not incompati-

ble with the criticism levied by one of the greatest authors from the nineteenth-century school of ‘realist’ fiction – Leo Tolstoy – who claimed that:

All his [Shakespeare’s] characters speak, not a language of their own but always one and the same Shakespearean, affected, unnatural language, which not only could they not speak, but no real people could ever have spoken anywhere ... In Shakespeare everything is exaggerated: the actions are exaggerated, so are their consequences.^[10]

In the light of such comment from an eminent practitioner in ‘realistic’ writing, perhaps we should take a closer look at Hamlet’s mirror-metaphor and at mirrors in general in Renaissance art and life.

We might first take note that in life, although flat, silvered-glass mirrors capable of reflecting clear, undistorted images were being produced in sixteenth-century Venice, these ‘faithful’ varieties were not generally available in England until the seventeenth century. In fact, mirrors were generally very far from ‘faithful’ in Shakespeare’s day. Polished metal mirrors, which provided dark reflections, were still in common use, being unbreakable, and the glass mirrors generally available were not flat, but convex, producing quite distorted

images.^[11] The fact that such mirrors were not faithful but deceitful is hinted at in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when Helena asks: 'What wicked and dissembling glasse of mine, / Made me compare with *Hermias* sphery eyne?' (753–4). Similarly, in *Richard III* the dramatist seems to be using the convex mirror to comic effect when, the crook-backed Richard, having first observed that he is not 'made to court an amorous Looking-glasse' (17), claims after seducing the Lady Anne, that he might now admire his own reflection, a reminder perhaps that even the 'maru'llous proper man' would appear bent in a curved glass:

Vpon my life she findes (although I cannot)
My Selfe to be a maru'llous proper man.
Ile be at Charges for a Looking-glasse,
...
That I may see my Shadow as I passe

(449–51 & 460)

The term 'Looking-glasse' was itself relatively new in the late sixteenth-century, coined around 1526, whilst Richard's use of the word 'shadow', for reflection, belongs to an older tradition (Middle English) and serves as a reminder that mirrored reflections continued to be associated with dark images.

Indeed, most familiar to Elizabethan and Jacobean audiences would have been the dark mirror used by St. Paul to explain the difference between earthly and divine knowledge:

For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face:
now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.^[12]

Unlike divine knowledge, which is clearly perceived, human understanding is partial and obscured, as if mediated through a distorted, cloudy, or dim glass.

However, it seems unlikely that in *Hamlet* the Prince is comparing drama to a dim or distorted image such as these, although he may perhaps be obliquely hinting at another type of actual mirror popular in the Renaissance – the so called perspective mirror – an optical device which played tricks upon the eye, usually by producing multiple or fractured images. In *Twelfth Night* when Orsino sees the twins Sebastian and Viola together, he compares the sight to that produced by such a mirror:

One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons,
A naturall Perspectiue, that is, and is not.

(2380–81)

Likewise, in *Richard II* (a play in which a looking-glass is spectacularly smashed by the deposed king), Bushy claims that the Queen's sorrow, viewed through her tears, 'Diuides one thing intire, to many obiects, / Like perspectiues' (269–70). In *Hamlet* the Prince is himself described as 'The glasse of Fashion, and the mould of Forme' (1809), a use of the mirror metaphor to which I shall return, and, as Robert Weimann points out, 'the figure of Hamlet – is itself so cast into multiple functions of mimesis that what the "character" throughout reveals is some profound crisis in representativity'.^[13] So perhaps this is another oblique association with the perspective-mirror. Additionally, Hamlet's play within the play, which he re-names 'The Mouse-trap' (2105), operates to some degree like a trick mirror, in so far as it is a 'trap' set to 'catch the Conscience of the King' (1645). However, we seem to be stretching the metaphor here, and this explanation does not altogether fit Hamlet's further purpose: 'to shew Vertue her owne Feature, Scorne her owne Image, and the verie Age and Bodie of the Time, his forme and pressure'.

The claim that 'the purpose of Playing' is intended to 'shew' these listed qualities, identifies with the visual, rather than the verbal component of drama and indeed, we might recall that Hamlet's *Murder of Gonzago* is preceded by a dumb show, a purely visual spectacle. This 'seeing' quality is particularly reminiscent, not of reflections in mirrors, but of a third type of actual glass in use in the period of production – the seer's crystal, a magic mirror used by magicians and fortune-tellers to conjure up images of the future. Such a mirror is identified in *Measure for Measure* when Angelo refers to 'a Prophet' who 'Lookes in a glasse that shewes ... future euils / Either now, or by reminissenesse, new conceiued' (849–51), and in *Macbeth* when, in the apparition of kings conjured up by the witches, the eighth in line 'beares a glasse / Which shoves ... many more' (1667–8). Like the dumb show in *Hamlet* these images are for sight only – the witches spirit them up with repetition of the word 'Shew' – and like reflections in a glass, they too are described as 'shadows'. *The Murder of Gonzago* works as a reminiscence, a kind of *memento mori*, recalling past events, reviving them as if 'new conceiued', and turning Claudius's eyes backwards in time and inwards to his own past deeds, probing beneath the surface mood of celebration at Elsinore, to Claudius's deeper guilt. We might observe here that one meaning of the word 'reflect', obsolete by 1677, is 'to turn (back), cast (the eye or thought) *on* or *upon* something' (*OED* 3).

In connection with seeing, and far more familiar today than the mirror or glass which can show what is not in the real world of the present, is use of the mirror in visual iconography, as a symbol of vanity or pride. In the Ovidian myth, it is the boy Narcissus who admires his own beauty by reflection, however, in medieval and early modern texts it is usually a female who represents this vice: vain women, mermaids and sirens admiring their own reflections in hand-held mirrors. This particular vice certainly informs Richard III's call for a looking glass, which in turn places him within that effeminate 'weake piping time of Peace' (26), he claims he is not shaped for in his opening soliloquy; whereas in *King Lear*, the Fool spells out the female connection with vanity in no uncertain terms, when he declares: 'there was neuer faire woman, but she made mouthes in a glasse' (1686–7). Whilst this familiar concept is evidently not the mode which links the play and the mirror, a connection may be made between the drama and the mirror which represents virtue.

Although less common than the image of female Vanity replete with mirror, the Virgin Mary is also represented with a mirror in Christian iconography,^[14] which is a virtuous spotless glass. The connection here operates at different levels: Mary's beauty, wisdom and truth link her to other admirable females of pre-Christian mythology, to Venus, Sapientia and Prudentia, all of whom are depicted with mirrors, but more

specifically Mary's mirror represents her pure virginity, for the mirror is impenetrable, capable of admitting light without harm to itself. Shakespeare draws on this association when in *Pericles* the Bawd instructs Boult to take Marina away and 'use her at thy pleasure, crack the glass of her virginity, and make the rest malleable' (IV.VI.140–3).^[15] Additionally, in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Mary was also regarded as a kind of mirror herself, as the *exemplar par excellence* whom all women should emulate. Shakespeare uses the mirror / glass as exemplar on a number of occasions: it is in such a sense that Hamlet is referred to as 'The glasse of Fashion, and the mould of Forme' (1809); Henry V is likewise described as 'the Mirror of all Christian Kings' (468), and Hotspur's wife claims in *Henry IV Part 2* that her husband 'was (indeed) the Glasse / Wherein the Noble-Youth did dresse themselues' (979–80), clearly the exemplary mirror identifies a didactic rather than a reflecting function.^[16] Also noteworthy, is the notion that the Virgin Mary, like 'the mirror of God', was capable of revealing the imperfections of sinners, for this is precisely what Marina does in *Pericles* and what the Prince of Denmark is planning to do with his mirror / play *The Murder of Gonzago*.

Whether aimed at identifying shortcomings, or establishing attributes to be emulated, the mirror / glass / speculum was repeatedly used in the middle ages and the English Renaissance, as a metaphor for books of moral and religious

instruction. In his very comprehensive study of the subject, Herbert Grabes lists some three hundred and ninety eight books published in England between 1500–1700, which include the words ‘Mirror’, ‘Speculum’, ‘Looking-glass’ and ‘Glass’ in the titles.[17] The mirror-metaphor was indeed so popular that Grabes claims that it is possible ‘to speak of a “fashion” for the metaphor’,[18] a fashion which appears to have increased dramatically in the second half of the sixteenth century – Grabes counts eighty new titles compared with nineteen in the first half-century, and of these twenty nine published after 1580 – a fashion that continued into the seventeenth century, reaching a high-point shortly after 1650.[19] Like the exemplary mirror, these ‘mirrors’ of moral and religious instruction were not, by and large, attempting to reflect outward appearances. Thomas Salter, in his instruction manual for women: *A Mirrhor mete for all Mothers, Matrones and Maidens, intituled the Mirrhor of Modestie* (1579), makes a point of clearly differentiating between two types of mirror, one which merely reflects outward show and one which identifies a deeper level of being:

In my judgemente there is nothyng more meete,
especially for yong Maidens then a Mirrhor, there in to
see and beholde how to order their dooyng, I meane not a
Christall Mirrhor, made by handie Arte, by whiche
Maidens now adaies, dooe onely take delight daiely to

tricke and trim their tresses, standyng tootyng twoo
howers by the Clocke, . . . no I meane no suche Mirrhor,
but the Mirrhor I meane is made of another maner of
matter, and is of mucche more worthe then any Christall
Mirrhor; for as the one teacheth how to attire the
outward bodie, so the other guideth to garnishe the
inward mynde . . .[20]

In Antiquity the mirror was used as a metaphor for the soul or spirit, which by the end of the sixteenth-century also incorporated the mind at which Salter’s mirror is directed. In a poem prefixed to the 1632 Folio of Shakespeare’s *Collected Works*, a writer identified as simply I.M.S. used this sense, suggesting that Shakespeare’s mind was like a mirror of ‘clear / And equal surface’ that ‘reflected ages past’.[21] Even closer to Salter’s mirror, which guides and instructs the inward mind, is the ‘glasse’ which Hamlet says he will set up for his mother that she ‘may see the inmost part’ of herself (2400).

Of course drama, in which the signifiers are real human beings, inevitably incorporates a degree of outward mimesis and, as Thomas Heywood observed in his *Apology for Actors*:

A Description is only a shadow receiued by the eare but
not perceiued by the eye: so liuely portrature is meerly a

forme seene by the eye, but can neither shew action, passion, motion, or any other gesture, to moouue the spirits of the beholder to admiration: but to see a souldier shap'd like a souldier, walke, speake, act like a souldier: to see a Hector all besmered in blood, trampling vpon the bulkes of Kinges, . . . Oh these were sights to make an Alexander.[22]

Given such comment on the mimetic potential of drama, we might recall that whilst Hamlet speaks out against the actor who over-acts, that ‘anything so ouer-done, is fro[m] the purpose of Playing’ (1867–8), and berates the clowns who try to embody a sense of his own reality rather than representing the fictional role ‘For there will be of them, that will themselves laugh, to set on some quantitie of barren Spectators to laugh too’ (1888–90), when watching the play within the play, Gertrude nevertheless complains of the player-Queen (who only speaks one line), that ‘the Lady protests too much’ (2098), a remark which suggests that in spite of Hamlet’s lesson, this actor is not reflecting life, but overacting, exaggerating, just as Leo Tolstoy maintained all Shakespeare’s characters do.

Hamlet’s mirror, it would seem, is very far from one which faithfully reflects life, but its purpose is close to those books of religious and moral instruction which, like the biblical

‘mirror’, show man how he should and should not behave. In Shakespeare’s *Richard II*, in the deposition scene when Richard calls for an actual looking-glass and the mirror is no longer a mere metaphor but a stage prop, Richard first says that he desires it ‘That it may shew me what a Face I haue’ (2188), identifying its ability to produce surface reflections. But in order to see the truth behind that face, to ‘see the very Booke indeede, / Where all my sinnes are writ’ (2197–8) that outward surface reflection is broken. Richard identifies the shortcomings of the reflecting-glass, claiming that the reflected image is untrue: ‘O flatt’ring Glasse . . . / Thou do’st beguile me’ (2202–4); but when it is broken, Bolingbroke makes a curious remark, punning on the word ‘shadow’: ‘The Shadow of your Sorrow hath destroy’d / The Shadow of your face’ (2216–7). Richard then, most usefully, analyses this remark for the reader / spectator, claiming that:

‘Tis very true, my Griefe lyes all within,
And these externall manner of Laments
Are meere shadowes, to the vnseene Grief
That swells with silence in the tortur’d Soul.

(2219–2222)

Over-reacting to the vision of himself, which he sees as deceitful, Richard smashed the glass in dramatic style, just like an actor, for the word ‘shadow’ was often used in place of ‘actor’, not to be taken as a ‘faithful’ reflection, but indicating that the dramatic sign is a copy, likeness or counterfeit. The shadow / counterfeit thus destroys the shadow / reflection, and in so doing, as Richard admits, a deeper mirror is reached, that of the ‘tortur’d Soul’, where grief itself swells, ‘vnseene’ by the reflecting looking-glass.

As evident in this historical example, by the middle of the sixteenth century, history itself functioned as a mirror in which one might look and learn, as Thomas Beard explained in *The Theatre of Gods Iudgements* (1597):

Historie is accounted a verie necessarie and profitable thing, for that in recalling to mind the truth of things past ... it setteth before vs such effects (as warnings and admonitions touching good and euill) and layeth vertue and vice so naked before our eyes ... that it may rightly be called an easie and profitable apprentiship or schoole for euerie man to learne to get wisdome ... Hence it is, that Historie is tearmed ... the ... the looking glasse of mans life [23]

History, whether historiography or historical drama, could present ‘good and euill ... vertue and vice’, as indicated in the subtitle to George Gascoigne’s *The Glasse of government* (1575), being: *A tragicall comedie so entituled, bycause therein are handled aswell the rewards for vertues, as also the punishment for vice*, a point reiterated in Hamlet’s ‘Purpose’ ‘to shew Vertue her owne Feature, Scorne her owne Image’. Furthermore, as Herbert Grabes points out, ‘the supreme function of the historiographical mirror became not its capacity to reflect but its power to correct’, [24] for these ‘mirrors’ in which vice and virtue are represented are not passive reflectors in which fleeting glimpses of an ever changing reality are glimpsed, on the contrary, these are fixed images, providing pictures of past deeds and misdeeds often larger than life, pushed to extremes to make a powerful, ideological point, such as the distorted image of Richard the third, constructed by Tudor historians and promoted by Shakespeare himself, a picture of a king closer to a comic cartoon than a reflection in a faithful mirror.

