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Front Cover:
Mary Bloch
*Between the conception and the creation
falls the Shadow*
Oil on canvas
2010

Back Cover:
Athena Torretti
Crawl
High-fire stoneware
2010

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From the Editors' Desks

Dear Reader,

You are bereaved. These are the end times. We, O Reader, are graduating.

But be not afraid, for we leave for you this book as a final word and benediction. As all men must, when faced with the vicissitudes of an uncertain fate, we cling to those eternal things which admit no change. And, though heaven and earth shall pass away, these words shall not pass away.

Many have given to the making of this book, and great is their gift, more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. This book is a work of love, meet adoration to our household gods. It is a pearl of great price; for it we have sold our inheritance, upon it we have pledged our life, our liberty, and our sacred honor. Find within the words of men who have known truth and walked with justice, who have searched after the heart of things and returned, like the servants of Job, to tell us. This is the sign and substance of our faith. And now, at the end of things, we offer it back to the source of our joy and *fontem amoris*:

O Alma Mater Studiorum, Sapientiae Sedes, at thine feet, listening, much have we seen and known; cities of men and manners, climates, councils, governments, ourselves not least. Had we but world enough, and time, an age at least to every part of thy teaching we should give. Truth is thy first lesson: this gray spirit yearning in desire to follow knowledge, like a sinking star; justice thy second: the perseverance which keeps honor bright. Thou art the ever-fixed mark that looks on tempests and is never shaken. Though we must go, thy firmness makes our circle just, and makes us end where we began.

O Reader, we cannot rest from travel; we must pass the iron gates of life. All we have been given here, all experience is but an arch wherethrough gleams the untravelled world.

Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

O Reader, to whom we leave the scepter and the Isle, we exhort thee: *veritatem et justitiam diligite*: love ye Truth and Justice, hold them dear. Set this as a seal upon you heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death.

And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be complete.

The Editors

The Dallas Philosophers Forum is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting the free and open discussion of philosophical topics in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex.

Joshua Cole

Recipient of the Dallas Philosophers Forum Scholarship

The Aesthetic Dimension of Sorites Paradoxes

The paradox of the heap is one of the oldest paradoxes in existence, and it has been contemplated by philosophers for over two thousand years. There are many variations on the paradox, but they are all essentially the same. The classic formulation begins by noting that a single grain of sand is not a heap. What happens if one grain is added; is it a heap now? Of course not. But what if another grain is added? Obviously, three grains of sand does not make a heap. One, however, can see that if grains continue to be added one by one, eventually a heap of sand will exist. The paradox consists of the fact that the single act of adding a grain of sand can apparently never result in producing a heap from a non-heap, but a heap eventually emerges nonetheless. Other forms of the sorites paradox ("sorites," from the Greek *soros* for "heap") express this same fundamental problem by asking exactly when we can call someone bald if we pick off his hairs one by one, or at exactly what point the color red ceases to be red on a spectrum from red to blue. The distinguishing feature of all of these paradoxes is that they deal with predicates which admit of borderline cases. Borderline cases are situations when we cannot say with certainty whether or not a certain predicate, such as "heap," "bald," or "red," applies to an object. In contemporary treatment of these paradoxes, this is also known as "vagueness," since there is an uncertainty concerning when the transition from non-heap to heap occurs.

Some of the most recent proposed solutions to this paradox are the epistemic, supervaluationist, and degrees of truth solutions. The epistemic solution posits that there is a sharp boundary between what is and what is not a heap, but exactly where this boundary falls is inherently unknowable. The problem of vagueness is dismissed as a problem with the nature of knowledge, thus the name "epistemic." The supervaluationist approach puts forward the idea that in borderline cases, the predicate heap neither definitely applies nor definitely does not apply, so there is no truth value at all to statements such as "A four-hundred-grain collection of sand is a heap." By denying that this statement is either false or true, vagueness is relegated to a problem with the formulation of sentences. The degrees of truth theory offers as a solution the introduction of degrees of truth to logic, saying that the statement "A four-hundred-one-grain collection of sand is a heap" is more true than the statement "A four-hundred-grain collection of sand is a heap." Vagueness occurs when it is not clear exactly how true a statement is.

I find all of these solutions unsatisfying or unacceptable. Though my exposition of them here was brief, I think it is apparent that they all seem to introduce new elements into epistemology or logic which seem ad hoc or unnecessarily far-reaching. Another solution is that put forward by Peter Unger, who simply denies that “heap” is a concept with any real content; that is, there is no such thing as a heap. I think this is a slightly more honest appraisal of the challenge offered by the paradox, but it also leads to saying that many other concepts are meaningless besides that of “heaps,” including those of “rocks,” “tables,” and “loaves of bread.” I want to offer something less radical as a solution to this paradox, but in the same vein. A similar dramatic shift in the treatment of the paradox is needed. By using the concept of heap as if it was defined in primarily numerical terms, any formulation of the paradox is fundamentally mistaken. The answer to sorites paradoxes does not lie in an analysis of the concept of vagueness or of borderline cases, but in a revised understanding of what a heap is. I propose that we see the predication of heap of an object as an aesthetic judgment, rather than a logical apprehension.

I will first outline my argument in a condensed form, and then explain the meaning of my terms and the relationship between my premises. The argument runs as follows: a “heap” is not a logical concept, therefore it cannot be approached under strictly logical terms. Sorites paradoxes frame the notion of “heap” as a logical concept and then expose the inconsistency inherent in this, leading to confusion. Approaching heaps as aesthetic concepts leads to no inconsistency. Therefore it is reasonable to suppose that heaps fall under the realm of aesthetic judgment rather than logical apprehension.

The terms “logical concept” and “aesthetic concept” are used here in opposing senses. By “logical concept” I mean a concept which underlies a predicate which can be explained analytically, breaking it down into its constituent ideas. Examples include “cube,” “bachelor,” and “dozen.” These words are known simply by knowing the meaning of their definitions: “geometric solid with six square faces at right angles,” “unmarried man,” and “set of twelve objects” respectively. Aesthetic concepts are those which underlie predicates and substantives which are essentially matters of judgment, such as “book” or “wet.” Note that for predicates of this nature, problems arise when strict empirical definitions are given for them. One could define “book” as “an object composed of pages bound together,” but this applies to “pamphlet” or “daily calendar” just as well. More and more distinctions must be made to narrow the definition of “book” until it seems precise enough to exclude certain objects, but then we find that things we have already judged to belong to the category of book are actually excluded by the definition. The same goes for “wet” (there is no specific amount of water which must be on a thing for it to be “wet” rather than merely “damp”). In contrast, logical concepts such as cube can be defined fairly easily. Anyone who understands what a cube is can give a definition of “cube” that would enable someone who did not know what a cube was to identify one. The same does not go for books.

Further discussion will make the difference between these two types of concepts more apparent. The distinction between logical and aesthetic concepts is related to the difference between aesthetic judgment and logical apprehension. In logical apprehension, one grasps the fact that an object fits the criteria for belonging to a class if and only if one understands the meaning of the criteria. Further, if one does understand the meaning of the criteria involved, and one perceives the object accurately, one cannot help the apprehension of the object’s logical category. In aesthetic judgment, one still possesses a set of criteria, but they are different in kind from logical criteria. I suggest that in common speech about aesthetic concepts, one does not apprehend the nature of an object, but one judges its nature by a positive act of the will. The involvement of the will does not imply that aesthetic judgment is a performative act which creates meaning, but is meant to point to the active nature of judgment, as opposed to the passive nature of apprehension. Further, an aesthetic judgment is subjective, in the sense that it involves a subject recognizing the nature of the relationship between an object and itself. This does not mean that there is no fact of the matter about whether an aesthetic judgment is correct. What it does mean is that there is no fact of the matter without reference to the subject making the judgment.