As a final note, although the Italian theories of *imitatio* in art undoubtedly gained in significance from the fifteenth through to the nineteenth century (Alberti in his mid-fifteenth-century treatise *Della Pittura*, actually recommended the use of a mirror to test the accuracy of a painting, noting defects are more pronounced in reflection, so that ‘things taken from nature are corrected with a mirror’), [25] these aesthetic values

did not find a firm footing in English art until the middle of the seventeenth century. It was Oliver Cromwell who had Samuel Cooper paint his picture truly like him, 'warts and all', [26] unlike Queen Elizabeth I, who was most careful to have paintings of herself constructed to present her queenly virtues, not her artificially painted, aging skin or even the true colour of her eyes.[27] And finally, there is no denying that in many of Shakespeare's plays it is the opposite notion of life imitating art which comes across in the theatrical metaphors which are repeatedly used to describe life, most famously in *As you like it*, when Jacques observes that 'All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women, meere Players' (1118–9).

The French painter Henri Matisse (1869–1954), maintained that all art bears the imprint of the historical epoch,[28] a correlation between art and life which is not a surface reflection, but an ingrained quality conveyed by the artist him/herself. Applying this theory to the play which the Prince of Denmark re-writes in *Hamlet*, we may also perceive how this play within the play is shaped and directed not so much by Hamlet's interest in 'realism', but by his own immediate, even distorted, point of view, which leads him to suspect not only regicide but female betrayal. We likewise bring to the reading of Renaissance texts our own knowledge, values and beliefs, but a degree of caution is needed when words and metaphors have changed over time, that our contemporary view is not

reflected on the surface, hiding an older, deeper meaning which lies beneath.

Chapter 2: Notes

- 1 *The Tragedie of Hamlet* quoted from *The Norton Facsimile The First Folio of Shakespeare* ed. Charlton Hinman (Norton & Co. 1968, 2nd edn. 1996), lines 1868–1872. This description from the Jacobean First Folio of 1623 is not included in the earlier Elizabethan Quarto play *The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet Prince of Denmarke* (1603). Unless otherwise stated, all further Shakespearean quotations are taken from *The Norton Facsimile* and identified in the text by line numbers only.
- 2 Samuel Johnson's 1765 'Preface' quoted from Brian Vickers, ed., *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage* Vol. 5 1765–1774 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), p.57.
- 3 Lily B. Campbell, *Shakespeare's Histories: Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy* (first published 1947, London: Methuen, 1964).
- 4 Kahn, *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1981) p.48.
- 5 See Jonathan Miller *On Reflection* (London: National Gallery Publications, 1998).
- 6 William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (first published 1817, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 'Preface', p.xxv.
- 7 Anna Jameson, *Characteristics of Women, Moral Poetical, and Historical* (1832), quoted from Ann Thompson and Sasha Roberts, eds, *Women Reading Shakespeare 1600–1900*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p.67.
- 8 Quoted from Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1983), p.2. More recently A..D. Nuttall has continued to argue in favour of a new mimesis in Shakespeare, one which captures stable characteristics and the flux of things, see *A New Mimesis: Shakespeare and the Representation of Reality* (London: Methuen, 1983).
- 9 Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp.56 and 53.

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- 10 Leo Tolstoy, 'Shakespeare and the Drama' (1906) quoted from *On Art* introduced and translated by Aylmer Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), pp.423 and 438. The essay created a flurry of interest when it was first published and G.B. Shaw was amongst those eminent critics who defended Shakespeare, see Aylmer Maude, *Tolstoy on Art and its Critics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1925); in 1934 G. Wilson Knight later rallied to Shakespeare's defence in *Shakespeare and Tolstoy*, The English Association no. 88 (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), for recent criticism on the subject see Yury D. Levin, 'Shakespeare and Russian Literature: Nineteenth-century Attitudes', in Alexander Parfenor and Joseph G. Price, eds, *Russian Essays on Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Newark and London: University of Delaware Press, Associated University Presses, 1998), pp.78–96.
- 11 Herbert Grabes, *The Mutable Glass: Mirror-imagery in titles and texts of the Middle Ages and English Renaissance*, translated by Gordon Collier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1982), pp.72–3.
- 12 The Holy Bible (KJV): 1 Corinthians 13, 12; the translation in the New English Bible: New Testament (1961) confuses clear and distorted mirrors: 'now we see only puzzling reflections in a mirror'.
- 13 Robert Weimann, 'Mimesis in *Hamlet*', in Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman, eds, *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory* (London: Methuen, 1985), p.282.
- 14 See George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), pp.95–6 and 177.
- 15 *Pericles* was not included in the First Folio of 1623, here quoted from the Alexander text *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works* edited by Peter Alexander (London: Collins, 1951).
- 16 On learning by exemplar see for example Lily B. Campbell, *Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1930), pp.23–38.
- 17 Grabes, *Mutable Glass*, pp.280–329.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p.3.

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- 19 Ibid., p.32–3.
- 20 Thomas Salter quoted from Suzanne Trill, Kate Chedgzoy and Melanie Osborne, eds., *Lay by Your Needles Ladies, Take the Pen Writing Women in England 1500–1700* (London: Arnold, 1997), p.45.
- 21 Quoted from Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, eds, *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.xlvii.
- 22 Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors* (1612) facsimile edition edited by Arthur Freeman (London and New York: Garland, 1973), I, B3V – B4.
- 23 Thomas Beard, *The Theatre of Gods Judgements* (first published 1597, London: 1612), ‘The Preface’, unpaginated.
- 24 Grabes, *Mutable Glass*, p.95.
- 25 Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting* (1435–6), translated and introduced by John R. Spencer (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1966), p.83.
- 26 Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution 1603–1714* (Wokingham: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 2nd edn., 1980), p.158–9; Samuel Cooper’s 1649 miniature portrait, *Oliver Cromwell*, is in the National Portrait Gallery, London.
- 27 On images of Elizabeth see Roy Strong, *Gloriana: The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987).
- 28 In his *Notes d’un peintre* Matisse described this historical imprint as being in the artist him/herself: ‘Tous les artistes portent l’empreinte de leur , epoque, mais les grands artistes sout ceux en qui elle est marque le plus profondment’. Quoted from the facsimile copy reproduced in: Roger Benjamin, *Matisse’s “Notes of a Painter” : Criticism, Theory, and Context, 1891–1908* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1987), p.745.

Awakening from the Nightmare of History: Spinoza's Intellectual System and the Two Orders of Religion in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*

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The radical mission of Shelley's Christ in the 'Essay on Christianity' is to destroy all 'received opinions . . . all the cherished . . . superstitions of Mankind', in order to undo the chains of custom and blind faith 'by which they have been encompassed from the very cradle of their being.' The impetus for this programme to 'unchain' humanity stems from the premise of a different form of social order, existing in the 'very cradle of their being', which was sustained by an ideal integration of law and religion. These institutions, 'although perfect in their origin, have become corrupt and altered', and the single redemptive goal of all Christ's teaching, Shelley states, is the 'restoration and re-establishment of these original institutions and customs . . . to their pristine authority and splendour.'^[1] Shelley had a lifelong commitment to this concept of a temporalised Fall, centring on the radical 'alteration' and 'corruption' of religious practices and beliefs, and a proportionate decline in the quality of human experience. Juxtaposed in much of his work is a history swarming with blind, torpid multitudes in thrall to false opinions and mind-warping superstitions, and an original pristine state of existence, a first order of religion where, as in Nietzsche's formula, religious ideals are not remote and transcendent, but

inherent in human experience.^[2] In this first order of religion God is not an external deity but an 'interfused and overruling Spirit of . . . energy and wisdom . . . mysteriously and illimitably pervading the frame of things', while history enthrones as its false idol 'the Jupiter who sends rain upon the earth' (*SP*, p.201).

Shelley held a corollary belief that language itself participates in the Fall, as a product of 'altered' religious beliefs. By the time he came to write *Prometheus Unbound* in 1818 his mistrust of language and his anxiety about expressibility had become such large issues that he claimed them as the chief preoccupation of his life.^[3] These are made explicit in an essay most recently dated in the same year he composed *Prometheus Unbound*.^[4] 'On Life' argues that cognition is a simplification of the world for pragmatic ends, a process which disregards subjective experience. Language is a closed system of signification or public 'signs', 'standing not for themselves but for others in their capacity of suggesting one thought which shall lead to a train of thoughts' (*SP*, p.172). Any attempt to conceptualise beyond this closed associative chain is doomed to failure because, as Frederic Jameson argues, you can only see as much

as your linguistic model permits you to see.[5] Human consciousness is narrowed by a linguistic order which determines its parameters, and ‘Our whole life’, Shelley concludes, is ‘an education of error’ (*SP*, pp.173–4).

This notion of the empirical world as a serial testimony to a Fallen state might explain Shelley’s sometimes astonishing lack of sympathy with ordinary life and ordinary people. Wherever he travelled throughout Europe he found superstition, ignorance, ‘& all the inexpressible brutalities which degrade human nature’. People were ‘disgusting & odious’, or ‘deformed wretches’.[6] He saw human beings not as people, as one critic put it, but simply as evidence of the need for universal reform.[7] This defective sympathy is aimed inwards as well, at the collection of variable feelings which randomly and wilfully dominate consciousness, and which we call personal identity (*SL*, I, 108). For Shelley, the ‘most exalted philosophy [and] the truest virtue consists in an habitual contempt of self.’[8]

This twin contempt for human nature and its discursive media grades into a reformist optimism whenever Shelley encounters a realm of sensation which lies beyond language. During the composition of ‘Mont Blanc’ on his visit to the Alps in 1816, Shelley became aware that the search for a verbal equivalence for sublime effects can only lead to a frustrated, tongue-tied impotence. Words, the ‘ghosts of all things that are’ hover inef-

fectually above the object they wish to capture, never managing to gain purchase. This failure of language to quantify the affective charge of the sublime signals its limitations: language cannot fully incarnate experience, and Shelley can only offer a stunned tribute to a power ‘Remote . . . and inaccessible’ (96), which eludes both concepts and tropes.

But this awareness is not a negative one for Shelley. The collapse of the cognitive faculties in the sublime moment is experienced as a temporary liberation from the thralldom of thought, and the attendant sense of psychological expansiveness suggests a higher order of experience that lacks a voice, an ordinary mental state whose free expression has been occluded by the ‘Large codes of fraud and woe’ which constitute ideology (81). The ‘mysterious tongue’ of the sublime conveys a non-verbal code which the poet must ‘interpret’ (76, 83), and this interpretative act defines the modalities of timebound knowledge by revealing the partiality—and thus fictionality—of linguistic representations. Language, and thought, the product of language, are not the measure of the universe, but the expression of systems of meaning which exclude other possible meaning-systems in their claim to encompass truth.. In *Prometheus Unbound* it is possible to find two such meaning-systems, or two orders of language, one occluded by the other. In fact the plot of the poem, as one critic argues, involves the movement from one language-order

to another.[9] The poem also suggests that the power which in ‘Mont Blanc’ is ‘inaccessible’ is precisely so because its original context has been forgotten, for the order of history, or ideology, denies its expression. Shelley shared with Blake the notion that ideology has its source in religion, and the only means of understanding its operations is by an immanent critique of religious myth. This enterprise informs both the thematic and dramatic structure of *Prometheus Unbound*.

Shelley’s utopian idealism in *Prometheus Unbound* has traditionally been a source of embarrassment to his defenders, and a source of rich abuse for his detractors. Hazlitt’s stinging dismissal of the poem sets the tone for a critical heritage which views Shelley’s idealism as a distancing force in his poetry:

The author of *Prometheus Unbound* . . . is clogged by no dull system of realities, no earth-bound feelings . . . by nothing that belongs to the mighty trunk and hard husk of nature and habit, but is drawn up by irresistible levity to the regions of mere speculation and fancy.[10]

But what rescues Shelley’s project from these charges of pointless idealism is its firm grounding in a metaphysical system whose importance to the Romantic period has been charted so comprehensively in recent decades.[11] The system is that of Spinoza, whose work Shelley was acquainted with

from as early as 1813.[12] It is not difficult to see why Spinoza’s thought should have impressed itself so deeply on the radically secular cast of Shelley’s imagination. Excommunicated at the age of twenty four for ‘abominable heresies’, Spinoza went on to produce a philosophical system which, though largely unpublished in his lifetime, came to be regarded as the destroyer of all established religion and authority.[13] He had a deep distrust of language, and was a ruthless demystifier of sacred texts, revealing the mechanisms whereby figural expression hardens into the apparent truth of ideology. He consistently pointed up the conceptual limits of discursive practices, and postulated higher ‘truths’ that transcend the relativities of language and cultural praxis, and whose ownership confers power. Most importantly, he shares with Shelley the tendency to estimate the spiritual health of society through a religious model, and in his *Tractatus Theologico-Politico*, which Shelley translated in 1817 whilst simultaneously reading the Bible,[14] Spinoza provides an original context for that elusive power of ‘Mont Blanc’.

Spinoza mirrors Shelley’s division between ideal and historical modalities, through his insistence on a clean conceptual break between the realm of ideology, or lived experience, and the realm of adequate ideas.[15] Normal conscious experience is for Spinoza merely a series of agitations and fluctuations of the affections, leading to ‘mutilated and confused ideas’, which

are the sole source of ‘evil’ in society.[16] In Spinoza’s affective model body and mind form a material and somatic unity—the health of one determining the health of the other—where ‘thoughts’ are ‘affects’ or feelings, stimulated or depressed by a sequence of external causes. Spinoza, like Shelley, includes language as an affective agent in this sequence. As with all other external causes, language works on the principle of association: whether we hear the word ‘apple’ (*pomum*), or see the impression of an object in the dust, the result is the same: the mind is impelled into an association of ideas relative to its particular experience. As we all have broadly similar thoughts and feelings, we are able to extrapolate from these particular experiences general terms and classificatory concepts, and enable communication within a conceptual scheme where we all occupy fairly similar positions. But this scheme does not reflect truth, only the transitory affects of a finite mode of nature. ‘Thoughts’ are merely the record of our chance collisions with material reality, and consist of the confused, composite images generated by this random order of sense-experience. For this reason the mind is not free and active in the production of ideas, but bound and passive.[17] Risking a rare metaphor, Spinoza describes ordinary human experience as powerless and pathetically unstable: we are constantly ‘agitated by contrary winds like waves of the sea . . . unconscious of our issue and our fate.’[18] History is the record of this uncertainty, and its narratives are based on ignorance,

error and, most of all, the superstitions of false religions. Hence the world of history is equated with existential suffering, estimated as a privation of knowledge, and experienced in the individual as a painful diminution of power and vitality.[19]

Another way of thinking about the world, however, is to conceive of things under the form of eternity. In this scheme Spinoza posits an absolute order of necessary truth, ‘fixed and unchangeable’, behind the limited perspectives of empirical history, and occluded by history’s banal testimonies.[20] In this order there is one self-determining substance whose name is God or Nature (*Deus sive Natura*). This substance forms a complete, perfect and eternal system, and to come to understand that system is to achieve the highest form of intellectual perfection, which Spinoza calls the love of God. The God of the *Ethics* is not an external, supernatural deity, but constitutes, like Shelley’s ‘interfused’ God, the essence of the human mind itself, a form of consciousness in which we ‘partake’ and which, the more it occupies us, the more perfect and happier we are.[21] So what appears to be a materialist doctrine of nature, where the theological term ‘God’ exists as a superfluous co-signifier thrown in to appease the orthodox, is in fact a theory of intellectual perfection which conflates the human and divine, an order of awareness or consciousness

attuned to the eternal order of nature, as it might appear to a pure, God-like intelligence.[22]

But Spinoza does not leave us immured in this prison-house of delusory historical phenomena. The ideal world, or the knowledge of God, appears in flashes, and these exemplary truths alert us to the existence of a genuine order of knowledge behind the screen of empirical delusion.[23] In these moments the mind is freed from external causes, and is identical with the infinite intellect.[24] This temporary freedom signals an ideally possible freedom which might be achieved under the right social conditions. In fact, it seemed theoretically possible to Spinoza to design a social system which would entail this intellectual freedom.[25] If the quality of experience is measured as the healthy balance of mind and body, or ideas and their affects, a properly-constituted society could re-direct the selfish instinctual drives towards objects worthy of interest, thus muting those random affects that arise from our personal contact with the material world. Free will, for Spinoza, is merely the license to commit error, hence all 'social' action, if it is to achieve freedom, must be robbed of individual significance. This permits the redirection of desire at goals which are common to all and constant for each, and precludes a purely personal and selfish interest in the world.

Spinoza lends credence to his theory by discovering this project of social planning in the work of Moses, the Lawgiver in the Old Testament, whose self-imposed task is to establish social cohesion in a primitive community, and to free them from natural necessity. Spinoza shared the Hobbesian view that pre-social human nature was prone to a perpetual jostling of temporary, immediate passions, a continuous appetitive restlessness driven by 'fleshly instincts and emotions which take no thought beyond the present and immediate object' (*TTP*, p.73). As the promise of a future benefit from social obedience could not secure a voluntary subjection, Moses 'imagined' a powerful supernatural essence—figurally conceived of as 'fire'—to which conduct must be referred, so that individuals would do their duty 'from devotion rather than from fear' (*Ibid.*) He devised a 'ceremonial' law, where 'Men should do nothing of their own free will . . . and should continually confess by their actions and thoughts that they were not their own masters, but were entirely under the control of others':

they were not allowed to plough, to sow, to reap, nor even to eat; to clothe themselves, to shave, to rejoice, or in fact to do anything whatever as they liked, but were bound to follow the direction given in the law (*TTP*, pp.75–6).

Duty was gradually nourished by these daily rites until it 'passed into the very nature' of the people (*TTP*, p.229). In this original religion, then, the mechanics of power do not exist in outward forms, but reach into the very grain of the subject's consciousness. Because religious law is fully internalised within the rhythms of lived experience, there is no individually motivated action: the subject lives and works and has his whole being in a religious ritual, stripped of all freedom except that of freely making the gestures of his submission 'all by himself.'^[26] The random sequence of individual causality is thus replaced by a series of implanted interpretative connections, clustering around a transcendental signifier, and which combine to form a collective consciousness. Spinoza's description of a material practice entering the realm of ideas in order to 'naturalise' law is cited by Louis Althusser as the fullest possible exposition of the project of ideology: to reconstruct self-determining individuals into social subjects through an aesthetic modulation of the psyche.^[27]

But ideology does not have a pejorative sense in this formulation. To experience consciousness through a screen of regulative ideas is a pre-condition for the socialising process itself, creating a symbolic space in which the community thinks itself and celebrates its collective unity.^[28] The ultimate goal of this pristine religion is not to oppress people but to release them from their subjection to natural law. It enables a qualitative

shift from the nagging particulars of pre-social life to a collective security, from the enslaving principle of self to a heightened form of social consciousness purged of the wanton desires of the sense-drive. Matthew Arnold usefully describes this form of consciousness as the euphoria of virtue,^[29] arising because 'happiness' automatically follows the selfless behaviour of social interaction. The expression of this euphoria is essentially poetic, as new combinations of language are 'thrown out' in an attempt to grasp the vast new object of consciousness generated by social interaction..^[30] Poetry is simultaneously prophecy or 'imagination', in its vision of the goal of collective work and the true forms of desire.^[31] Spinoza suggests that this process could lead up through stages of increasing detachment from the contingencies of external causes to a point where mind could contemplate eternal ideas.

This project of social planning is thus fostered by what Shelley termed in his 'Essay on Christianity' the 'ideal integration' of law and religion, giving rise to the pristine authority and splendour of our original social institutions and customs. Moses' Promethean strategy was to bring 'fire' into human existence, initially conceived of as an overruling supernatural essence, but then slowly subsumed into human nature as the collective emanation of social euphoria, or, in Arnold's term, 'the Shining'.^[32] The collapse of this project is coeval with

Adam's transgression. In Spinoza's fully humanised version of the Fall, Adam is not the first father, but the first prophet to break a law inscribed with the name of God, 'despite the certain knowledge that evil would follow' (*TTP*, p.63). A strict and totally selfless obedience is the absolute precondition of social well-being, Adam is aware, but his perverse submission to forbidden, individual desire—knowledge, or 'private' power—typifies the revival of pre-social instincts within the community. Through his personal hunger for facts, Adam 'breaks free' from the imaginative world of the community and is sunk in the Blakean coils of a false rationalism. The 'evil' that follows is the only evil Spinoza countenances in his philosophy: the realm of 'confused and mutilated ideas' into which the hapless Adam falls. Adam is now 'at war with himself.' Exiled from the 'eternal vision' of social virtue, he inhabits a world of self-division and mental strife (*TTP*, p.35).

Hence the Fall for Spinoza entails a series of affects which take place within the perceptions and feelings of the subject, a causal sequence shading from psyche to soma. Experience after the Fall is not different, it is simply experienced differently. When the lived sensation of virtue deserts action, the social ritual loses its imaginative unity and becomes simply work, or labour. The Orphic song of the community—the imaginative language in which it extends and celebrates its collective solidarity—loses its significance for Adam, as it

ceases to be accountable to his own experience. In Arnold's description of this process, the supernatural tropes lose their connection with the living language and concretise into things, personalities, people. The 'spirit of virtue' eulogised as *The Shining*, materialises, when the God of experience is extinguished, as 'The Lord'.^[33] The free-floating term cannot stand in for anything but its objectified self, and the collective content of the idea is privatised in terms of an individual, anterior deity. Adam participates in this because, to use Durkheim's formula, the ritualised social system is created and imposed by the human will, yet it ultimately escapes the consciousness of any single individual. It is more a kind of super-mind which binds the clan, and not an object of perception.^[34] The imagery of a power no longer internal to experience is reconstructed as the attributes of an external providence which governs human nature, and which is seen as responsible for the pain and depressed vitality which attend transgression. The original religious myth which spoke directly to the subject now seems to come from outside, a voice of the Other, and Adam talks to God 'as though he had to do with a man' (*TTP*, pp.35;63).

Hence the Fall for Spinoza marks the advent of a second order of religion which supplants and conceals the first order. The fragmented, alienated condition of human existence in history implies an original state of unity against which it takes its

measure, and yet that unity can only be alluded to conjecturally, as it is not an object of sustained mythical focus, which sees creation and transgression as almost contiguous events. It is in this context of two religious orders, one true and one false, 'the first repressed by the second', that Freud makes his famous comment that religious behaviour is a neurotic symptom. After 'the breaking of the laws' the true religion of Moses—a lived religion where God is an immanence—is superseded by the false religion of the priests, where a material representation of a deity with supernatural attributes becomes an object of neurotic terror.[35] Nietzsche also views this second order of religion as one of alienation: meaning is displaced to a world beyond, and 'true being' is displaced from the sensible world, which in turn loses its meaning.[36]

These two orders of religion, and their correlative orders of experience, provide the structural principle of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*. The play opens with a speech which firmly places it within the second order, with an external deity in place, and human suffering equated with his reign:

Prometheus. Monarch of Gods and Daemons,
and all Spirits
But one, who throng those bright and rolling worlds
Which Thou and I alone of living things
Behold with sleepless eyes! regard this Earth

Made multitudinous with thy slaves, whom thou
Requiest for knee-worship, prayer, and praise,
And toil, and hecatombs of broken hearts,
With fear and self-contempt and barren hope.[37]

Jupiter's status as a mere image, built from the formless language of illusion, is a grounding premise for most critical interpretations of the poem. His reign has been decoded as the projection of an essentially human energy, a shadow self-created by Prometheus' imaginings.[38] Jupiter is a hollow fiction, a phantom of grammar which shimmers into life when poetic relations become symbolic systems of control, and the discursive representations of Prometheus' mythology harden into the received ideology.[39] Yet Prometheus is convinced of the reality of his object of defiance to the point of obsession. The opening speech locates the Titan in a fixed relation to Jupiter through an identity of self and other, monarch and subject, victim and tyrant, and to sustain his sleepless vigil all the springs of his 'all-enduring will' are directed towards his enemy (1, 118). The Spinozistic implication here is that the objectification of the deity affects the entire content of consciousness. This mental order constitutes mythic time, a realm whose empire is history, in which Prometheus has endured 'Three thousand years of sleep-unsheltered hours,/And moments aye divided by keen pangs/Till they

seemed years' (I, 12–15). There are numerous references throughout the act to history as an inescapable modality, its 'wingless, crawling hours' the only possible reality (I, 48). Jove's messenger Mercury similarly insists that there is no experience outside history, no refuge from the 'weary years' in which humans must endure and suffer (I, 363).

Within the modalities of this timebound world individuals experience an isolation and alienation which resembles their pre-social existence. The characters in the play dwell in separate solitudes, mental as well as physical. Each is embroiled in a painfully private order of experience, an individual process of thought-association that is unintelligible to the other. Act I and the beginning of Act II are dominated by confusion, amnesia, and the recurrent collisions of semantic zones. Verbal transmission of information is fractured and partial, a system of affects which merely bewilder the listener. Words evoke thoughts which are indistinguishable from physical sensations, visceral tinglings like unwanted intimacies that disturb Prometheus with an unpleasant faintness (I, 146). The spiritual energies which once informed the world of nature no longer commune with Prometheus, who hears only lingering airs, 'mute' echoes, and 'an awful whisper . . . scarce like sound' (I, 250; 130–3). Amnesia is also a key theme in these acts. Memory is sketchy and unreliable, or it denies characters access to the past. Words are forgotten or mislaid, events are

telescoped or misinterpreted, and emphasis is purely on the negative qualities of past experience. The Earth-Mother's account of Prometheus' redemption of humanity fails to provide any meaningful account of that process. She alludes only to one incandescent moment of freedom when Prometheus arose 'a spirit of keen joy', and humans uplifted 'their prostrate brows from the polluting dust' (I, 158–60) before being plunged into the tyranny of Jupiter's reign. To put this another way, there are two kinds of myth alluded to in the Earth's testimony: a myth of creation (when a spirit of joy ruled), and a myth of transgression (Prometheus' defiance of heaven). But these two orders of myth are collapsed together so that creation and transgression appear to be the same thing. So although the play presupposes that original unity by which the fallen world must be evaluated, the mythic pattern provides no emotional or semantic space for its expression. Prometheus' own reign, with its power and its poetry—that original language that is now reduced to 'ghastly talk/In darkness' (I, 244–5)—is effectively elided from consciousness. This concurs with the exigencies of the second order of religion, expressed by the furies, where freedom is instantly transfigured into its antithesis, and social reform equated with tyrannous repression. It is also a well-evidenced dictum of the play that Jupiter's power issued from Prometheus himself ('I gave all/He has', Prometheus tells Mercury [I, 381–2]), yet how this power-relation was reversed is not represented with any

logical coherence. It is for this reason that some critics have dismissed the Earth's testimony as unreliable.[40] Like Blake's Angels, the Earth-Mother views change and potency with a fearful, gothic conservatism, one which powerfully buttresses the oppression she allegedly opposes.

If we recognise, then, that the fallen world emerges from the sensations and suspect testimonies of characters who are embroiled in its conceptual order, it is possible to view the negative affects experienced by these characters from a more positive slant. The first act pivots on a change of heart, when Prometheus unreflectingly asserts that he 'hates no more', and that the desire for evil 'is dead within' (I, 57;71). This moment of change is instantly bewailed by the Earth, who interprets it as a weakness that will permit Jove a stronger foothold in his bid to vanquish the Titan and his people. But by revoking this hatred, expressed most fully in the doom-laden curse, Prometheus unwittingly suspends his unrelenting act of will that has kept Jupiter in place for three thousand years, and hence enables the circumstances where the mythic order can be viewed as contingent. In Spinozistic terms, Prometheus' spontaneous urge to 'recall' his curse is in service to an idea that is not part of the associative order of myth. This idea, which rises free and unbidden in the mind, also guides Prometheus to reject words as 'vain' (I, 303), and this is a crucially necessary step towards recognising the implication of

experiences that are unrepresentable in language. Throughout Act I the whole process of perception is troubled and defective and confused. The mental landscape is in an unpredictable flux, and illusion and reality have no clear boundaries. Prometheus is constantly prey to fleeting, indistinct images and sounds, and is continually 'mocked' by shapeless sights that hover at the edge of vision, which he calls 'The ghastly people from the realm of dreams' (I, 37). The gothic diction of Prometheus and the Earth define these visitations as troubling hallucinations, logically related to the pressure of dreams on a brain exhausted by a protracted wakefulness. But equally they could be read as the encroachment on the conscious mind of spiritual energies demanding recognition after the long sleepless night of the soul. Put another way, Prometheus' spontaneous change of heart has created a condition where empirical perception comes under threat from the potent, undefined energies which surround it. This suggests the 'collected lightning' of the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, whose ultimate discharge in the 'predestined hour' will effect an 'unimagined change' in the opinions which cement the social condition.[41]

These affects similarly undermine the ontological certainty which Prometheus bestows on supernatural entities. Despite Prometheus' insistence that individual identities are defined and fixed by his truculent resistance to Jupiter, there are many

examples in the first two acts of a protean slippage of identity. As he gazes at the ‘execrable shapes’ of the furies, Prometheus finds himself fusing with his object: ‘Methinks I grow like what I contemplate’ (I, 449–50). While he studies the features of Jove’s phantasm, it slowly mutates into his own self-image as it prepares to repeat Prometheus’ former words:

Prometheus. I see the curse on gestures proud and cold,
And looks of firm defiance, and calm hate,
And such despair as mocks itself with smiles,
Written as on a scroll.