As mentioned above, it is characteristic of sorites paradoxes that the concepts involved always admit of borderline cases. Borderline cases occur when one is not sure whether or not to apply a certain predicate. People often indicate the presence of a borderline case by the use of the colloquial suffix “-ish.” They will say of objects that they are “red-ish,” “tall-ish,” or “small-ish.” For soritical predicates and objects there is no way of proving definitively that the predicate does apply, or that the object concerned is a certain type of object. Logicians approaching the paradox tend to attribute the lack of available proof regarding a state of affairs to the “vagueness” of the word or concept. But exactly what “vagueness” is, what property of predicates or objects could produce such baffling problems in their application, is widely disputed. Part of my approach to sorites paradoxes is to reject “vagueness” as a useful concept here because in this context “vagueness” simply functions as shorthand for “admitting of borderline cases.” It merely gives a name to the phenomenon; it explains nothing. What all soritical words have in common is that their application in any given circumstance is a matter of aesthetic judgment. For the paradox of the heap in particular, the word “heap” seems to refer to a logical concept because its definition, “a large collection of small objects,” is analyzable into the concepts of “large,” “collection,” “small,” and “objects”. We can easily see that the concepts of “large” and “small” have an important part to play in the subsequent judgment “heap,” but it is equally clear that their predication is an application of aesthetic judgment. I propose that aesthetic judgments like this are essentially subjective, but retain their everyday meaning despite this. I emphasize again that what I mean by “subjective” is that the truth of the judgments of “large” or “small” or similar predicates is inextricably linked to the relationship between the object judged and the subject who makes the judgment. I most emphatically do not mean that there is no truth value to statements

involving these predicates. The subjective nature of predicates such as “red,” “tall,” “book,” and other like concepts is apparent if this description of aesthetic judgment is accepted. The formulation of the paradox of the heap treats “heap” as if it were analyzable in terms of the number of objects which compose it, which it is not. Any reference to that number will have no bearing on the status of the collection as a heap, since number is not part of the definition of “heap.” What is definitive is the nature of a particular relationship which exists between the object and subject. There is no sense in asking “Is this given object a heap or not?” without taking into consideration the subject for whom the object is a heap.

A few objections to this position must be met. First of all, one might charge that this view, by relegating all predications of this nature to aesthetic judgment and explicitly making such judgments subjective, has the consequence of making these predicates lose their normal, apparently objective meaning. I would reply that the presentation of the paradox of the heap demolishes the conception that these predicates have objective content. In addition, the many instances of disagreement that these predicates engender indicate that their meaning is neither determinate nor easily defined. This is far from a complete answer, but one can see the rough outline of a full reply. Second, one might note that this solution does nothing to help us solve the problem of borderline cases. I did not set out to solve this problem. In borderline cases, we will have to judge as best we can, as we normally do. Our language usually provides resources for addressing borderline cases in the form of alternate predicates; in the instance of being uncertain whether a collection is a heap or not, one could call it a pile or a mound.

One could say that one can see the distinction between what I have called logical concepts and aesthetic concepts, but object to the use of the word “aesthetic.” It seems to have nothing to do with the normal use of the word. This is true, but I use it this way because I believe that aesthetic judgments of beauty are no different in kind from the judgments I have laid out here, as they both have the same subjective structure. I am not particularly attached to the designation “aesthetic,” and one could just as easily call all judgments of this type “subjective judgments,” including judgments of beauty among these. But judgments of beauty seem paradigmatic for this subjective structure, and it was by considering these judgments that I came to see their application to sorites paradoxes. Lastly, one might note that the definition of “aesthetic concept” laid out above is enormously broad, and object that if this idea is correct, then nearly all concepts we have are aesthetic rather than logical in nature. This is indeed the implication of my argument. Very few of the concepts we think are logical can in fact be completely analyzed in a logical manner, and at the root of most of our logical concepts lies an aesthetic one.

If the definitions I have given of logical apprehension and aesthetic judgments are accepted as coherent, and the observations about ordinary speech that underlie them are deemed correct, it is difficult to see how one would avoid

being led to my conclusion. Aesthetic judgment is a vastly larger field than the philosophy of art, and in fact allows us to approach our everyday concepts with a greater understanding. A further exploration of aesthetic judgment would attempt to further identify the forms that relationships between subject and object can take, the role of the will in aesthetic judgment, and more fully specify the way in which aesthetic judgments are universal for all similar subjects.

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Mary Eich
Stack
 High-fire stoneware in gas reduction
 2011

**Defeated by the Love for Language:
A Review of Melissa Range's *Horse and Rider***

It requires tact and an impeccable integration to begin a book of modern poetry with an epigraph from the book of Exodus. Yet, Melissa Range succeeds with her passage from chapter 3, verse 15: "Sing unto the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has cast into the sea." Range's "horse and rider" are an amalgam of violence; they are "the union of force and intellect" (The Trebuchet). As a poet, Range addresses the problem of war and destruction that has always visited the world. In language drawn from David's psalms of thanksgiving, she proclaims a *Novus Ordo Saeculorum*, a new age in which victory becomes defeat and defeat victory. Melissa Range is the prophet of a love that "begins in defeats" (The Taming of Bucephalus).

In this first book, Range has given birth to a work of timeless proportions. With relish she embraces the Anglo-Saxon heritage of our language and tethers it to modern conventions of speech. *Horse and Rider* bears its readers back into the scene of moving mythological and biblical rhetoric while simultaneously allowing them to retain their rootedness in the present. After she timelessly transports modernity to the tent of Sisera to observe his untimely death, Melissa Range stuffs a hand-grenade full of Persephone's "bitter seeds," "bits of fear, [and] bits of rage" (The Hand-Grenade). Range "teach[es] land-bound things to fly, / [and] turn[s] mountains into missiles" (The Trebuchet). Melissa Range emphasizes the role of poetry as the launching of the language of common prose. In the same breath that she hurls her "mountain[ous] missiles" towards her reader, she calmly advises them to:

Sing of defeat, for without defeat, how could we sing?

Sing of swords, shields, chariots, sifting
down beneath the tangling reeds.

Sing of the clear dry heavens, the mottled sea—
cedar, sable, silver, sunset, snow.

Sing unto the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously;
He has slaughtered whom he has slaughtered;

He has shown himself worthy of all our noise:
He has rid the earth of a few more horses, a few more boys.

-Horse and Rider

She both initiates an invasion and draws up the defense for it. Range reaches into the past; she has the hindsight to address an age-old problem with an equally ancient answer. In an interview with Kim Urquhart, she recognizes the need for the world to reify the role of religion in the casting of horse and rider into the sea: "I am not writing from a place of religious faith, though I used to.... A teacher once told me that we write about our obsession, and I seem to have

a religious obsession." Melissa Range binds and ties her "religious obsession" into her book.