(I, 258–61)

Hence those habitual modes of perception which support the mythic order are, from the moment that Prometheus experiences his change of heart, under threat from the forces of the Underworld, that nebulous realm which the characters in the play never fully understand. The Earth explains the Underworld as a mirror-universe, a place where every living creature has its double or ‘shade’. The platonic suggestion of ‘shadows’ and ‘forms’, supports both the mythic order’s dualism between sensuous and supersensuous, living and dead, the world of nature and the world beyond the grave, and also the belief, expressed by the Earth, that only death can

collapse that dualism (I, 199). But the Underworld can also be interpreted as proof of a mental division within the individual mind,[42] a division that has been matched with Kant’s distinction between noumenal and phenomenal realms.[43] In this reading, the manifest energies and forms which press on the threshold of consciousness and the far borders of memory are indices of a subjective power that has been abdicated and forgotten, for the short-sighted rationalism of myth doubts and denies the reality of affects which cannot be traced to their immediate causes. What are in fact vestigial, primordial memories and their somatic affects are misrecognised as phantoms, for the second-order religion denies any context where such manifestations could be realised. Hence in the Earth’s testimony they are neutralised and silenced, driven underground to a dead zone where ghostly shades mutter their secret, ineffectual language in darkness. This rigid dichotomy, again couched in gothic epithets, deflects attention from the unimaginably vital energies contained in the underworld, which is described as a place of

Dreams and the light imaginings of men,
And all that faith creates or love desires,
Terrible, strange, sublime and beauteous shapes

(I, 200–2)

When Prometheus forgets the terms of his curse we find that it resides intact, undimmed by time, in the Underworld, suggesting a realm beyond the reach of history and temporal relations. The ‘strange’ and ‘sublime’ shapes are epitomised above all by Demogorgon, a ‘tremendous gloom’ (I, 207) or boundless material extension who similarly teases spatial relations out of thought. Moreover, the shades or spirits who reside in the Underworld are agents of a collective rather than an individual consciousness—the Earth suggests that one shade will do as much as another in recalling the curse—and each, including Jupiter, is similarly compelled to obey Prometheus’ summons: ‘Ask, and they must reply’ (I, 215). This relationship between the apparently ‘real’ world and the Underworld symbolically returns both power and agency to Prometheus, and this is further underlined when, through Prometheus’ power, the shade of Jupiter repeats the curse:

Ay, do thy worst. Thou art omnipotent.
O’er all things but thyself I gave thee power,
And my own will. Be thy swift mischiefs sent
To blast mankind, from yon ethereal tower.
Let thy malignant spirit move
In darkness over those I love:

On me and mine I imprecate
The utmost torture of thy hate.

(I, 272–79)

Prometheus’ original curse was in fact a self-fulfilling prophecy. True to his nominal role as ‘forethinker’, Prometheus, like Spinoza’s Adam, predicted that evil would surely follow his naming (or cursing) Jupiter as the source of humanity’s ills. Jove, as the Earth-Mother has made clear, carried out to the letter the ‘swift mischiefs’ predicted by Prometheus. When Jupiter’s double appears, Prometheus correctly recognises it as a spectral, floating signifier with no fixed attributes: the phantasm lacks thought, and memory, and all powers of recognition or understanding, and it is only Prometheus’ ‘possession’ of the spectre that permits animation. Yet this awareness is not expressed as an idea, but in the ambiguous language of proleptic irony:

Prometheus. Tremendous Image, as thou art must be
He whom thou shadowest forth. I am his foe,
The Titan. Speak the words which I would hear,
Although no thought inform thine empty voice.

(I, 246–9)

As well as his ability to summon shades from the ‘inaccessible’ Underworld, and thus gain access to the collective memory of the repressed unconscious, it is also made clear that Prometheus himself summons the furies, and Mercury, too, must ‘obey’ him (I, 432;435). Yet Prometheus fails to recognise these proofs of self-agency, because the overarching myth denies their possibility. Instead, he passively submits to torture by the ‘thought-executing’ furies of Jove (I, 387), who come to reinforce that equation between reform and suffering first articulated by Earth, and to proclaim the essential powerlessness of Prometheus’ state. But from the subliminal hints of the play it is evident that the furies are in fact internal forces, agents of individual conscience which function as ‘dread thought beneath thy brain,/And foul desire round thine astonished heart’ (I, 488–9). Prometheus, like Adam, is at war with himself: one aspect of his mind is subliminally aware that change is imminent, while another despairingly confirms that human nature will remain imprisoned in the empirical world of history, and that suffering is inevitable and eternal:

Prometheus. Ah woe! Alas! pain, pain ever, for ever!
I close my tearless eyes, but see more clear
Thy works within my woe-illumined mind,
Thou subtle tyrant! Peace is in the grave.

(I, 635–8)

Prometheus’ mind and body are co-sufferers: mental agonies are imaged forth as physical wounds, which serve as a trope for the depressed vitality Prometheus attributes to Jove’s tyranny. Myth is thus a system of psychical affects which enact a form of dismemberment on the human body.

In ‘Julian and Maddalo’, which he composed just prior to *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley cited the will as the sole cause of spiritual atrophy. But he also suggested that the chains that bind the spirit were not adamantine but ‘Brittle perchance as straw’.^[44] This echoes Spinoza’s belief that change is ready-to-hand, and the sophistication of *Prometheus Unbound* lies in its awareness of the ideological impediments placed in the way of reform, that system of beliefs, ‘truths’ and mental impulses which support the realm of delusory appearances. The ‘all-miscreative brain of Jove’ (I, 448) is actually Prometheus’ own brain, but only when the will is fully detached from the object of its obsession will Prometheus be able to become aware of this. To this extent Prometheus remains complicit in his own oppression. He is disenfranchised as a true seeker of truth, for his involvement in the second order of religion is complete. The negative or ‘evil’ affects that are generated by his belief in Jove form a network of conscious self-restraints, which only sleep can paralyse. But sleep is what Prometheus fears most, and is something to which he will not submit:

All things are still: alas! how heavily
This quiet morning weighs upon my heart;
Though I should dream I could even sleep with grief
If slumber were denied not.

(I, 812–5)

Act I stubbornly insists on the value of consciousness, and concludes with Prometheus' resolve to remain awake. Act II begins in the aftermath of sleep and dreams, and its momentum stems from these. Panthea, who slept at Prometheus' feet, has had two dreams, one of which she has forgotten. In the other, remembered, dream Panthea has seen Prometheus in his pristine splendour, the form which lives 'unchanged within' (II, 65). In the dream the 'all-dissolving power' of love creates a mystical, sexual union between them that transcends individual identity, sense-perceptions, and thought itself:

I saw not, heard not, moved not, only felt
His presence flow and mingle through my blood
Till it became his life, and his grew mine.

(II, 79–81)

When Panthea kisses Ione during this suspended state, she evokes in her sister a desire which no longer coincides with her preconceived notions of fulfilment, and which has no phenomenal equivalence:

I always knew what I desired before,
Nor ever found delight to wish in vain.
But now I cannot tell thee what I seek:
I know not.

(II, 95–8)

There is a clear signal here for the immanence of a libidinal revolution, drawing on the memory-traces of a forgotten era, but it is impeded by a lack of understanding. The image of a Promethean self that lies immeasurably above that which he usually takes to be himself is, yet again, a 'truth' which lies beyond the conceptual reach of myth. 'Prometheus unbound' is an image that lacks a concept in the mind's associative content: it is not generated by empirical causes but arises as a free, independent idea unconnected to habitual modes of perception. Dreams, Shelley insists, elude the gridlock of empirical experience, and permit 'gleams of a remoter world' to visit the soul.^[45] In Panthea's dream new meaning is evoked analogically through a language of somatic impulses, as she

experiences the original fusion of the individual with a binding spirit of love. But the visual imagery of her dream is merely a response to a ‘hidden’ or forgotten narrative to which there is no access through language. When Panthea subsequently relates the dream to Asia she undoubtedly ‘speaks’, but in a language that is literally empty of significance. Panthea’s rapturous description of her union with Prometheus maps the contours of a desire beyond empirical experience, and evokes only an affective zero in her listener:

Asia: Thou speakest, but thy words
Are as the air: I feel them not: oh, lift
Thine eyes, that I may read his written soul!

(II, 108–10)

Asia’s narrative strategy here is to evade an historically-situated language whose parameters exclude the notion of freedom. When the dream is ‘told’ the free, unbound image of Prometheus has become an experiential reality, but its significance is still impeded by insufficient knowledge. In her perception of the image Asia confronts an unassimilable concept: her understanding is checked and her response is shock: ‘*Panthea*. Why lookest thou as if a spirit passed?’ (II, 118). Spinoza’s definition of wonder is applicable here. Wonder

is ‘the conception of anything, wherein the mind comes to a stand, because the particular concept in question has no connection with other concepts’^[46] Christopher Norris sees this definition as a prototype of the sublime moment when experience exceeds phenomenal cognition.^[47] Asia thus glimpses a ‘truth’ outside the grasp of language, one that evolves at the level of immediate, pre-reflective experience and which emerges in the mind without an act of will. The inference here is that Prometheus is actually enchained by the conceptual network of historically bound knowledge. When the image is experienced the ‘forgotten’ dream manifests itself in consciousness as a spectral immanence:

What shape is that between us? Its rude hair
Roughens the wind that lifts it, its regard
Is wild and quick, yet ‘tis a thing of air.

(II, 127–9)

Although still anthropomorphic and vaguely threatening, the dream-image of Demogorgon suggests the immaterial quality of an experiential God. When Panthea recounts her forgotten dream Asia recognises it as her own dream too: ‘As you speak, your words/ Fill, pause by pause, my own forgotten sleep/ With shapes’ (II, 142–4). As the gleams of this forgotten dream

strike them with baffling congruity, boundaries between self and other are dissolved, and mental experience becomes identical. The dream is not a narrative but an imperative: the single term ‘Follow’ is inscribed across the entire face of empirical nature, urging Asia and Panthea on a mental journey to the source of the forgotten dream. The manifold of empirical phenomena thus points beyond itself, signalling an endless deferral of meaning, a movement which entails the gradual emptying out of the phenomenal and the suggested and gradual presence of the noumenal,[48] represented by that underworld which caused so much confusion in Act I. In his role as an ‘eternal’ being Demogorgon, the overruling spirit of the underworld, resembles Zurvan, a supreme being in Zoroastrian myth who dwells in infinite time, beyond the conflicts that exist in history, and beyond good and evil, which are products of the fallen world.

Demogorgon is the only character in the play with access to the truth, yet his principal thematic function is to express the inexpressibility of that truth and, as the scene in the underworld unfolds, to link all representations of truth in the fallen world to ignorance and evil. Paul Cantor rightly classifies *Prometheus Unbound* as an ‘anti-mythic myth’, a work which uproots myths from their original contexts and recombines them in a way that disempowers their traditional claims to truth-value.[49] The meeting between Asia and Demogorgon

takes place in a scene whose strategies mock the stubborn certainties of mythic knowledge in order to wrest perception from its subjugation to mythic fictions. Demogorgon is represented as a ‘veiled form’ on a throne. But when the veil ‘falls’—Shelley’s favourite trope for the cleansing of perception—there is nothing beneath: ‘neither limb,/ Nor form, nor outline; yet we feel it is/ A living Spirit’ (II, 2; 5–7). Demogorgon’s very name is an illusion, a ghost-word resulting from a medieval mistranscription of the name Demiurge, creator of all things.[50] He invites a catechism where he will ‘tell all’, yet his repetitive, laconic responses to Asia’s questions merely draws from her the extent of her own knowledge about human history. Both Prometheus and the Earth-Mother had produced fragmentary, incoherent accounts of history, both centring on and obsessed with the cosmic aftermath of Prometheus’ curse. Asia’s myth is much fuller, and resembles again the Zoroastrian account of the four stages of history, each lasting three thousand years: the creation is followed by an undisturbed, thoughtless co-existence of man and beast (the reign of Saturn in Asia’s myth). Then the evil spirit (Jupiter) enters the world, and good and evil mingle in human nature, causing a network of confused desires—the ‘fierce wants’ and shadows of ‘unreal good’ which she sees as the source of mental torment in her myth (II, 55–7). The final stage marks the advent of the redeemer, and the universe is restored

to an everlasting purified state in which the saved, now immortal, sign the praises of their God.[51]

In Asia's myth however there is a further stage, where the redeemer is chained by his God and humanity regresses to its former self-division and fragmentation, where man is driven on, 'the wreck of his own will . . . / The outcast, the abandoned, the alone' (II, 104–5). So although the pattern is broadly Zoroastrian, Spinoza's narrative of social origins and the Fall serve as the figural content of Asia's myth. Asia's description of the fluxes of human destiny links the origins of myth with history itself. Time 'fell' from Saturn's throne, defining human history as the interrelationship between man and his preordained overlords: the exteriorised gods are a postulate anterior to that narrative, always already positioned in a time prior to human knowledge. Yet Asia is dissatisfied with this account of history, for it fails to pinpoint the true locus of power. The reign of Saturn, marked by a pre-reflective humanity like 'semi-vital worms', and Saturn's Epicurean indifference to human fate, is succeeded by Jove's reign, when Jupiter uses his power to inflict miseries on human nature. But his power is endowed from outside: 'Prometheus/ Gave wisdom, which is strength, to Jupiter' (II, 43–4). In other words Jove's omnipotence is an attribute originally conferred on the god by Prometheus himself, as a means to human freedom. Yet Jove has exactly reversed the role for which he was 'empowered'.