Horse and Rider can be likened to a whip or lariat, braided of three strands, each of which is composed of a gathering of threads. It is the reins, held in the hands of the rider – a rider and a poet who has come on her horse with a message "to sear the unsuspecting world that lay in shadow" (The Taming of Bucephalus). The epigraph of *Horse and Rider* begins the book with a fitting tone of directive. Throughout her book, Melissa Range magnificently melds her own poetic voice to the voices of her subjects; she speaks to her reader through them. Commenting on her art in a Hopkins-like poem about a common dragonfly, Range "pair[s] nouns / and adjectives / to one fierce verb" and with her "aqua-stylus," "threads" words "—those frail jades / and blues" "into a gauze" (Green Darner). She "seed[s] stained pages back to life" (September Trees) and writes with her wooden pencil, having the crucifixion in mind, "Long live the cog, the clog, the rod, the twig. / There are other wars besides the wars of men. / Wood has bested iron, as it shall again" (The Tent Peg). Range ropes her readers in and snaps them into cognizance with her whip. Her poems directly address the quandaries of death, suffering, and violence that are contemporary concerns in a world ridden with terrorism. Melissa Range imposes herself upon her audience, as she "dart[s] toward the undefended space," with such "indeflectible purpose" that it is right for us to ask: "Have [we] ever seen such a swarming fist, / a smiting wit?" (Self-Portrait as the Labors of Samson).

The book is roped off and arranged into three significant sections: Horse and Rider, The War Horse, and The Taming of Bucephalus. Throughout each one, Range plucks skeins of tradition, both biblical and mythological, and tethers them together, with marvelous ease. Range leaves it up to her readers to unravel the meaning found in each of her poems. *Horse and Rider* begins with a collection of poems, corralled in a section called "Horse and Rider." Here Melissa Range presents murky meditations on "blood shed," "the polestar of grief," "murderous love," and a "scarred" heritage. Range begins rhetorically with her poetic presentation of the problem. In her poems, Range finds favor with all those who have undergone pain, suffering, and injustice. Range's opening section builds a firm foundation of empathy from which the rest of the book can rise.

Range's second section is in the style of the Exeter Book of Riddles. In it she presents weaponry, devilry, destruction, and death; she gathers the various violent seeds of arrows, bows, landmines, shields, and ropes, and husks them all under the ruddy skin of a pomegranate:

Eat of me, Persephone—
I'm a pomegranate with a brigade
of bitter seeds beneath my husk;
give a tug, and they'll cascade.

You're like me, a ball of shrapnel

set to detonate at just a touch, made
of bits of fear, bits of rage; your filler's
part escape, part escapade.

-The Hand Grenade

With her “fly-by...nick[ing]” and “etch[ing]” diction, Melissa Range “deal[s] death as death should be: / commonplace, quick, and economical” (The Battle-Axe). Violence presents itself coldly from the voice of the weapons themselves, giving the reader an insight into their true identity. They are cold, blunt, and inhuman. Although, her use of the traditional riddle poem allows Range to anthropomorphize her weapons, the language she uses never allows her reader to forget that weapons are not humans, and humans not weapons. Range reveals the lie that lets “The Trebuchet” proclaim itself “a product of harmless machines / in harmony.” From the horse and rider that have been “cast into the sea,” Range resurrects a new order of horse and rider.

The part of her book that Melissa Range named as “The Taming of Bucephalus” presents the reunion of horse and rider in harmony, using the relationship of Alexander the Great and Bucephalus as a paradigm:

Your blaze burning, you saw the shadow
of a phalanx in Alexander's face;
you saw grazing plateaus strewn with horses;
speared with desire to spur your boy
through all his wars, you cared not what became of you
Love begins in such defeats. The sun
made of you two a conflagration, another sun
to sear the unsuspecting world that lay in shadow...

According to Range's rationale, the horse and rider had to be defeated. Even her presentation of “Christ Imagined as a Cavalry Commander” revels in the rhetoric of defeat: “Chevalier...You've lost, once and for all. That pleases you.” Defeat runs rampant throughout *Horse and Rider*. If Range had ended her book without braiding a third strand into her rope, she could be classified among the innumerable artistic cynics of the world, who harp on as many horrors as their poetic sight can encompass. However, Melissa Range is an empathetic poet; she deals with the subject of victory only against the reality of defeat. Love and joy are painted against the frame of death and sorrow. Conversion and prayer only rise from the “dark and bloody ground” where they were “buried / unmarked like arrowhead[s]” (Dragging Canoe). From her heritage and the tribes that first peopled the “black sky gash[ed] black hills” of Tennessee (High Lonesome), Melissa Range “learned to win [the] losing battle”; the “blood of Chickamaugas” planted and “fertilized” the seeds of patience, suffering, and humility within her (Dragging Canoe). The theme of defeat and humility traces its beginnings back to Range's first influences.

Beginning a collection of poetry with a poem entitled “The Canary,” which commences with “This miner's minion, / this drab rendition of light / yellow,

feathers fades, slated / saffron,” is a sure sign of homage to Hopkins. Range's influences are notable and numerous. They begin “at home” in her own backyard of the Tennessee coal mines and stretch backwards in time making stops along the way in various Greek myths and finally rooting themselves in the histories of the Bible. As her poem “High Lonesome” conveys, the concept of home holds an honored roll in her poetry:

Tennessee November: nothing slumbers:
in the barn, bluebottles' ice-whittled shells
hue the tops of feed and water buckets,

inlay corn shucks and tobacco flakes
instead of the lashes of Appaloosa or Paint.
Everything which could be salvaged

has gone to rot—a dead woman's house,
her dead husband's barn. I live
among the ghosts of horses I gave names...

Escape from the present is not a priority for Melissa Range; rather, as she said in her interview with Kim Urquhart, “What I'm really interested in is how to capture what is ineffable, elusive and sacred in the world.” For Melissa, this means the bringing of the past into the present. She speaks with the same surety whether writing about the fame of Martin Luther King Jr., that “Brother who blew the covers from the Bibles” (Those Who Wait), or “Achilles the grand,” whose “labors” embody the “love which has no rest, no home, no gain” (Achilles Walks the Beaches). Unabashedly, she attributes inspiration to both the novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky and to the indie-pop artist Sufjan Stevens. Melissa Range twines her influences together in her poems' subject matter, structure, and persuasive sentiment.

Oddly enough, *Horse and Rider* begins and ends with images of birds. Range's opening poem presents cavernous, coalmine-dwelling canaries:

Little

birds, broods bred for dank
And death, for lost myths—the maze
hot in the throat, the notes a pyre—
what beast of sacrifice
cannot guess its saving fire?

-The Canary

This poor creature, yoked to live a life of inevitable death, is forced by the spirit of the horse and rider, the spirit of violence and utility, to remain forever flightless. Range's concluding poem, “Prayers to the Birds,” creates a stark contrast:

Forgive us as priests

in slums and picket lines forgive the church:
in vigilance, mining the breach—

that sky—for something that will not be owned.
Cardinal, finch—forgive us our lone

hiding behind bushes, spying you out
when we should be flying at your side, not
from pride but from humility: that soaring
force that finds its power in adoring.

These two poems act as an avian aria, a duet bookending *Horse and Rider* as Melissa Range's *ars poetica*; language allows her to soar and lends her flight. The sight that she—airborne—sees enlightens her and after alighting on a perch of "October Trees," she announces to us:

I must quit my day job. I have found another calling:
to expose the lie of the foreign tongue, the notion
of human understanding—that I should not listen
to bark or bray or cool flutter, that I should not dog-ear
the un-paged dictionaries waving in every trunk,
that I should not learn a dirge for the *each* of you,
rather than the all, for in the all is nothing
either of us can keep. Sawfallen, Splitlightning,
Allorange, Ovenflame, Slightring, Coldpenny,
Leatherlantern—how will I have time to sleep?

Horse and Rider preaches a love of language – a love that begins in submission to it. Language must not be broken by violence, must not be crushed by utilizing strength. We must not harness it as we would the warhorse or the workhorse. As in Yeats' poem, "The Fascination of what's Difficult," our yoke must not be the cause of Pegasus' "Shiver[ing] under the lash, strain, sweat and jolt / As though [he] dragged road-metal." Rather, we must ride language as Alexander the Great rode his beloved steed, Bucephalus. We must ride it as the birds overhead ride the air. Only then will we find flight.

Serena Rose White

"Perilous and Beautiful": Distance, Desire, and Formal Restraint in "The Equilibrists"

"The aesthetic forms," writes John Crowe Ransom, "are a technique of restraint, not of efficiency. They do not butter our bread, and they delay the eating of it" (*The Southern Critics* 99). This pithy quotation is drawn from an essay entitled "Forms and Citizens," which Ransom first published in 1938 as part of a collection called *The World's Body*. In that essay, Ransom explores the various ways that man, whom Ransom characterizes as naturally predatory and disposed to vigorous and direct action, becomes civilized through ritualistic forms, which restrain and transform his appetites. The stricture of ritualistic ceremony prevents direct action. In doing so, it creates a certain distance that allows objects – and people – to be seen in the fullness of their individuality, and not simply as ends to be seized and used. Ransom's essay addresses the ways in which culture is transmitted through the passing-down of these inherited forms of societal behavior, but it also has an aesthetic component. Ransom writes astutely about the use of poetic form in Milton's pastoral elegy "Lycidas." It is even more interesting to examine the way that he himself employs such traditional forms in his own poetic compositions, for many of his poems address the idea of formal restraint through their content as well. In "The Equilibrists," first published in *The Fugitive* in 1925, Ransom both describes and creates an instance of that sort of aesthetic distance about which he wrote in "Forms and Citizens." The lovers in the poem are held in a torturous and precarious state of inaction because of their dual devotion to the restraining formal force of honor, which prevents them from consummating their love, and the equally powerful force of passionate love, which inextricably binds them together. Ransom uses traditional rhyme and meter, deliberately archaic diction, and a narrator whose identity and relation to the lovers is unclear. Like the honor that separates the lovers but increases their desire through distance, these devices are themselves formal restraints that make the poem both captivately immediate and loftily difficult for the reader.

The poem, which is made up of fourteen quatrains of iambic pentameter in an AABB rhyme scheme, opens in mid-reverie. The speaker tells of a lover who meditates upon the many facets of his beloved's physical beauty: he is "Full of her long white arms and milky skin," and "had a thousand times remembered sin" (1-2). The sensual images of the woman's beautiful body are immediately tempered by the taint of guilt and separation. The description is in the past tense, which indicates that the lovers are no longer able to delight in each other's presence, but only to remember their past encounters. The word "sin" is interestingly unclear in both its source and implications. Has the man himself judged his own actions to be sinful? Or is the assessment that of an independent narrative presence? And for what reasons would the physical expression of their love be a sin? Ransom does not provide the particulars of the lover's moral predicament, which contributes to a sense of the universal nature

of their balancing act. The lover travels in the midst of a “press of people” yet is somehow alone in his preoccupation with his memories, focused solely upon “Minding her jacinth, and myrrh, and ivory” (3-4). These lines immediately establish a pattern of archaic word usage that continues throughout the poem and recalls the courtly love poetry of the Provencal troubadours, who write of the unattainable lady whom they love from afar.

This connection is underscored by the next three stanzas, which describe a passionate kiss that is abruptly curtailed by the lady’s devotion to honor. Ransom relates the tale of their tragic romantic encounter with great delicacy through the use of metaphor.

Mouth he remembered: the quaint orifice
From which came heat that flamed upon the kiss,
Till cold words came down spiral from the head.
Grey doves from the officious tower illsped.

Body: it was a white field ready for love,
On her body’s field, with the gaunt tower above,
The lilies grew, beseeching him to take,
If he would pluck and wear them, bruise and break.

Eyes talking: Never mind the cruel words,
Embrace my flowers, but not embrace the swords.
But what they said, the doves came straightway flying
And unsaid: Honor, Honor, they came crying. (5-16)

Although her eyes seem to say that the lady desires physical consummation of their love, her devotion to honor compels her to send cold words flying down from the “officious tower” that presides over the field of her body. The tower seems to be her head, or perhaps her mind or intellect: Ransom does not give an explicit parallel, which paradoxically adds to the metaphor’s grace by not pushing for an overly exact correlation between tenor and vehicle. The images here capture the intensity of the woman’s internal division: though she deeply desires the man (the “lilies” of her body are “beseeching him to take... pluck and wear them, bruise and break”), her conscience will not allow her to act on her passion. There is also a strong contrast between the heat of the lovers’ passionate kiss and the cold word of honor that restrains them. Although they feel that Honor is “such a little word,” nevertheless it separates them sharply and lies “between them cold as steel,” like the sword that lay between the tragic adulterers Tristan and Iseult (27-28).

As the poem progresses, the presence of the unnamed speaker becomes increasingly prominent. It is now clear that the lovers are being described by some kind of observing “I” who becomes emotionally involved in their plight and strives to explain it to a listener. He compares the lovers, in “their torture of equilibrium,” to “two painful stars” who swirl about each other in “the clustered night their prison world” (26, 29-30). After this simile, he seems to be overcome with the emotional import of the image that he himself has presented, and

he responds to the lovers’ plight with a passionate cry, angrily shouting “Ah, the strict lovers, they are ruined now!” (33). Then, becoming somewhat more philosophical, and he shifts from describing the lovers in the third person to addressing them directly. “Man, what would you have?” he asks in vain (36), as if he already knows that there can be no satisfactory resolution to their dilemma:

Would you ascend to Heaven and bodiless dwell?
Or take your bodies honorless to Hell?

In Heaven you have heard no marriage is,
No white flesh tinder to your lecheries,
Your male and female tissue sweetly shaped
Sublimed away, and furious blood escaped.

Great lovers lie in Hell, the stubborn ones
Infatuate of the flesh upon the bones;
Stuprate, they rend each other when they kiss,
The pieces kiss again, no end to this. (39-48)

The imagery of infernal lovers tearing each other apart in their unending passion recalls Dante’s excruciatingly vivid descriptions of the punishments inflicted upon the damned souls of *The Inferno*, with its elaborate system of *contrapasso*. It seems clear that the lovers will never choose either of these alternatives, since to do so would be to give up on either their love or their honor. The speaker returns here to the paired opposition of heat and cold that appeared earlier in the poem, and to the image of two stars caught in each other’s orbit, saying: “But still I watched them spinning, orbited nice. / Their flames were not more radiant than their ice” (49-50). Although the speaker implies that the lovers are somehow able to maintain their delicate balance and refuse to make a choice between love and honor, his story has an unclear narrative structure and a hazy sense of temporality, which is not resolved as the poem draws to a close. The next lines make it clear that the lovers have died and have been buried, yet the speaker does not seem to imply that death has forced them to choose between love and honor, or to be judged and sent to either Heaven or Hell. Impossible as it seems, the speaker implies that they have reached a permanent state of equilibrium: they are constantly restrained, constantly held back from each other by the codes of honor, yet they are drawn toward each other ceaselessly and with equal force.

The final stanza of the poem takes the form of an epitaph made by the speaker in order “to memorize their doom” (52). It is a sort of miniature poem-within-a-poem, and its central image and message is consonant not only with that of “The Equilibrists” as a whole, but also with the theories laid out by Ransom in “Forms and Citizens.”