The fall of Prometheus is attributed to the 'omnipotent' Jove, even though Asia's testimony has reversed this power-order. As in the Earth-Mother's testimony, the point of reversal is not represented, but vaguely conjectured as a function of solitude: Jove is goaded into malice through the sheer arrogance of individual power: 'to be/Omnipotent but friendless is to reign' (II, 47–8). Asia returns to this point of agency in her final summary of fallen human nature. She equates evil with 'self-contempt', born of man's lowly status as the 'wreck of his own will' (II, 104). But she has to demand a 'name' for the source of that evil. The source is not Jupiter, she is aware, for when Prometheus cursed him Jupiter 'trembled like a slave. Declare/ Who is his master?/ Whom calledst thou God?' (II, 108–12).

Up to this point Demogorgon's responses have implied a crucial distinction between 'God' and 'Jupiter'. God is an eternal principle, while Jupiter 'reigns', that is, he exists as a continuum in historical time. When Asia asks him whom he calls God he is compelled to speak 'as ye speak.' Asia lacks the conceptual framework which would make sense of an immanent, immaterial deity, for she has only partial dream-traces of the prelapsarian world. The term 'God', as Demogorgon means it, is an empty signifier for Asia, who thinks in the historical time of her myth, so a description of the pristine consciousness would be useless:

through the nets of language. She has already described the conditions of the prelapsarian world, but missed its meaning. Ironically, the only time that an external deity is absent from Asia's myth is during the intellectual awakening of society, when the human birthright of 'self-empire' and love (II, 42) had been enabled by Prometheus, and

the harmonious mind
Poured itself forth in all-prophetic song;
And music lifted up the listening spirit
Until it walked, exempt from mortal care,
Godlike.

(II, 75–9)

At this point the regulative function of the named God described by Spinoza in the *Tractatus* has been internalised within human consciousness: sensuous and supersensuous, human and divine, are conflated, and 'subjection' is freedom rather than bondage. Asia's description of human autonomy is, however, bracketed as a frail contingency between two 'omnipotent' reigns of supernatural tyranny, and hence devalued. The preordination of the gods to human history pre-empts any strike that would reduce them to a humanly-invented fiction.

Asia's interpretative act forms the doctrinal conclusion to the play, and effects the collapse of the antithesis of natural and supernatural as she comes to understand that there are two orders of meaning, a mythic order and an ideal order. The false order of myth is a story that is bound in time, place and circumstance. The true order displays actions 'according to the unchangeable forms of human nature and eternal truth' (*SP*, p.281). The predestined hour of freedom is simultaneous to Asia's awareness of the illusions of ideology, and this awareness signals the end of myth, and thus history. All that remains for Demogorgon to do is to announce Jupiter's powerlessness and shut forever the gates of heaven:

Lift thy lightnings not,
The tyranny of heaven none may retain,
Or resume, or hold, succeeding thee.

(III, 56–8)

This reading of the first two acts of *Prometheus Unbound* rescues Shelley from that charge of nebulousness fashionable since Hazlitt's criticism in the 1820s. For Hazlitt, the apparent division of the intellect and the emotions evident in the poem compels Shelley to abandon any possible reality to wander irresponsibly in the realm of a Romantic Arcadia, to paint

‘gaudy, flimsy allegorical pictures on gauze, on the cobwebs of his . . . brain.[52]. A Spinozistic equation of mind and body, however, linking ideas and human affects, fix the drama firmly in both an intellectual and a somatic register. If there are illusions in the play, they are the hereditary defects of a metaphysical tradition which postulates realities answering to ideas for which no empirical conditions of application can be specified, and not Shelley’s personal responsibility.

Chapter 3: Notes

- 1 *Shelley's Prose, or The Trumpet of a Prophecy*, edited by David Lee Clark (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1954): pp.199–200. Subsequent references cited in the text as *SP*.
- 2 *The Twilight of the Idols*, quoted in J.P.Stern, *Nietzsche* (London: Fontana, 1978), p.53.
- 3 Karen A. Weisman, *Imageless Truths: Shelley's Poetic Fictions*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994): p.83.
- 4 By P.M.S. Dawson, in *The Unacknowledged Legislator* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980): Appendix, 'The Dating of Shelley's Extant Prose Works', pp.282–83.
- 5 Frederic Jameson, *The Prison House of Language*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p.14.
- 6 *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley* edited by Frederick L. Jones, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1964); 2 Volumes: II, pp.43, 67; I, p.487. Subsequent references cited in the text as *SL*.
- 7 Simon Haines, *Shelley's Poetry: The Divided Self*, (London: Macmillan Press, 1997), p.72.
- 8 *The Journals of Mary Shelley 1814–1844*, ed. P.R. Feldman and D. Scott-Kilvert, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); 2 Volumes: I, p.36.
- 9 David Punter, 'Shelley: Poetry and Politics', in *Romanticism and Ideology* ed. David Aers, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p.163.
- 10 *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, edited by P.P. Howe (London and Toronto, 1930–34), 21 Volumes: 8, pp.148–9.
- 11 See Thomas McFarland, *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), and Christopher Norris, *Spinoza and the Rise of Modern Critical Theory*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993).
- 12 Edward Dowden, *Life of Shelley*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), p.374.

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- 13 See Stuart Hampshire, *Spinoza*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1953), p.26.
- 14 Dowden, p.445.
- 15 Norris, p.24.
- 16 Spinoza, *Ethics*, v, props.28;38, *Demonst.*; subsequent reference cited in the text. All references to the *Ethics* are to the originally numbered Parts and Propositions, Definitions, Demonstrations, Appendices and Notes of that work.
- 17 *E.* II, Prop. 18–37.
- 18 *E.* III, Prop.59, *Note*.
- 19 *E.* v, Prop.29, *Schol.*; III, Prop.2, *Note*.
- 20 Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, trans. R.H.M. Elwes, (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1955), p.44; subsequent references cited in the text as *TTP*.
- 21 *E.* II, Prop.34, *Demonst.*; V, Prop.20, *Schol.*, Prop. 31, *Schol.*
- 22 Norris, p.37.
- 23 Hampshire, p.175.
- 24 R.J. Delahunty, *Spinoza* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p.301.
- 25 *Spinoza*, p.42.
- 26 Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, translated by Ben Brewster, (London: NLB, 1971), p.169.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p.164.
- 28 Jameson, p.70.
- 29 Virtue is also described by Spinoza as ‘blessedness’, and the more the mind delights in this ‘the less it suffers from affects which are evil’ (*E.* V, Prop.42, *Demonst.*).
- 30 *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R.H. Super, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1960–77); 11 Volumes: 6, pp.179; 181–7.

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- 31 Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p.106.
- 32 Arnold, VI, p.184.
- 33 Arnold, VI, p.184.
- 34 Quoted in Richard Harland, *Superstructuralism* (London: Methuen, 1987), p.24.
- 35 Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, translated by James Strachey, (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953–74); 24 Volumes: 23, *Moses and Monotheism*, pp.51–8.
- 36 Stern, p.53.
- 37 *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. by Thomas Hutchinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), *Prometheus Unbound*, ll.1–8; subsequent reference to line numbers cited in text.
- 38 O’Neill, *The Human Mind’s Imaginings*, p.97.
- 39 Weisman, p.90; Hogle, p.171.
- 40 See, for example, M.H. Scrivener, *Radical Shelley* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p.151.
- 41 *Poetical Works*, p.206.
- 42 O’Neill, *The Human Mind’s Imaginings*, p.95.
- 43 See Earl Wasserman, *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), p.132.
- 44 ‘Julian and Maddalo’, 181–2.
- 45 ‘Mont Blanc’, ll. 49–50.
- 46 E III, Def 4
- 47 Norris, p.44.
- 48 See D.J. Hughes, ‘Potentiality in *Prometheus Unbound*’ (Boston: *Studies in Romanticism*, ii, 1963), pp.107–26.

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- 49 Paul Cantor, *Creature and Creator* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.94. For a survey of the full range of these neutralised myths see Jerrold Hogle, *Shelley's Process: Radical Transference and the Development of His Major Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.172.
- 50 See *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, ed. M.C. Howatson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.179.
- 51 See the *Encyclopaedia of Religion* ed. Mircea Eliade, (London: Macmillan, 1987); 15 Volumes: 15, 'Zoroastrianism'.
- 52 Hazlitt, Vol. 7, pp.245–6.

Devices of concealment and revelation in Jackie Kay's *Trumpet*

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At a Brighton poetry reading in May 1999, Jackie Kay declared that she was proud of the labels – black, Scottish and lesbian – that reviewers attached to her when discussing her work, adding that all three of these identities did not detract from, but rather enhanced her ‘personhood’. In her first novel, the writer celebrates the personhood of the character, Joss Moody, a famous trumpeter who is revealed to be, on his death, a woman. In a series of different narratives, interspersed throughout the principal, first person account of Joss Moody’s widow, Millie, Kay examines other characters’ responses to the disclosure that Joss Moody had lived a transgendered life. In the very first paragraph of *Trumpet* (1998), Millie ruefully observes: ‘It used to be such a certain thing, just being myself.’^[1] She expresses her dismay at the way the press photographers relentlessly pursue her, capturing and printing images of her that she does not recognise. Later in her narrative, she affirms that her life ‘is a fiction now, an open book’, in whose pages she is ‘trapped’ (Kay, p.154), for she suspects that prurient journalists, and readers avid for their findings, will make of her what they will, just as they will construct their own versions of the man she loved, the famous trumpeter who is revealed, on his death, to be a woman.

Recalling how Moody was often misquoted in interviews, Millie asks herself: ‘What do [the journalists] know about his life? What do I know about his life really? What do I know about my own life?’ (p.154). In *Trumpet*, Kay portrays a relationship between two lovers that would seem to epitomise fidelity and candour; yet it is one which is founded on deceit, for one partner lies to the other, and both partners lie to those who are closest to them, notably their son. At the heart of this novel lies an elaborately sustained deception – a character’s false gender – and most of the narrative documents reactions to the exposure of this character’s authentic sex. By emphasising the ease, and panache, with which Josephine Moore/ Joss Moody accomplishes her life as a man, Kay raises questions about the factitious, unstable nature of gender identity. In the various narrative accounts, in which a range of characters respond to Moody’s femaleness, she exposes the extent of social preoccupations with gender markers and attributes.

In this essay, I want to consider the ways in which Kay foregrounds both the concealment and the revelation of Joss Moody’s femaleness. The signs of his true sexuality, the breasts and the genitalia, are carefully disguised and hidden, and when

they are made known to unsuspecting characters, they provoke incredulity, followed by awe. But what Kay then does is to demonstrate how each character adjusts his/her perception of Joss Moody in the light of the femaleness, ultimately accepting it, or perceiving it as irrelevant. What eventually supersedes all other feelings is respect for the person, Joss Moody: the boundaries between his masculine identity and his female sex lose their clear definition, as characters such as the registrar, the funeral director, and the son, Colman, acknowledge Joss Moody's *personhood*. The principal narrator, Millie, accepts, finally, that the images of her lover which she treasures, namely, 'his golden trumpet, his mouth pieces, his battered old box, his latest flyer announcing his glorious return' (p.239) transcend gender and sex. I believe that, in her celebration of 'transgendered' love, Kay questions socially normative markers of manhood and womanhood. It is by a close analysis of the syntax, patterns of imagery, choices of punctuation and lexis, narrative configurations and rhetorical devices in her work, that I wish to illustrate and substantiate my argument.

The 'secret' of Moody's sexual identity is explained in the dust-jacket of the book. Had the reader ignored the publisher's brief, s/he would quickly deduce that the drama and mystery surrounding the character's death pertain to some newly discovered, astonishing fact about his life. In the opening

chapter, there are several allusions to this discovery. Yet whatever constitutes the remarkable revelation is not specified until much later. The allusive way in which the reader is introduced to the principal narrator, and her plight, illustrates the obliqueness which characterises Jackie Kay's narrative technique.

At the outset, Millie explains that she is being hounded by pursuers who station themselves outside her home, waiting for her to show face. The familiar collocation 'photographs in the paper' (p.1) suggests who the pursuers might be, but neither a press photographer nor a journalist is specifically mentioned in the text. In the introductory paragraph, the narrator uses no fewer than seven pronominal references to people who, the reader infers, must be representatives of the media. There is, however, no antecedent in sight:

I pull back the curtain an inch and see *their* heads bent together. I have no idea how long they have been there. It is getting dark. I keep expecting *them* to vanish; then I would know that *they* are all in my mind. I would know that I imagined *them* just as surely as I imagined my life. But *they* are still there, wearing real clothes, looking as conspicuous as *they* please.

(p.1)

The italicised words are all third person pronouns, of various cases. Third person pronouns can be *anaphoric* or *cataphoric* in their reference: when the element with which a third person pronoun corefers (this element is called the *antecedent*) precedes the pronoun, the use is anaphoric; when the element succeeds the pronoun, the use is cataphoric. By far the commoner type of reference is anaphoric.

In the above excerpt, all the third person pronouns are cataphoric, since they appear before an antecedent, which the reader expects to encounter in the ensuing paragraphs. No precise coreferent appears, however, and whomever the narrator means by ‘they’ and ‘them’ is contextually inferred by allusions to ‘photographs in the papers’ (p.1), ‘someone ... waiting outside my house with cameras and questions’ (p.2), and ‘the cameras’ rapid bullets’ (p.2). It is clear from contextual reading that the coreferent is, collectively, the media.

Once the coreferent of the pronoun is identified, it is done so indirectly, either by metonymy, in the form of pieces of equipment and work associated with journalists, or by further indefinite reference, as in ‘someone’. By employing the less common type of pronoun reference, cataphoric, and by choosing to insert the antecedent indirectly, Kay presents her protagonist’s pursuers, as people without individual identities; rather, they appear as homogeneous, anonymous, all wearing

‘the same face. The same white sharp face’ (p.155). The unnamed ‘someone’ is the intruder Millie fears, the person she locks her door against, the enemy she eludes when she creeps out of London to head for Scotland. In the very first pages of the narrative, the writer presents her principal narrator in flight from a relentless enemy whose threat is magnified by its amorphousness, its lack of specificity. The metonymic term, the Press, encapsulates the collective threat which journalists and photographers pose for Millie.