Equilibrists lie here; stranger, tread light;
Close, but untouching in each other’s sight;
Mouldered the lips and ashy the tall skull.
Let them lie perilous and beautiful. (53-56)

The bodies of the lovers have received a respectful response from the speaker, who has carefully wrought these lines upon their tombstones. He hopes to inspire a similarly restrained attitude in any stranger who would walk above them. Like the speaker and memorializer within the poem, the author of “The Equilibrists” has operated under formidable aesthetic restraint in his process of composition. He has done so for a reason. Ransom writes that “the intention of art... goes against the grain of our dominant and carefully instructed instincts; it wants us to enjoy life, to taste and reflect as we drink... A technique of art must, then, be unprepossessing, and look vain and affected, and in fact look just like the technique of fine manners, or of ritual. Heroic intentions call for heroic measures” (*The Southern Critics* 105). The heroic intentions and measures that Ransom has taken within “The Equilibrists” allow the reader to achieve the sort of aesthetic distance that he lauds as being uniquely capable of revealing the rich individuality of the object at hand, if only the reader has the patience and perseverance to let it do so.

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Facing Page:

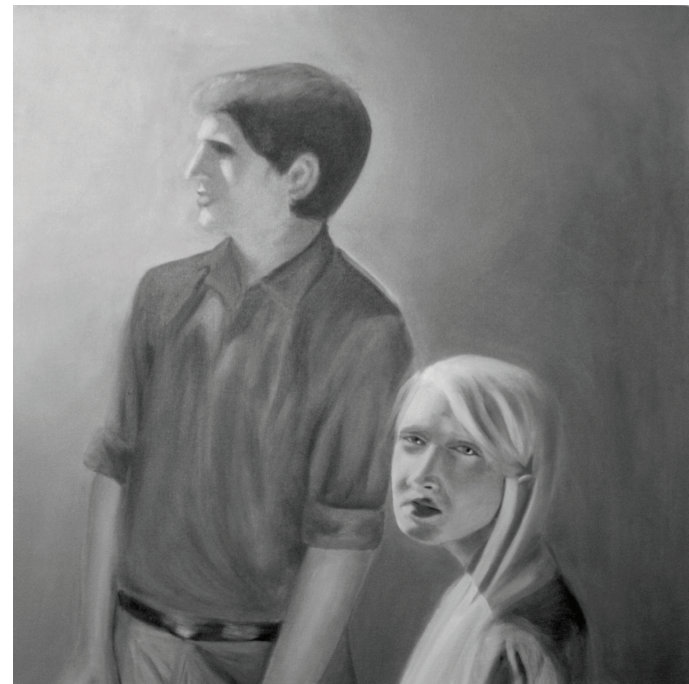
Mary Bloch
*Portrait of two freshmen quoting two Vermeer paintings
 and a Wallace Stevens poem*
 Oil on canvas
 (2010)

Jacob T. Reilly

The Nocturnal Sonnets

XV

Are you a conjurer to make light things
 Vanish before my eyes in gray grave shades
 Like that obscuring dusk in which all fades
 To fears of failures and vague threatenings?
 Suns swallow star like czars that trampled slaves;
 A light too bright to glimpse the lesser lamps:
 Are you, perhaps, that searing glare that tramps
 Upon the clouds whenever one misbehaves?
 But happily both, brazen light of day
 And seamless-post-sunset-before-moon's-rise,
 Fade indistinct beneath the nighttime's sway
 Of a shared mutual dark. Common pitch ties
 Our souls in bondage black while our virtues play,
 Sparkle, and dance like stars on the night skies.



Seaside

The sun smoothed early darkness, illumining the soft surge of surf like the flick of a bedroom light that same swell of skin and curls midst familiar frame and four corners. Childhood, adolescence, middle age, and old age, each of the 365 days of 78 years, give or take a few weeks and months, presented the same scene to the old man. As though already captured in oil and circumscribed by a bright brown mahogany etched with symmetrical shapes, the ocean appeared as always before, save a strange sail's disruption, infrequent and momentary. And with a steady stare and soft sigh, he took all and none of it in. It was already there. And the familiarity of wave and breeze effaced, if but for a moment, that familiar anxiety. He sat, a clean slate propped up in the sand. Then silence was shattered by a hurried and curious voice: "Is the water coming closer?"

These past three mornings were markedly different from a lifetime of visits. Following the recent cancer, sickness, recovery, cancer, sickness and death of his daughter, the old man's familiar world of sand and surf was met with an alien appearance. With some surprise, the old man found himself at first little affected by the newcomer's presence. Seated sinistrally and behind, the figure really only appeared a vague blur flitting often at the fringe of the old man's vision. Even a question was answered with not too much effort, and the immigrant as quickly introduced as absorbed into the sea-side society of one.

A combination of familial turmoil and, for him, an unexplainable and divorcing apathy towards his friends, wife, sons, and daughter, had kept him from, before three days ago, seeing his only grandson. There had been that brief embrace following the boy's introduction at birth, when his wife had said that swell of flesh and cloth had his eyes. The old man didn't see it. Following that day, a few Christmas cards marked the only infrequent and momentary glimpses he had into the boy's life. Over the years the cards had collected in much the same way as dust collects on an unkept mantle above an abandoned hearth.

Two days before, the boy began to make himself known even before sun struck water and started the day. If one had chanced to be out amongst the waves and able to peer through the darkness to view the happenings of the shore, one would have witnessed what seemed an Indian bobbing and bouncing, performing some mystic dance alongside an immovable totem pole, fixed in the sand. Though early darkness still veiled the seascape, the old man could not help but perceive this boy sitting sinistrally and behind--the youthful motion mysterious and subtle, the expression of a wandering mind confined to an otherwise immobile body. And save a few uncontrollable, furtive glances in the boy's direction, infrequent and momentary, after the sun smoothed out the darkness, the old man faced the same familiar wave and breeze, effacing, almost, if but for a moment, that familiar anxiety of meaning and purpose.

It was yesterday that the childlike curiosity brimmed and broke, surging forth in a simple question concerning the unfamiliar strand before him. The voice had struck the old man's ear like the sound of glass shattered by a mid-

night intruder. And if less for the boy's satisfaction and more to return to familiar sounds of wave and breeze, the old man had spoken in violation of his own tacit law of the seascape. Now, once more, the silence was met by a hurried and curious voice: "Is the water coming closer?" his grandson asked. The old man, like a teacher communicating significant shapes scrawled out on a blackboard, gestured towards the sea: "It is, Joseph. The tide is coming in." Then that familiar flit at the fringe of his vision somehow changed and took shape; Joseph slid forward and sat down beside the old man. Chancing an upwards glance, Joseph met his grandfather's gaze, as the old man met revelation like a Native American out midst familiar wave and breeze who chanced upon a Genoan stumbling on the strand.

Rebekah Spearman

The Atonement of Troy

"*Cui dabit partis scelus expiandi / Iuppiter* [to whom will Jupiter give the part of expiating the crime]?" (Horace C.1.2.29-30) asks the poet, Horace, while musing on recent events. In Augustan Rome, a sense of national guilt and the need to expiate it was prevalent among such poets as Horace and Vergil who depicts Turnus' death as expiation for past Trojan offenses. In the *Aeneid*, Turnus' death demonstrates that Aeneas has ended the cycle of Trojan licentiousness, a cycle originating with Paris and Helen and continuing through Aeneas and Dido.

Although Vergil describes Turnus as "an Achilles, / Child of Latium" (6.135-146), Turnus is, more subtly, a parallel to Hektor. The fact that Turnus is a native of Italy and that Aeneas is the intruder would suggest that, rather than being a second Achilles, Turnus is a second Hektor. Furthermore, certain details in Vergil's descriptions of battles reinforce this idea. For instance, when Turnus is besieging Aeneas' camp, he "Took up a blazing pine torch in his hand" (9.102) and set fire to Aeneas' ships. This is an obvious reference to the episode in the *Iliad* when Hektor storms the Achaian bulwarks and torches the Achaian ships. In addition, when finally Aeneas and Turnus fight, Turnus flees. Vergil describes how "They [race] for no light garland of the games / But [strive] to win the life and blood of Turnus" (12.1034-1035). This is significant since Homer, in the *Iliad*, writes that there "was no festal beast, no ox-hide / [Achilles and Hektor] strove for... / No, they ran for the life of Hektor" (22.159-161). As Vergil was obviously familiar with Homer's two heroic poems, it is clear that by using such parallel language he intends his reader to appreciate Turnus' resemblance to Hektor.

By depicting Turnus as a second Hektor, Vergil creates an important circularity of events. By killing Turnus, Aeneas once and for all ends the Trojan cycle of immorality. And, by expiating Trojan decadence, Aeneas is able to found a

new people without the baggage of vice. While she stood, Troy was a city lax in her public morals. Whether considering Priam and his many wives or Paris and his stolen bride, a Roman would view the Trojan hereditary monarchy as a standing offense to Justice. Since Hektor was the chief defender of Troy, he was also the chief defender of Trojan injustice and erotic intemperance. Thus the death of Hektor's Italian counterpart provides fitting expiation for Trojan sin. Aeneas atones for his own concupiscence, moreover, by killing Turnus. When Pallas is killed, Aeneas brings "two robes all stiff with gold / Embroidery and purple [which] Dido of Sidon / Herself had loved the toil of making" (11.96-98). With these, Aeneas shrouds the dead prince. By using the robes that Dido had made in Pallas' funeral rites, Aeneas rejects the life of luxury that Dido offered him and accepts a warrior's life and responsibility to allies. And by killing Turnus, the slayer of Pallas, Aeneas makes good his rejection of vainglory and hedonism.

Finally, Vergil explains the necessity of amending Trojan corruption when he describes the Latin embassy to Diomedes. Having already described the Achaeans' atrocities in Book II of the *Aeneid*, Vergil now traces some ramifications of those actions. Diomedes recalls that each of the Achaian captains has suffered since his return from Troy, that "Menelaus Atrides / Tastes exile near the pillars of Proteus" (11.356-357) and that "The Mycenaean, entering his home / Met death at his unspeakable consort's hands" (11.363-364). Diomedes himself is forced to leave his original homeland in search of a new country so that he may atone for his "Wounding, defiling, Venus' hand" (11.377). The Trojans must redress their crimes, or, like the Achaeans, they will be condemned to suffering. Diomedes' account gives meaning to the seemingly aimless wanderings of the Trojans. Their travails serve the purpose of cleansing them from the corruption of their society, exemplified in erotic intemperance. And, inasmuch as he is a figure of Hektor, Turnus is the appropriate sacrifice to purge the Trojans of their moral defects.

Turnus' death illustrates how Aeneas expiates inveterate Trojan depravity. Vergil makes it clear that Rome could not be founded upon the efforts of effete, licentious men such as Paris. Thus, Aeneas undergoes his many trials to prove that he is fitting to be the forefather of such a glorious city as Rome. This education by adversity also serves as a reprimand to the thoughtful Roman reader: if Aeneas must be purified of the degeneracy of Troy, oughtn't Rome to retain some semblance of Aeneas' virtue?

A Lesson in Italian Grammar, in Which is Considered Convict Geese, Graffiti, and a Boy Named Bob: A Joyce Imitation

Rome will be amazing and it will be your home and you will love it forever and there will be no place like it in all the World.

That's what everyone had always said: she always thought they were hopeless romantics: they were all the same.

She was one of those people. Like Mary Choll: she had long eyelashes like a cow.

*The cow jumped over the moon.
The little dog laughed to see such sport.*

She loved Nursery Rhymes. Mummy used to read them all the time to her and Joey. Joey was going to Rome too. Eventually. She said:

– Go to the Borghese Gardens.

She wanted him to bring a picture of Piazza del Popolo back for her. Joey was an artist. He liked to draw pictures of geese. Convict geese.

OH, THE GOSLINGS.
GIVE THEM CORN.

That's what he used to say to Edmund. Edmund had exactly ten freckles on his nose. He thought Joey was funny.

They all used to eat corn on the cob together in the summer watching the sun set. Edmund said:

– Is there corn in my teeth?

Mummy said:

– Look at the sun set.

* * *

Piazza del Popolo lay directly ahead. A gargantuan obelisk in the center of the piazza pointed like a compass to St. Peter's. The dusky air was warm and breezy. It was not like that in the city. Here it smelled like leaves. The sun set over Rome. The clouds like purple cotton-balls lined the horizon. Haze from the polluted city air thinly veiled the dome of St. Peter's. She felt insignificant and small on the balcony in the grandeur. Bob was there.

Bob was nice. He had a cheerful face. Not today. She asked him:

– How are you?

Bob answered: Pretty all right.

Then she said:

– This is so beautiful.

He replied: I can't believe we are leaving so soon.

*Return to me.
Please come back, bella mia.*

The balcony was worn down and covered with graffiti. Mummy had said:

– Never write on the walls.
These weren't walls. Someone had scribbled "Roma, mi amore."

Pronomi: mi, ti, si, ci, vi, si.
Devo usare prima il verbo coniugato.

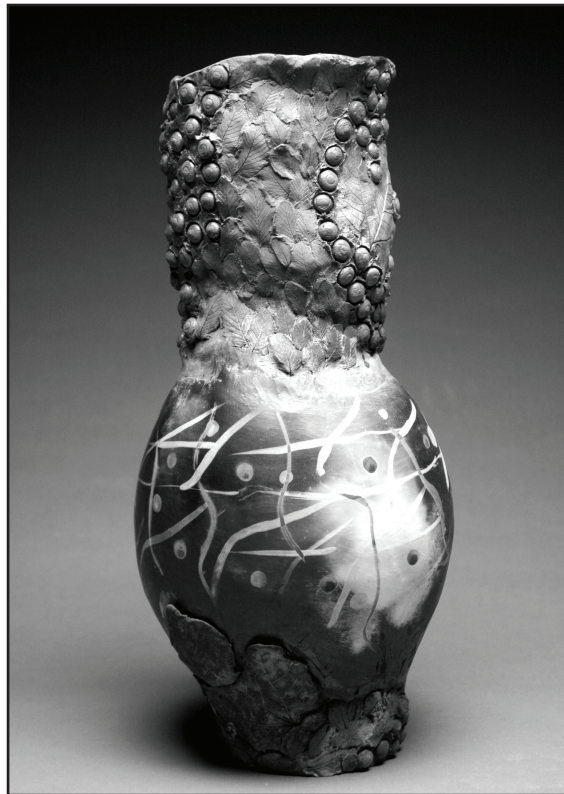
The Italian teacher was nice. Valeria: she had short black hair. Bob had short hair too. But it was gold. The sun was gold too.

The sun had disappeared behind St. Peter's dome. There was an accordion player in the piazza. His music echoed up. It was tinny and hauntingly melancholy, though at the same time oddly confident. Beautiful music! She played the piano. Not very well. But she liked Chopin. Edmund had said:

– CHOP-in.

She wondered if you could play Chopin on the accordion. She dropped to her knees and stared through the columns. They were like hourglasses, and the time in Rome was diminishing like sand. They would be going back home soon. Bob said:

– Real life.



Yesica Moran
Stamp
Ceramic

Frogs: The Future of Literature?