Ensnared in her cottage in Torr, her shelter from those who pursue her, Millie looks back on her life with her partner, and she expresses her anger at the reactions to the couple’s ‘secret’, a ‘harmless’ one which ‘did not hurt anybody’ (p.10). What exactly constitutes this secret is not immediately divulged, however. Kay postpones its divulgence, generating suspense in a number of ways. As with the representatives of the Press, who are not directly named, the secret insinuates itself into the text gradually, and anonymously. Millie, tortured with anxiety about her son Colman, back in London, asks:

What could I tell him – that his father and I were in love, that *it* didn't matter to us, that we didn't even think about *it* after a while? I didn't think about *it* so how could I have kept it from him if *it* wasn't in my mind to keep?.

(p.22)

Kay employs the same devices of concealment she uses when presenting her narrator's nameless pursuers: she repeats the third person pronoun four times, using it cataphorically, but withholding the antecedent the reader expects. Furthermore, she draws attention to the indeterminacy of the secret by expanding on the 'what' of Millie's rhetorical question, in three nominal clauses; in the expansion, the indefiniteness of 'it' is merely exaggerated, its unimportance made salient.

Kay foreshadows the revelation of Joss's femaleness when, in the account of the couple's courtship, in Glasgow, she portrays her narrator's faint unease. Millie confesses that she feared 'something was wrong' when Joss avoided touching her; she remembers how she used to watch him walk away and think he walked as though he 'practised it' (p.15). What also emerges from this account is Joss's mendacity. When he was questioned about his mother's death, the narrator recalls that Joss was evasive, and hesitant, before 'pluck[ing] heart attack out of

thin air' (p.17). Millie never learns the truth about Edith Moore, her partner's mother, as the reader infers later in the narrative, when Millie comes upon Joss' memorandum 'Write EM' (p.92), and does not know what the initials mean. It is not until much later that their significance is clarified for the reader.

There are, I would suggest, two reasons why the writer keeps her principal narrator ignorant about Edith Moore, yet reveals her existence to the reader, long before the text's conclusion. One reason is that the mystery surrounding the identity of EM creates narrative tension. In narratology, the writer's hinting at a future occurrence, in this case, the possible identification of 'EM', is often called, after Gerard Genette, an advance mention. Such a device is a 'simple marker without anticipation, even an allusive anticipation, which will acquire ...significance only later on'.^[2] In *Trumpet*, the reader, after seeing the unexplained initials 'EM', senses, certainly hopes, that what these letters represent will be disclosed, for such are the demands of reader expectation. But the narrator never discovers who EM is, and the fact that she does not would seem to justify her assertion that she does not, and can not know everything about her husband's life (p.154). By the use of such narrative strategies, Kay draws attention to a central theme in the novel: the inscrutability of identity.

The precise moment when Joss's femaleness is revealed to the reader, and to the narrator, is prepared for by devices other than foreshadowing. Kay uses several techniques in her attempts to accord salience to the revelation. Joss's behaviour is shown to digress from the usual pattern: he kisses Millie with a passion and urgency not previously demonstrated; he accompanies her inside the flat, then follows her to her bedroom. The seduction comes to an abrupt halt, however:

There is something he has to tell me. Something he should have told me ages ago, months ago, but couldn't. He was afraid that if I knew I would stop seeing him. I feel sick. 'Knew what?' My mind is racing...I can tell it is something serious...

(p.19)

There are several linguistic features worth commenting on in this extract. The narrator is reporting the exchange that takes place between herself and Joss Moody, but instead of presenting the report in indirect discourse, which would be the convention, she uses a combination of free indirect and direct discourse. Such a method accelerates the narrative flow and adds to the realism of the mimesis. It also heightens the drama of this important scene. The Free Indirect Discourse (FID) is

manifest in the repeated 'something', in the irregular sentence consisting of a subordinate clause, and in the reinforcement of 'ages ago, months ago'. The FID ushers in the narrator's question, a sentence type that is termed an explicatory echo. This kind of question calls for clarification, rather than repetition, of something which has been uttered, and is characteristic of informal language. The pronoun 'what' replaces a piece of information which requires to be clarified in the context, but in the passage quoted above, elucidation does not follow. The item of information, consisting of the indefinite pronoun 'something', remains unspecified, its vagueness emphasised by repetition.

In the ensuing paragraph, Kay's lexical choice enhances the seriousness of the 'something', and the narrator's anger at Joss's reluctance to explain it. Millie asks him, "What's the *matter* with you?" to which he replies, some time later, "I'll show you what is the *matter*" (p.20 my italics). The word 'matter' is significant, for it suggests a problem such as illness or crime, and seems incompatible with the harmlessness Millie mentioned earlier, when referring to her 'secret'. For Joss Moody, femaleness is problematic and troubling, for it prevents his being himself.

In western culture, the breast is a powerfully eroticised indicator of female sexuality. The exposure of Joss Moody's

breasts is one of the most powerful and most important episodes in the narrative. Kay uses several syntactic structures, rhetorical devices and tropes in order to foreground the breasts. First of all, as she does elsewhere in the text, she generates narrative suspense: she has her narrator describe, in detail, her lover's undressing, using anaphora, repetition and parallelism to convey the methodical nature of the act:

He takes off his blue jacket and throws it on my floor. He takes off his tie and throws that down too. His hands are trembling. I am trembling too...He is undoing the buttons of his shirt. He slows down now.

(p.20)

The abundance of simple present tense verbs, with occasional present progressives inserted, makes the action seem more immediate to the reader. The simple present in this instance is more precisely called the instantaneous present, a verb tense associated with commentary. Quirk *et al* explain that the instantaneous present 'occurs where the verb refers to a single action begun and completed approximately at the moment of speech'.^[3] Its use here makes Millie's observation and narration appear simultaneous.

The passage in which Joss's breasts are revealed invites analysis:

Underneath his vest are lots of bandages wrapped round and round his chest. He starts to undo them. I feel a wave of relief to think all he is worried about is some scar he has... He keeps unwrapping endless rolls of bandage. I am still holding out my hands when the first of his breasts reveals itself to me. Small, firm.

(p.21)

By making the noun phrase, 'the first of his breasts', the active subject of the clause, and by using the verb 'reveal' reflexively, Kay depicts the emergence of the breasts as an almost miraculous occurrence, an epiphany. By separating, in a non-sentence, the post-modification 'Small, firm', she accentuates the appearance of the breasts, in a description that is more referential than emotive or poetic. It is as though the narrator were checking for authenticity. Immediately following the above paragraph is an ellipsis, after which the narration returns to the primary level.

Kay's narrative configuration serves to diminish the consequences of the preceding revelation. As the narratologist

Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan explains, the ellipsis is intended to convey maximum speed, where ‘zero textual space corresponds to some story duration’,^[4] and it is used for the purposes of accelerating the narrative. The ellipsis hastens the reader away from the scene in which the narrator discovers that the man she loves is a woman, and the absence of any comment on that discovery suggests that its impact was slight. The moment when Joss Moody’s breasts are revealed to his partner is stylistically marked, as I have argued; the narrator’s thoughts on the revelation remain unknown, and do not warrant a *descriptive pause*, which retards the narration and imparts significance to a particular section of text. With a descriptive pause, the writer may, for example, illustrate a central theme more fully, develop the characterisation, or depict the setting in more detail. In this scene from *Trumpet*, the absence of any commentary on the disclosure of Joss Moody’s breasts is noteworthy.

There are other instances in the narrative where the emergence of Moody’s breasts is described, and these occur during post mortem examination. When Doctor Krishnamurty pronounces and records death, she removes the bandages which bind the breasts. Her first reaction is incredulity: she thinks of ‘how strange, how preserved they looked ... [not] real breasts at all’ (p.43). But after establishing Moody’s female identity, she performs her professional duty without much further ado,

substituting the word ‘female’ for ‘male’ on the death certificate, before ‘clos[ing] the door upon the dead woman’ (p.44). In another ‘People’ account, the omniscient narrator explains the reactions of the Funeral Director, Albert Holding, to Joss Moody’s female sexual identity. What emerges most clearly from the following is the sense of Holding’s astonishment, and his admiration for the beauty of what is before him:

Even though Holding was expecting them, he still gave out a gasp when he saw them. There they were, staring up at him in all innocence – the breasts. In terribly good condition for someone of his years. Pert, alert

(p.110)

In the passage, there are three third person plural pronouns replacing ‘breasts’, and all are cataphoric in their reference. By selecting the cataphoric use of the pronoun, Kay creates suspense, about what it is that Holding expects to see; the appearance of the breasts is elegantly and formally prepared for. The second sentence illustrates the technique of postponed identification, explained by Quirk *at al* as ‘the placing of a pro-form earlier in the sentence while the noun phrase to which it refers is placed finally as an amplificatory tag’.^[5] The presentative ‘there’ brings the pronoun to the

reader's attention, and the dash marks the postponed identification more overtly. Kay's use of the definite article is also interesting, indicative as it is of the breasts' prior discursive appearance, while her personification of them endows them with an innocent life of their own. As she does on page 21, when first describing the markers of Moody's femaleness, Kay postmodifies them, in a non-sentence, 'Pert, alert'. Her use of personification and internal rhyme makes the unusual collocation more memorable.

Holding's sense of wonder is communicated in this passage, but what is also conveyed is the swiftness with which he adapts to Joss Moody's newly established femaleness. Before his very eyes, the male face is transformed into one more womanly, one 'without question, a woman's face', so unquestionably female that Holding is amazed that 'he himself could have thought it male' (p.110). What the funeral director witnesses in his parlour is not the blurring of gender boundaries, but the transformation of sexual identity. Although Kay emphasises her character's astonishment, and his discomfort with the task of informing Colman about his father, she does ascribe to him any feelings of revulsion or outrage. The revelation of the breasts is a narrative event which, because it is repeated more than once, assumes a position of considerable prominence in the text. Rimmon-Kenan would term it a kernel event – one which 'advance[s] the action by opening an alternative'.^[6] In

Trumpet, the unexpected discovery of Joss Moody's femaleness not only transforms the perceptions of the fictional characters, but also offers the reader an alternative understanding of what constitutes femaleness and maleness. Perhaps the reader may, like Albert Holding, reappraise the assumption 'that what made a man a woman and a woman a man was the differing sexual organs' (p.115).

If the breasts are a repeated image of Joss Moody's female sex, the bandages are a recurrent symbol of its concealment. There are several allusions to the unpeeling of the bandages, and, in each instance, Kay describes them as though they were a means of camouflage or protection. The word 'bandages' has, after all, connotations of pathology and injury, associations which are sustained in the text by references to possible scare or wounds (p.220). But when the bandages are discarded, astonishing and unexpected truths are revealed. In the account of the doctor's visit, for example, the narrator notes that, when removing the bandages, the doctor becomes 'quite apprehensive about what kind of injury the bandages could be hiding' (p.43). Once removed, the bandages are likened to skins protecting valuable tissue or material: the doctor remembers them 'lying curled on the bed like a snake' (p.43); the funeral director thinks they resemble 'the bandages of an Egyptian mummy', an 'archaeological find' (p.110) – a treasure hidden from view, like Joss Moody's femaleness.

Near the end of the narrative, Millie recalls the daily ritual she performed, winding the bandages tightly around the couple's 'harmless secret', the success of her task measured by the flatness of the breasts. What is being accomplished in the ritual is more than the disguise and denial of femaleness: it is the suppression of one of its most erotic signifiers. To his lover, Joss Moody's breasts were superfluous body parts:

His breasts weren't very big. They flattened easily. Nobody except me ever knew he had them. I never touched them except when I was wrapping the bandages round and round them. That was the closest I came to them, wrapping them up...Other than that, they didn't exist. Not really.

(pp.239–40)

The narrator's reporting voice, deadpan and factual, conveys an impression of the breasts as irrelevant packages which can be made to disappear from view. Because they were a reminder of his unwanted female identity, Joss Moody kept his breasts hidden, undergoing pain in the process, and because Millie complied in every way with her husband's gender re-alignment, she too denied their existence.

The couple's son cannot accept femaleness as a category for his dead father, but his denial is accompanied by outrage and disgust. In the early accounts he delivers to the tabloid journalist, Sophie Stones, it becomes clear that much of the son's anger results from his having been deceived by both parents. In his interviews, Colman uses many terms that exemplify what the linguist Muriel Schulz calls 'the semantic derogation of women'.^[7] Colman confesses how revolted he feels by the discovery that his father had 'tits', a 'pussy' (p.61), 'a cunt' (p.169), a 'big frigging mound of venus' (p.55). The markers of femaleness are debased in his ranting speech, speech which illustrates his extreme reaction to the revelation of his father's true sexual identity. He is shown to be manipulated by Sophie Stones, and contaminated by the venal and cynical world she represents. In the first part of the narrative, Colman exhibits negative traits, such as anger, egocentricity and sexual prejudice; these are reduced in intensity the further he distances himself from Sophie Stones's corruption, and the closer he comes to an understanding of his father. Kay effects a transformation in the character of Colman Moody, whose journey from London, to Glasgow, Greenock and Torr – his father's former settings – parallels his progress from embittered disgust to enlightenment. Joss Moody's letter to his son, which Colman carries with him on his journey north, finally opening it on the coast road home, is the reward for his growing self-awareness.

The letter performs both a thematic and structuring function in the novel. It contains the father's explanation, what Joss Moody calls 'the sum of my parts'. The letter is an act of faith, for the father entrusts his story, his memory, to his son, hoping he will 'hold [him] dear' (p.277). The letter also creates narrative tension. It is introduced in Colman's first interview, when he explains that he found an envelope addressed to himself, with the instruction, from his father, 'To be opened after my death'. Colman dismisses it as 'just a list of excuses and reasons' (p.65), but with each successive allusion (pp.140, 141, 193), the reader senses its importance, and grows more curious about its contents. Kay prepares for their disclosure thus:

[Colman] gets out his father's letter...He takes a deep breath. He is ready for it. Whatever it is, he's up for it. He opens it carefully. It is a long letter. Must have taken him some time to write

(p.270)

The instantaneous present tenses; the rhetorical device of anaphora; the staccato-like sentences; and the idiomatic, elliptical Free Indirect Discourse, all help to intensify the dramatic importance of the letter's opening. The letter is another means

by which Kay both conceals and reveals the true nature of Joss Moody's identity. The reader, like Colman, expects and wants to know why Josephine Moore chose to live as a man, but no such explanation is contained in the 'Last Word' section, nor is there any reference to woman, gender, sex, femaleness. The word which is recurrent is 'father', mentioned over twenty times in a letter that celebrates the trumpeter's own father, and endeavours to sustain his memory. Explaining that John Moore had had to change his name, Joss Moody adds: 'We've all changed names, you, me, my father. All for different reasons. Maybe one day you'll understand mine' (p.276). What should matter to Colman is that he remembers Joss Moody was a good father to him, not that he was really a woman.