A central image in both Miguel de Unamuno's *Mist* and Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* is that of characters coming to life and interacting with their author. As a result of these encounters, many questions are raised, among them: who/what is an author, and why do they write? The two works in question offer several different ideas of what an author is: a director, a scribe, a watchmaker, a scientist, or even a character in a larger work. However, every possible definition of the function of an author that these works present, they soon proceed to subvert. Each work also offers a different reaction to this authorial identity crisis: Pirandello, one of despair (though I don't see this as his own personal response), and Unamuno, one of resigned amusement.

The above definitions of what an author does/is can be classified into two groups: active and passive. Active author functions would include the director and the scientist; passive functions would include the scribe and watchmaker. The idea of author as director is expressed most clearly by Pirandello, in that the stage director agrees to become the author sought by the characters to write their play. Theoretically, this function gives the author the most control over the characters. However, the characters in Pirandello's play (as opposed to the actors, since they are all technically characters) challenge this idea of the author by trying to direct their own play, as when the stepdaughter says to the father: "Make your entrance. You don't have to walk around. Come straight here. Make believe you've already come in," to which the director responds: "Do you mind telling me, are you directing, or am I?" (Pirandello 42). In evaluating the idea of author as director in Pirandello's play, we must consider the degree to and manner in which the director is able to exercise control. At several points, the director must seemingly reason with the characters and persuade them to do things his way, such as when they are discussing how to stage the scenes with the little boy, the little girl and the son. In an attempt to win over the stepdaughter, the director says, "We will have the garden scene. Don't you worry, we'll have it in the garden. You're going to be happy with the way it turns out" (Pirandello 58). This passage would indicate that the staging of the play is a collaborative effort between the director/author and the characters, with the director having the final say. This collaboration can be contrasted with the seemingly absolute control claimed by the "in-book-author" Don Miguel (that is, Unamuno's character based on himself as author). When Augusto threatens to kill Don Miguel, Don Miguel decides to kill Augusto. This is in some way based on input from the character (in the form of a death-threat), but not at all in accordance with his wishes. Don Miguel seems to think that with the stroke of his pen, he can alter the fate of his character, but, strangely, he cannot change what he has written. "I hereby render judgment and pass the sentence that you are to die," Don Miguel tells Augusto. "It is now written, and I cannot now recall it" (Unamuno 302-304). Augusto's subsequent death at the end of the story, which he tries

unsuccessfully to delay, would serve as evidence that Don Miguel really had this power, although this evidence is not incontestable.

The more passive idea of the author as scribe is by no means post-modern. Ever since the Muses of the ancients, the idea has existed that the author takes his inspiration or even direct dictation from a source outside of himself. More recently, “theories” have abounded that all stories actually exist in some dimension, independent of the author, and the author’s only function is to write them down. Calvino in his *If on a winter’s night a traveler* even toys with the idea that stories are beamed into authors’ heads by aliens. Augusto in *Mist* voices this challenge to Don Miguel very directly: “May it not be that you are nothing but a pretext for bringing my history into the world?” (Unamuno 295). Victor (another of Unamuno’s characters) alludes to the idea with more humor: “Suppose, for example, that some—some ‘nivolist’ were hiding here now, taking stenographic notes of all that we were saying” (Unamuno 287). Pirandello has the director/author in his play do exactly this, when he tells the prompter to “follow the scenes as we play them little by little and try to get down the dialogue, or at least the major points” (Pirandello 33). This function of the author is the most passive of all, denying him any creative role in the creation of the characters or the story. The watchmaker function is slightly more creative in that it implies that the author creates characters and then turns them loose to do as they will (or that they break loose on their own and come alive), though this function quickly turns into that of the scribe once the characters come alive. “When a character is born, he immediately assumes so much independence, that he can be imagined by everybody in a number of other situations in which the author never dreamed of putting him, and sometimes he even acquires a meaning the author never dreamed of giving him” (Pirandello 56). In such a situation, all the author can do is “follow [the characters] in their words and actions, which they precisely suggest to him” (Pirandello 56). What would be the motivation of an author in this situation? One can only imagine that he would write under compulsion from the characters, whose story would already be formed.

Some theories hold that authors write for self-preservation, to immortalize themselves in their words. This is not the case in these two works, or, if this is what the in-book-authors set out to do, they are foiled. A common element in both works is the characters forcing the authors to question their own existence/identity. Again, it is Victor who observes most succinctly that “the most liberating effect of art is that it makes one doubt whether one does exist” (Unamuno 289). Augusto asks directly, “May it not be, my dear Don Miguel, [...] that it is you and not I who are the fictitious entity?” (Unamuno 295). In asking the director, “who are you?” the father says that characters, because of their fixed characteristics and unchanging reality, are always “someone”, while a changeable man (an author) can be “nobody” (Pirandello 54-55). In both books is found the idea that characters are immortal; they cannot die because they do not live. Perhaps this is one reason that Pirandello and Unamuno have written themselves into their books—as authors they must doubt their existence, but as characters they will live on. Yet, what is it to be only a character in a greater story, as Victor

suggests to Augusto (Unamuno 286)? Both books in the end grapple with this disturbing possibility, dealing with it quite differently.

A final option presented by these works for the role of an author is that of experimental scientist, in which the author creates characters and puts them into different situations to see how they react. This role is active in that the author is in control of the experiment, and can manipulate events and settings as a scientist would manipulate variables. The motivation for this view of writing might be to try and distill truths about human nature, if these are taken to exist, which is not certain in this postmodern era, or it might simply be amusement, as a schoolboy might mix chemicals just to see what happens. This role is exemplified by Augusto in his attempt to conduct a “psychological experiment” on Eugenia. Augusto almost takes on an authorial role when he creates his own Eugenia, and later attempts to analyze the real one. Augusto’s transformation from experimenter into frog (Unamuno 253) parallels the existential crisis of the authors in both books. In making himself a character in his own book, Unamuno may be following Victor’s advice to Augusto: “make a frog of yourself”—“jump into the pool and croak for a living” (Unamuno 282). Victor gives this advice to Augusto after telling him that he must confound reality and fiction, dream with waking, the true with the false (Unamuno 282). Pirandello does this less directly by referring to one of his plays and then having the actors in the play comment about and try to interpret it, and by having them comment on his style in general, which as they describe never intended “to please either the critics or actors or public” (Pirandello 8).

If we take his characters’ evaluation of his drama as a statement of Pirandello’s intentions as a playwright (which it may or may not be), then what could be the purpose of his writing? Perhaps he writes only to raise questions, to spread and thicken the mist and confusion proclaimed by Victor in *Mist*. If the author is not a director or a scientist or even a watchmaker, what is he to be? Pirandello’s director presents one possible reaction to this confusion of true and false, reality and fiction: “no longer able to put with it all,” he shouts, “Make-believe! Reality! You can all go to Hell, every last one of you!” (Pirandello 65). This play, though it came ten years after *Mist*, seems to portray the modernist author who despairs of ever finding a purpose and writes for the sake of communicating his despair. Unamuno’s book comes no closer to finding any real purpose for writing, but treats this problem with the playfulness of the deconstructionists. Victor’s comment that “all this dialectical subtlety and talk, this juggling with words and definitions—it serves to pass the time!” (Unamuno 286) seems an embodiment of Derrida’s deconstructionist idea of *jouissance*, or the playful ambiguity of language as it constantly subverts itself. Victor may even be seen as a prophet of postmodernism; his words “experiment upon yourself” and “devour yourself” (Unamuno 282-283) set the stage for the reflexive nature of postmodern literature, which loves to experiment with and explore its own conventions and capabilities, as well as to question the very nature of its own existence.

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Zofia S. Kaminski

Sarah from the Book of Tobit

I saw that I was weeping once again.
The world, my mind, have become disjointed.
I sorrow too much to actually feel.
Now I react and watch myself react.
The demons haunt me, eyes watching me,
Narrow glowing slits of coldest fire,
Laughing at me and clawing at my soul.
My mother helps prepare the wedding bed.
Everyone knows it will remain unused.
Silence precedes me as gossip flutters.
The killer of her seven noble husbands.
“Murderer, murderer,” so their eyes say.
I think, perhaps, it is better this way.
I can stay safe and undefiled and pure.
Women’s talk has warned me of dishonor.
I would rather be barren than destroyed.
Yet, I wonder about him, my kinsman,
His eyes shine with something like godliness,
He does not fear demons or murderers.
Perhaps I weep from love, I do not know.
My father has begun to dig his grave.

Ethan Munsill

The Possibility of Meaning:

John Donne’s “A Valediction: Of My Name, In the Window”

Faced with an impending absence, John Donne imagines inscribing his name in a window to be a tutelar for love. “A Valediction: Of My Name, In the Window” is a poem of possibility, roaming through a future tense of pervasive conditionals. Is it possible for a name etched in glass to support “firme and substantiall love?” (62). For Donne, it is conceivable. The possibility hinges on language’s somewhat supernatural capability to mean, not merely as a pointing-towards symbol which evokes a concept and steps aside, but as a capsule of transmissive reality. Better than a lyric or letter, for his lover, Donne’s name embodies him, imbued with his spirit and working its supernatural influence on the lover he has to leave.

For Donne, the natural world can be shaped and manipulated by a lover’s name, both by its placement and by its being seen. Stanzas one through three compare imparting the name to altering a material substance: “My name engraved herein, / doth contribute my firmnesse to this glasse” (1). The name’s transformative power miraculously makes the fragile glass “as hard, as that which grav’d it was,” since through “showers and tempests” the name remains evoking Donne’s unwavering love (4, 15). A sense of this endurance is conveyed by alternating verb tenses—“all times” appear to have already found his name “the same.” Stanza one uses present, past, and future tenses (“engrav’d ... doth contribute ... grav’d ... will give”) and stanzas two and three use present and future tenses (“should bee,” “shewes,” “reflects,” “can undoe,” “see,” “am are,” “can outwash,” “shall all times finde,” “may fulfill”). [1-2, 4-5, 7, 9-12, 14-17]

Though the inscription facilitates comparison between the constancy of the man Donne and the name “Donne,” it is the lover’s recipient eye which works catalytically on the name’s supernatural powers. Stanza three ends with this puzzling couplet: “You this intirenesse better may fulfill / Who have the patterne with you still” (17-18). A pun on “patterne” is the crux of the paradox. Originally, pattern—an image-like copy—and patron—a tutelary spirit—were the same word (*OED*). For his lover, reading the name brings these definitions together, since for her, the name-Donne calls forth more than an image and enables a mystical interaction. Consider, for example, that a window under normal conditions is transparent and reflective: the glass is “all confessing and through-shine” and “reflects thee to thine eye,” as Donne suggests in lines eight and ten. Under “loves magique”—that curious interaction of a lover and a loved-one’s name—“all such rules” are undone (11). Her glance causes their selves to blend—her perspective drawing out a pattern and patron, an image spiritually substantial, which radiates indistinguishably intertwined with her reflection: “Here you [lover] see me [Donne], and I [Donne] am you [lover]” (12).

Stanzas one through three explore the possibility of the name to sustain love, stanzas four through six explore its possibility to affect grief, and stanza seven explores its possibility to handle both concerns. The name bears not only

the reality of Donne's fixed and entire love but also the dismantled Donne torn apart by absence. As "loves magique" undid their absence in mystical union, so grief, through mystical disjunction, instills a yearning for restoration (11). In grief, the name appears as a mutilated Donne, his "ruinous Anatomie" (24). What initially resembles through simile extends beyond similarity. Though the jagged inscription may appear anatomical—"ragged and bony"—Donne sees his divided self as literal: his actuality rests in her as the causal source of all his action (an idea referencing the Aristotelian degrees of the soul):

Then, as all my soules bee,
Emparadis'd in you, (in whom alone
I understand, and grow and see,)
The rafters of my body, bone
Being still with you, the Muscle, Sinew, and Veine,
Which tile this house, will come againe. (25-30)

Separated from her, Donne is pure potential without his souls. By engaging this reality transferred through his "ragged bony name" she can "repaire / and recompact ... [his] scattered body" (23, 31-32). The name guides her thoughts and actions, as the simile of the sixth and seventh stanzas suggests by comparing the name's supernaturally influential realities of love and grief to "the virtuous power which are fixed in the stars" (33). Just as astrological forces should guide men toward proper action, so Donne warns his lover:

No doore 'gainst this names influence shut
As much more loving, as more sad,
'Twill make thee; and thou shouldst, till I returne,
Since I die daily, daily mourne. (39-42)

To capture completely his absence, the name-Donne simultaneously manifests his complete self and his mutilated self, which through "love's magique" undergoes a death daily—more actual than figurative—by bringing his self together and ripping it apart (11). The only appropriate response for his lover: "daily mourne" (42).

Presumably owing to their extended separation, Donne's lover, growing numb to love and grief, neglects the inscription in the eighth through tenth stanzas. The result, more than a lack of attention, is a complete behavioral change: her hand is "inconsiderate"—without the sidereal—as it forcefully opens the window, utterly irreverent (43). Once the window is open, she gazes not at Donne, but through him "to look on One, whose wit and land, / New battry to ... [her] heart may frame" (45-46). Brought into focus, however, by its "trembling," the name appears "alive" and its influence through meaning returns: "Then thinke this name alive, and that thou thus / In it offendst my Genius" (44, 47-48). The offense works on two levels: she angers the tutelary name, but, in addition, without her attentive eyes providing the pattern for the complex relationship of name and lover, the impressive conclusion of previous stanzas collapses in a foolish heap. The final intellectual flourish of outmatching an imaginary suitor

seems nothing more than a quick fix for Donne's vexed ego. The name—Donne's genius—does perform the Odyssean feat of overtaking the suitor, stealing the suitor's place in the letter's address when Donne's lover unwittingly writes to him:

And if this treason goe
To an overt act, and that thou write againe;
In superscribing, this name flow
Into thy fancy, from the pane.
So, in forgetting thou remembrest right,
And unaware to mee shalt write. (55-60)

Once again self-assured, however, Donne admits that "glasse, and lines must bee, / No meanes our firme substantiall love to keepe" (61-62).

In apparent agreement with the concession of these first two lines, the eleventh stanza concludes with Donne's death metaphor mitigating his apparent intellectual lapse. I would suggest, however, Donne has not completely abandoned his argument, and here only makes it more elegant. Previous stanzas indicate Donne is merely departing, not dying:

Being still with you, the Muscle, Sinew, and Veine,
Which tile this house, will come againe. (29-30)
'Twill make thee; and thou shouldst, till I returne. (41)

Thus, Donne here describes a metaphoric death as the cause of his mental sluggishness: "Neere death inflicts this lethargie" (63). Yet to speak of absence as death, recalls that previously-described mystical death. Donne certainly has not forgotten. Instead of opposing his previous position, these lines covertly support the possibility of transmissive reality through language. These lines, sure to capture and impart those realities of love and grief born by a poignant metaphor, rescue his argument even as they feign defeat. The word "death" would certainly leave his lover desirous and mourning.