There is no discussion of the 'different reasons' why Josephine Moore became Joss Moody, and the reader too must try to infer, and understand them. The narrative hastens towards what the reader expects will be a revelatory conclusion, but an explanation is not forthcoming. Perhaps Jackie Kay sees no need for one. What the writer consistently foregrounds in her novel is the uncertainty of identity: characters change names; a rough exterior often belies an interior sensitivity; people lose themselves in music; 'female' is swiftly substituted for 'male'; 'a man turns into a woman before [one's] very eyes' (p.111). But, in *Trumpet*, what is shown to be immutable is Joss and Millie's

love, the memory of which is indelible. The epigraph, an excerpt from a George Gershwin song, proclaims:

The memory of all that –
No, no! They can't take that away from me!

The belief that love can transcend gender and sexual identity is celebrated in *Trumpet*, a novel in which the supposed 'certainties' of human experience – sex markers and gender attributes – are contested.

Chapter 4: Notes

- 1 Jackie Kay, *Trumpet* (London: Picador, 1998). p.1. All further quotations from this work will be cited by page reference in the text
- 2 Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. Jane E Lewin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), p.5
- 3 Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartnik, *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (London: Longman, 1985), p.180.
- 4 Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Routledge, 1983), p.53.
- 5 Quirk, op. cit., p.1310.
- 6 Rimmon-Kenan, op. cit., p.16.
- 7 See Schulz in Deborah Cameron(ed.) *The Feminist Critique of Language* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.134.

Interpretation Theory and Performance: Gadamer/Derrida/Nietzsche

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‘Performance’ is a term which has come to figure prominently in discussions of the interpretation of a variety of kinds of text – literary, religious, philosophical, legal and political. Although not always foregrounded, one of the most influential accounts of ‘interpretation as performance’ is given by Hans-Georg Gadamer in *Truth and Method* and elsewhere. This paper will outline Gadamer’s approach, and raise some questions about it, in particular the question of the *cost* of participation in the interpretative process (with Gadamer it sometimes seems as if you’re always already there). After glancing at Habermas’s well-known critique of Gadamer, the paper will discuss the 1981 *événements* in Paris involving Gadamer and Derrida. Derrida’s non-participation (one might say ‘performance’) in a conference about hermeneutics and deconstruction will be discussed in relation to other disruptive manoeuvres in literature and philosophy, especially by Nietzsche. The paper will end with a discussion of Gadamer’s meditation on Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.

Gadamer’s ‘Performance’

To explore Gadamer’s understanding of performance takes us to the heart of his hermeneutics. The very concept of ‘perfor-

mance’ as customarily employed is for Gadamer fraught with problems, because it tends to presuppose a distinction between a given ‘performance’ and some more original or ideal version of the ‘work in itself’ which exists in the mind of the author or composer, or perhaps in some reconstructed original performance (if we cannot have access to the consciousness of Shakespeare or Bach or St Paul, then the next best thing is to reconstruct the first appearance of a work in London or Leipzig or Corinth). But that very differentiation between the ‘work in itself’ and its appearances or performances is precisely what Gadamer is in the first place concerned to critique. Such a differentiation is for Gadamer an *abstraction*, literally a drawing the work out of the living event of its happening. For Gadamer the work (literary, musical, religious) only *exists* in the contingent event of its being performed. The construction of some ‘original’ or ‘authentic’ version is always the work of *reflection*, and therefore logically *subsequent* to the pre-(or non-)conceptual actuality of the work’s presentation/performance [German *Darstellung*, literally ‘putting there’]. As Gadamer puts it:

The work of art cannot simply be isolated from the “contingency” of the chance conditions in which it appears, and where this kind of isolation occurs, the result is an abstraction that reduces the actual being of the work. It itself belongs to the world to which it represents itself. A drama really exists only when it is played, and ultimately music must resound.

(Gadamer, 1989, p.116)

This (according to Gadamer) artificial distinction between the work of art (or text) and its performance is paralleled by an equally artificial distinction between the subject-matter of a work of art (or text) and its so-called aesthetic qualities. Gadamer is here challenging the formalist idea which has in various guises tyrannized modern aesthetics (and much more than aesthetics); that is, that a pure or disinterested or contemplative response to a work (or text) should refrain from attending to what it is actually *about*. The rejection of *mimesis* or representation lies not only at the heart of modernist art and criticism; it also, partly via the influence of a particular reading of Saussure, lies at the heart of post-structuralism and postmodernism, for which the critique of representation is precisely ‘foundational’. Although *Truth and Method* was first published before the advent of the various ‘posties’ and their

varieties of relativism, Gadamer had, so to speak, seen them coming in that he had already critiqued the kind of romanticism with which postmodernism is so deeply complicit. Not only that; he had critiqued it on the basis of his reading of Heidegger, on the *misreading* of whose works (Gadamer would say) the ‘posties’ in large measure depend. As I hope to show, both Gadamer and Derrida are profoundly Heideggerean; where they differ is in their reading of Heidegger, and particularly in their reading of Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche. The question of the reading of Nietzsche not only opens up the entire issue of the status of postmodernism (whose icon Nietzsche above all is); it also takes us back to the idea of performance and its relation to conceptual thinking, and the question, of such concern to Kierkegaard, of how truth can be communicated.

In a move which seems prescient of postmodernism, Gadamer takes his stand in *Truth and Method* against the *aestheticization* of the experience of the work of art and its truth. And what he opposes to such aestheticization is precisely the deeply unfashionable idea of *mimesis*. Indeed to what he calls the *double* aesthetic differentiation of the work (or text) *both* from its subject-matter *and* from its performance, Gadamer opposes a *double* *mimesis* in which the representation or performance of the work overcomes or perhaps forestalls such reductive divisions of the experience of the work of art (or text) into:

authorial intent; subject-matter; performance; audience reception (or ‘reader-response’) etc. In his own words:

More exactly, one can say that the mimetic representation [*Darstellung*], the performance, brings into existence [*zum Dasein*] what the play itself requires. The double distinction between a play and its subject matter and a play and its performance corresponds to a double non-distinction as the unity of the truth which one recognizes in the play of art.

(Gadamer, 1989, p.117)

This notion of ‘play’ is crucial to Gadamer’s stand against the relativism, nihilism and mere subjectivism in the unholy alliance of methodological self-regard and aestheticizing individualism endemic in the humanities of his day, and *a fortiori* in our own postmodern times. The passage just quoted comes from the section of *Truth and Method* entitled ‘Play as the Clue to Ontological Explanation’. Here Gadamer is concerned to overcome the subjectivization of aesthetic experience in a way which, whatever its lack of Parisian chic, is arguably at least as radical as any post-structuralist deconstruction of the subject. He writes of the concept of play:

I wish to free this concept from the subjective meaning that ... dominates the whole of modern aesthetics and philosophy of man [sic]. When we speak of play in reference to the experience of art, this means neither the attitude nor even the state of mind of the creator or of those enjoying the work of art, nor the freedom of a subjectivity engaged in play, but the mode of being of the work of art itself.

(Gadamer, 1989, p.101; my emphasis)

He continues:

The “subject” of the experience of art, that which remains and endures, is not the subjectivity of the person who experiences it but the work itself. ... For play has its own essence, independent of the consciousness of those who play. Play – indeed, play proper – also exists ... where there are no subjects who are behaving “playfully”. The players are not the subject of play; instead play merely reaches presentation [*Darstellung* – we might translate ‘performance’] through the players.

(Gadamer, 1989, p.103^f)

Alluding to Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*, Gadamer refers play not only to religious ritual (a point to which I'll return), but also back to nature, for nature itself is ultimately all about performance. He writes:

Play is really limited to representing itself. Thus its mode of being is self-representation. But self-presentation is a universal ontological characteristic of nature.

(Gadamer, 1989, p.108)

Play is by no means a uniquely human or even animate process, for not only animals but water and light also play, or as Gadamer wants to put it, it's rather *that human beings also play* (Gadamer, 1989, p.105). Gadamer is here arguably at least as radical as more fashionable postmodern anti-humanisms and their flirtations with cyborgs and viroid life. Indeed Gadamer at this point refers back to German Romanticism which, as Andrew Bowie has convincingly argued (Bowie, 1990), not only prefigures, but is actually ahead of, the post-modern game; Gadamer cites a saying of Friedrich Schlegel in which the boundaries which divide art, nature and religion are overcome, or deconstructed, or ultimately irrelevant, to the play of the world:

'All the sacred games of art are only remote imitations of the infinite play of the world, the eternal self-creating work of art.'

(Gadamer, 1989, p.105)

Gadamer offers a perhaps more accessible account of some of these ideas in his collection *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, especially in the title-piece, with its subtitle 'Art as play, symbol, and festival', and in the essays 'The festive character of theatre' and 'The play of art'. In the essay 'The relevance of the beautiful' he writes that:

play appears as a self-movement that does not pursue any particular end or purpose so much as movement as movement, exhibiting so to speak a phenomenon of excess [*Überschuss*], of living self-representation. And in fact that is just what we perceive in nature – the play of gnats, for example, or all the lively dramatic forms of play we observe in the animal world, especially among their young. All this arises from the basic character of excess striving to express itself in the living being.

(Gadamer, 1986, p.23)

While human play certainly intends something, or is about communication, in the first place it is about itself:

The function of the representation of play is ultimately to establish, not just any movement whatsoever, but the movement of play determined in a specific way. In the end, play is thus the self-representation of its own movement.

(ibid.)

Thus the work of art is by no means reducible to its ‘message’, though for Gadamer this does not imply any kind of mere formalism. On the contrary, the work of art is most deeply implicated in the contingent event of its own happening or presentation or performance: ‘the work speaks to us as a work and not as the bearer of a message’ (Gadamer, 1986, p.33). Referring to Luther’s retention of the old Roman Catholic tradition of sacramental realism, Gadamer claims that analogically:

the work of art does not simply refer to something, because what it refers to is actually there. We could say that the work of art signifies *an increase of being*.

(Gadamer 1986, p.35)

Thus the intention (or ‘message’) of the author or artist, the *form* of the work, and its contingent performance and reception are all part of an ‘hermeneutic identity’ (Gadamer, 1986, p.25) which we divide at our peril. To attempt methodologically to dismember this ‘hermeneutic identity’ is to risk losing ‘a genuine experience of art’ [*Erfahrung* = an experience you undergo, which changes you, and not *Erlebnis* = an experience which as aesthetic subject you *have* or *consume*] (Gadamer, 1986, p.26). ‘The peculiar nature of our experience of art,’ he writes, alluding to Heidegger, ‘lies in the impact by which it overwhelms us’ (Gadamer, 1986, p.34). Later in the same essay he writes:

Art is only encountered in a form that resists pure conceptualization. Great art shakes us because we are always defenseless and unprepared when exposed to the over-powering impact of a compelling work.

(Gadamer, 1986, p.37)

‘Our temporal experience of art’, Gadamer muses, is perhaps ‘the only way that is granted to us finite beings to relate to what we call eternity’

(Gadamer, 1986, p.45).

Habermas’s Critique

Such an understanding of hermeneutics and aesthetic experience can obviously be attractive to those of a particular religious bent. Gadamer could be seen as a kind of ‘right-wing’ Heideggerian, by analogy with the so-called ‘right-wing’ Hegelians who, in contrast to the ‘left’ or ‘young’ Hegelians such as Marx, interpreted the philosophy of the Master in a way compatible with, and generally supportive of, the Christian religion. Gadamer would then be seen to be in some respects in the general company of the likes of Karl Rahner and John Macquarrie, to name but a few. However, while no one has seriously suggested that Gadamer is ‘right-wing’ in a *political* sense, nevertheless the fact that he was uncomfortably close to that dark horse Martin Heidegger has inevitably led the more ideologically suspicious to question whether in fact all is not sweetness and light in such sunny lines as:

If we really have had a genuine experience of art, then the world has become both brighter and less burdensome.

(Gadamer, 1986, p.26)

If Gadamer’s hermeneutics is not actually ideologically suspect, then is it not at the very least ideologically naïve?

This question was first put by Jürgen Habermas in his essay ‘Zur Logik der Socialwissenschaften’ [‘On the Logic of the Social Sciences’] (Habermas, 1967) and more famously in his reply to Gadamer’s reply. The latter appears in Mueller-Vollmer’s *Hermeneutics Reader* as ‘Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology’ (it’s also translated as ‘On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection’ in Gadamer’s *Philosophical Hermeneutics*); Habermas’s well-known reply to Gadamer’s reply appears in Mueller-Vollmer as ‘On Hermeneutics’ Claim to Universality’. Habermas asks whether Gadamer’s trust in language, tradition, and the endless play of dialogue, might not overlook the possibility that language is a ‘systematically distorted’ form of communication, distorted, that is, by class interests? From one point of view the issue between Gadamer and Habermas is the status and prospects of the ‘Enlightenment project’, with Gadamer defending the value of tradition and prejudice (properly understood) against

the Enlightenment's 'prejudice against prejudice'; and Habermas defending the Enlightenment project's commitment to unmasking prejudice or ideology or 'systematically distorted communication' in the classic tradition of those masters of suspicion, Marx and Freud. This ground has been covered many times, most interestingly perhaps by Paul Ricoeur (see Ricoeur, 1970). I don't propose to pursue it here.

Derrida's Gesture

However while Habermas and Gadamer share the common ground of critique and dialogue, I want to look at the quite different kind of response to Gadamer in the gesture of refusal offered by Derrida. In 1981 a symposium on 'Text and Interpretation' was arranged in Paris where Gadamer and Derrida, the leading representatives of hermeneutics and deconstruction respectively, were to meet for a grand encounter. The encounter turned out to be so disappointingly brief as to lead some participants to wonder whether it had happened at all. The main culprit was 'Monsieur' Derrida, as Gadamer insists on referring to him in his subsequent accounts of the meeting. 'Professor' Gadamer (as Derrida insists on calling *him*) arrived at the conference with a weighty (30 page) paper on 'Text and Interpretation'. In the paper, which surveys the history and current state of play in hermeneutics, Gadamer does mention Derrida directly. The reference is to Derrida's claim, in *Spurs* and elsewhere, that

hermeneutics in its search for meaning is in collusion with logocentrism and 'the metaphysics of presence'. The context for this claim is the interpretation of Nietzsche. Derrida has suggested that Heidegger, with his quest for the meaning of Being, is actually still captive to 'the metaphysics of presence', and that Nietzsche is a more radical thinker than Heidegger. Gadamer, on the other hand, sides in his paper with Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche as 'the last metaphysician', and insists that Heidegger is the more radical thinker. Gadamer thus does challenge Derrida directly, within the conventions of a conference, to an *Auseinandersetzung* (or as we used to say in Glasgow, a 'square go') about Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche. Derrida however did not respond in kind. On the contrary, he directed three brief questions to Gadamer which seem to have nothing to do with Gadamer's paper, leaving an irritated Gadamer to wonder whether he has been understood at all. Derrida opens by saying:

During the lecture and ensuing discussion yesterday evening, I began to ask myself if anything was taking place here other than improbable debates, counter-questioning, and enquiries into unfindable objects of thought ... We are gathered together here around Professor Gadamer. It is to him, then, that I wish to

address these words, paying him the homage of a few questions. ...

(Michelfelder & Palmer, 1989, p.52)

I am quoting these prefatory remarks by Derrida, which do not seem to contain much in the way of content, to illustrate how Derrida responds to Gadamer by means of an ironic *performance*, rather than by any substantive *argument*. Derrida seems to be drawing attention to the situation and the persons involved in it, rather than attending to the content of these ‘improbable debates’. His remarks are in Austin’s terms *performative* rather than *constative*. That the *occasion* of an utterance is crucial, seems to be his point. However as I hope to show, Gadamer is far from unaware of the occasionality and performativity of philosophical utterance; as usual, he would say, Derrida has got hold of, and is dramatizing, one aspect of the situation, and is exaggerating its importance. I’ll return to this.

What Derrida does ask in his three questions is, first of all, whether Gadamer’s hermeneutics doesn’t presuppose the *good will* of the participants, a presupposition which Derrida claims (to Gadamer’s astonished denials) is basically Kantian, and therefore ‘metaphysical’; secondly, Derrida asks, picking up on Gadamer’s references to psychoanalysis on the previous

evening, whether the ‘integration’ of psychoanalysis and hermeneutics would not ‘involve a breach, an overall re-structuring of the context, even the very concept of context?’ and to a kind of interpretation which ‘would be closer to the interpretative style of Nietzsche than to that other hermeneutical tradition extending from Schleiermacher to Gadamer’; and finally, returning to the issue of the ‘good will’ presupposed in Gadamer’s hermeneutics, Derrida asks about the role of *interruption* in the understanding process (*Verstehen*), an interruption which, far from enabling the continuity that Gadamer always emphasizes, is rather about *discontinuity* and ‘the suspending of all mediation?’ (Michelfelder & Palmer, 1989, pp.52–53).

Derrida’s conference paper does not develop any of these points. The only explicit connection is the reference to Nietzsche. Derrida’s paper ‘Interpreting Signatures (Nietzsche/Heidegger): Two Questions’ contains no reference to Gadamer, but rather focuses on Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche. The problem with this is, in Derrida’s view, that while Heidegger rightly wanted to save Nietzsche from the interpretations made of him by the Nazis and by ‘a classical university tradition as well, which made of Nietzsche a “philosopher-poet”, a life-philosopher without conceptual rigour ...’ (Michelfelder & Palmer, 1989, p.63), the price paid for thus rescuing Nietzsche’s philosophical reputation is his

installation into the role of the culminating figure in Heidegger's grand history of Being. But to identify the signature of Nietzsche with the ultimate destiny of Western metaphysics is to force a kind of unitary identity and monumental role onto Nietzsche which is at odds with the latter's playful plurality of identities and roles. Derrida writes:

But is it correct to say, as Heidegger so positively claims, that this thinking is one? – that Nietzsche then has only one name? Does he name himself only once? For Heidegger this naming takes place only once, even if the place of this event retains the appearance of a borderline ... at the summit of Western metaphysics, which is gathered together under his name.

But who has ever said that a person bears a single name? Certainly not Nietzsche. And likewise, who has said or decided that there is something like a Western metaphysics, something which would be capable of being gathered up under this name and this name only? What is it – the oneness of a name, the assembled unity of metaphysics? Is it anything more or less than the desire ... for a proper name, for a single, unique name and a thinkable genealogy? Next to Kierkegaard, was not Nietzsche one of the few great thinkers who multiplied his names and played with signatures, identities and

masks? Who named himself more than once, with several names?

(Michelfelder & Palmer, 1989, p.67)

Here Derrida echoes his earlier essay 'Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles' [*Éperons: Les Styles de Nietzsche*] where he emphasizes the stylistic proliferation of Nietzsche which resists any attempt at hermeneutic closure. Heidegger's Nietzsche interpretation is mentioned quite frequently in *Éperons* (though not much in the extracts translated in *A Derrida Reader*), and it may be that Gadamer has *Éperons* in mind when in his paper at the Paris conference he refers to the 'challenge' of the 'French' interpretation of Nietzsche. However that may be, Gadamer does explicitly mention *Éperons* in his essay 'Das Drama Zarathustras' (in fact the title Gadamer gives – *Les éperons de Nietzsche* – is incorrect). Unfortunately the English translation of Gadamer's essay, 'The Drama of Zarathustra', omits those parts of the original which refer to Derrida.

Zarathustra's Song

What Gadamer seeks above all to do in his Zarathustra essay is to emphasize the need to read *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* not as a philosophical treatise which contains Nietzsche's teaching, but as a *drama* about the attempts of the *character* Zarathustra to

communicate his ‘truth’. Rather than *containing* ‘Nietzsche’s teaching’, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is about the act (and indeed the tragedy) of teaching. As for identifying the philosopher Nietzsche with this statement of his philosophical truth, Gadamer writes:

...it is certainly incorrect simply to identify Zarathustra with Nietzsche and his speeches with Nietzsche’s philosophy. Rather, it is a hermeneutical task of the first order to determine the “in between” of teaching and action that we find here and in every poetic text. We must be fully conscious of the problem of conceptualizing the message of a thinker who is so divided between conceptual and poetic speech.

(Gadamer, 1988, p.220)

Thus Spoke Zarathustra is a narrative, and as Gadamer says:

This has enormous conceptual consequences. On a first reading, one will read the book as the announcement of a new table of values that are set up in opposition to the old Christian values. This reading is certainly not false, but it

is somewhat superficial in contrast to the drama whose events are recounted in this book.

(Gadamer, 1988, p.221)

Gadamer’s task is, he says, ‘to inquire about the meaning of these events, which constitute the tragedy of the teacher Zarathustra’ (Gadamer, 1988, p.221). The truth of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* lies in the narrative action itself, for, as Gadamer writes,

If one considers the tragedy of the prophet who is approaching his end [*Untergang*], and continually shrinking from it in terror, instead of these half-filled tablets which Zarathustra gives to himself, the whole work acquires a new immediacy, intelligibility, unity and tension.

(Gadamer, 1988, p.224)

There is no room here to follow Gadamer’s reading of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in any detail. The key point, however, which relates to the theme of performance, is that the narrative of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* suggests that truth (or ‘wisdom’)

needs to be performed, or *sung*, rather than just stated. As Gadamer puts it:

...the soul that acknowledges the eternal recurrence as its wisdom must first learn to sing its song. And has it really learned to sing and not to fall back on the teaching, on “Thus Spoke Zarathustra”, when it finally sings forth the “Yes and Amen Song”? Is that really the fulfillment?

(Gadamer, 1988, pp.225–6)

There is ambiguity here, indeed a tragic ambiguity, which does connect in the end with Nietzsche’s own destiny as a thinker. As Gadamer concludes his essay, in a manner which partly responds to Derrida’s criticisms of Heidegger’s Nietzsche interpretation:

[Zarathustra] knows and yet is not what he knows. Nietzsche’s theoretical attempt to justify Zarathustra’s message conceptually on the basis of a general principle, the will to power, which culminates in the eternal recurrence of the same, was not completed. Could it ever have been completed? In the end, the inheritance of metaphysics is preserved in Nietzsche’s radical critique of consciousness and self-consciousness from the

perspective of life, and in his sketch of a universal theory of the will to power, and this metaphysics, as Heidegger has correctly seen, terminates in the mastery of all being, in the rule of technology. In contrast, the drama of Zarathustra imparts another teaching. The teacher and cultivator, the revaluator of all values, who wants to be Zarathustra, must in the end say to his soul, ‘Sing, speak no more!’.

(Gadamer, 1988, pp.230–1; cf. Nietzsche, 1969, p.247)

Has Derrida merely caricatured his opponent Gadamer as ‘the Professor’? For Gadamer shows how Nietzsche, despite his rejection of the ‘spirit of gravity’, nevertheless has a tragic awareness of the ‘insoluble diremption’ (Gadamer, 1988, p.226), the ‘self-contradiction’ and the ‘self-dissolution’ (Gadamer, 1988, p.229) that lies at the heart of his thought. ‘Deconstruction’ is not absent from Gadamer’s Nietzsche. Gadamer emphasizes as much as Derrida Nietzsche’s ‘play of becoming’, but recognizes that the *cost* of that play – or performance – is a tragic one. Perhaps joy only exists in proximity to tragedy, and vice versa. Whether there is in Derrida’s writings the possibility of any real joy is a moot point; sometimes he seems to take a merely perverse – or merely suspicious – delight in not having his cake and not eating it. There is

however a dearly bought joy or ‘second naïvety’ at the end of Gadamer’s interpretation of the drama of Zarathustra:

It is the ease of the child, its easy forgetting, its timelessness, its arising in the there of the moment, its playing, that surpasses them all [the ‘higher men ... who cannot cast off the spirit of gravity’]. It is like a song. Song is human existence (*Dasein*) – not something intentional, indeed, beyond all disclosing of intention, beyond all ‘unconcealing’, something rather lying behind it, that fulfills itself entirely in itself. This is no desire to hold fast to what is past, no ‘spirit of revenge’.

(Gadamer, 1988, p.231)

Yet such joy is not without sorrow either, ‘the sorrow of the cool evening, but above all else the emotion of impending departure:

“They wept with one another” – without complaint, gently’.

(Gadamer, 1988, p.231; cf. Nietzsche, 1969, p.243)

Chapter 5: Notes

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I.

There must have been a sun
and some horizon
and they met. That much we guess,

the way the light moves
from the red to the blue
end of the spectrum, through the glass-

floored mezzanines, indoor
potted palms and furniture
in mid air; now, at dusk, the sleepless

glitter-globes in strings
like bubbles rising.
We have granite slabs tooled to a gloss

like a fast shallow river,
no ripples, sheeting over
dark pebbles you could almost touch.

In the square, like the valves
of a heart, stand the halves
of a night sky we can step right into; each

face of cloudy dark agate
knows the other like a secret.
We approach together then, as at a lych-

gate, step through one
by one. Why this is done
is not for us to say. We know that much.

II.

Glimpsed, it's gone
as you look: an earth-tone
that, if you could follow it, teasing

reflection apart
from refraction through
the depthless planes of glazing,

might be raw
or burnt sienna, bloodshot
filaments of madder – not just light

singing arias
to itself but something
anyone might stumble on, say a late

shift worker
opening an unmarked
door, into a sudden damp of stone,

a reticence
of mudbrick alleys shading
back and in. Look... Too late. Gone.

III.

A cargo cult? A weightless grid
of economics, as one theory holds,
dropped on a bare hill from a clear sky?
The shapes of desire? Or suppose

all this was here before us,
in the way the light behaved
that made some nomads halt
with a sense that they'd arrived

at a place already built but not
yet visible – to be pieced together

in time, from sun and wall and shadow
like the nicked edge of a razor,

from a slowly gathering buff glow
in courtyards seen through passageways
which on the unpremeditated
cusp of evening folds the place

inside out in one deft movement
like a child's game, here's-the-church-
and-here's-the-steeple, folding
all of us inside it so each arch

frames sky, not dark but prussian blue
too intense to look at. As residents
we're used to this, accepting what's
before our eyes, the prima facie evidence.

IV.

Good morning. And how was your stay?
The light will be with you shortly,
and a choice of colours.

Rosy-fingered Dawn with her overalls on
is sprucing down the aisles,
fluffing dust from the light wells.

Cleaners glide out slow as swans
over pools of polished marble
on the hum of their sweeping machines.

The whole house of cards rebuilds itself.
Glass lift doors flex and sigh,
and all the many-angled selves

we caught reflected in windows
with the night outside
are thinning like the stage ghost trick.

You saw them? This much we can say:
It'll all come out in the blue
then pink wash of Have a nice day.

Each week fewer and fewer cars
ventured out onto the roads
until the sound of one approaching
became something noticeable,
a noisy materialisation from another world.
Gradually the air cleared
and colours people had forgotten
became apparent in the Mediterranean light
of the still warming summers.
Birdsong replaced the dull roar
of tyres on concrete, cuckoos
calling in the middle of London,
deafening hordes of swifts
screaming across Trafalgar Square.
The pigeon population began to diminish
as hawks commuted into the city
and terns and black-backed gulls were seen
riding the Thames miles inland.
Every evening the emergency calls of blackbirds
were drowned by the ringing
of a million bicycle bells as cyclists
began their nightly migration to the suburbs,

swinging, twelve abreast, round Hyde Park,
freewheeling down Westminster.
Flocks of sails appeared off the coast,
the Solent a year-long regatta
while windfarms sprung up
like enormous clumps of daffodils
on low hills and exposed plains.
Every garden was soon converted
into an allotment; vast areas
of formerly cultivated land
became infested with ragwort
and small birch, then reverted to forest
where feral cattle mingled with deer and boar
while bears, which had been
holding out in small pockets
as if waiting for this moment,
emerged, blinking, into the new light.