WILLING SHAPE-SHIFTERS: THE LOATHLY LADY FROM
IRISH SOVRANTY TO SPENSER’S DUESSA

By

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Ph.D.
Graduate Dept of English
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Abstract
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Ph.D. 2001
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I explicate the nexus of cultural ideas embodied in the loathly lady motif, whose narratives are concerned with national and personal identity. Her shape-shifting flesh signals the contestation of will inherent in kingship, nationhood, and heterosexual relations. I begin with the Irish Sovranty figure, Chaucer and Gower's loathly ladies, Dame Ragnell, Thomas of Erceldoune's fairy queen, and several balladic heroines: medieval versions which endorse active female sexuality and make male subjugation to it a kingly ideal. The two loci of the tales, the forest and court, are diametrically opposite spheres brought into play with each other through the two main characters of the tales, the beastly bride and the hunter hunted. These enact an courtship ritual invoking an imbroglio of concerns, including anxiety about food and sex, fear of assimilation, suspicion of human beastliness; the signification of feminine flesh, the relation of word to flesh, of genre to gender; initiation into maturity, social hierarchy, and the power ratio underpinning heterosexuality. The paradoxes of the beastly bride and the hunter hunted are coupled; the slippage of inversion allows a loosening of gender roles. The female
body of the loathly lady incorporates anxiety and desire inherent in competition, with the union of opposites providing redemptive closure.

I then show how Spenser makes an opposite use of the same motif. Duessa, his loathly lady, is sternly disempowered, her active sexuality is punished, her adept performance of the role of romance lady is disavowed. The trial and execution of her is used to urge Elizabeth toward harsher treatment of the Irish. Spenser addresses the issues which the medieval loathly lady configures, but his different inflexion measures his assessment of these. Yet like the medieval models, where the loathly lady is a king-maker like the Irish bard, and where Chaucer’s and Gower’s hags reflect authorial intention, Duessa, too, provides a paradigm of Spenser’s performance. Her multiplicity mirrors his poetic strategy, while her energy is displaced onto Mutability and reconciled by Nature, in alignment with the happy endings of the medieval tales.
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My better-half Neale Johnson is a bulwark.
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Introduction

This thesis investigates the motif of the shape-changing lady who is alternatively lovely and loathly. I call this figure the loathly lady after Geoffrey Chaucer's knight's marriage-night, between-the-sheets complaint, "thou art so loothly" (WBT 1100), a more poignant rephrasing of "foul and old" which are the author's terms up until then. Previous scholars have made the connection between Chaucer's Wife of Bath's hag and other loathly ladies, including the Irish sovereignty hag, and Dame Ragnell. Specialists in early Irish literature note that the motif recurs, and observe variations. Medievalists equipped with twentieth

1 Donald B. Sands also uses this label in his preface to The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell (323-5).

2 Those detectives who chart this terrain—William P. Albrecht, Francis James Child, Arthur C. L. Brown, Sigmund Eisner, Roger Sherman Loomis, G. M. Maynadier, Alfred Nutt, Jessie L. Weston and Bartlett J. Whiting—provide the ground work for this thesis. Scholarly opinion is that all extant works which use the loathly lady motif have evolved from earlier oral forms, pagan and irretrievable. The network established by scholars in the early twentieth century has not been pursued by recent critics; the feminists, Marxists et al. who anatomise Chaucer have not exploited the legends which are contrapuntal to his Wife of Bath's Tale.

3 I make use of the following: Maire Bheathnach, Alan Bruford, John Carey, Ann Dooley, Joanne Findon, S. F. Gallagher, Maire Herbert, C. L. Innes, Mary Low, Prionsias Mac Cana, Kim McCon e, Maire Cruise O'Brien, Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, John O'Donovan, Thomas F. O'Rahilly, Harold Roe, and Whitley Stokes. Weston and Loomis establish the link between the Irish hag and Arthurian material. Loomis foregrounds "the resemblance between the Grail Bearer and the Sovranty of Ireland" (Grail 49). The motif's cross-circuiting complicates its meaning. Edward Dudley gestures to the exegetical slippage involved in Romance's incorporation of Celtic myth: "The contention that the alien world of the Celtic narrative tradition is embedded within the form of medieval Romance itself contains a double agenda. The alien force is both contained/imprisoned within the later narrative form and at the same time exists there as a hidden configuration with its own signifying capabilities and contradictions" (37-8). The loathly lady, paradoxically both ubiquitous and elusive, makes a perfect representative of her own textual ambiguities.
century theory have discussed Chaucer's hag in relation to the Wife of Bath, noting that there is osmosis between the two. But no one to date has performed a thorough investigation of the shape-changer as a motif, applying awareness of the gendered body's signification to a consideration of what her unstable body might mean. There is no one extant original source for the loathly lady, no Ur-text. While incidentally firming up what such an Ur-text might include, my thesis will illuminate what the motif embodies: an imbroglio of cultural ideas about contestation, in which gender roles are loosened, dissolved and resolved.

The thesis begins with the early Irish and English loathly ladies. With Chaucer's version as a central comparison, I establish the significance of the archetype of the loathly lady in a range of texts from the late medieval period:

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4 A list of important critics would be impossible to compose inclusively. However, I cite the following scholars below: David Aers, Peter C. Braeger, Peter G. Beidler, Larry Benson, D. S. Brewer, Mary Carruthers, Susan Crane, Sheila Delany, Carolyn Dinshaw, Juliette Dor, Ruth Evans, Susanna Greer Fein, Louise Olga Fradenberg, Susan K. Hagan, Margaret Hallissy, B. F. Hamlin, Ann Haskell, Lesley Johnson, Peggy Ann Knapp, V. A. Kolve, C. S. Lewis, Carl Lindahl, Jill Mann, Priscilla Martin, Clair C. Olson, Dolores Palomo, Lee Patterson, Derek Pearsall, David Raybin, David S. Reid, Felicity Riddy, Peter Robinson, Sands, Angela Jane Weisl, and Marion Wynne-Davies.

5 Juliet Mitchell, justifying the ways of Lacan to women, explains that “neither the unconscious nor sexuality can in any degree be pre-given facts, they are constructions; that is, they are objects with histories and the human subject itself is only formed within these histories” (4). Although “in any degree” is a rather extreme definition, and “histories” a less stable term than it was in the 80s, the body is the site whereupon ideas of identity are enacted. Speaking of generic woman rather than the loathly lady, Mann finds ‘a special appropriateness in mediating the tragic experience of mutability through a woman’ (Geoffrey 30); I address her argument below.

6 Throughout this thesis I use “motif” rather than “archetype” to avoid the distraction of Jungian connotations. (Alan Bruford's definition of “motif” as “a detail of a story sufficient
which consists of the poem “Lughaidh Mal” and the prose passage “Lughaidh Laidhe and the Other Sons”; the Coir Anmann, and the Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid, (14th century); Chaucer’s Wife of Bath’s Tale (circa 1390); John Gower’s Tale of Florent (1386-93); several ballads from Francis James Child’s collection (“The Marriage of Sir Gawain”; “King Henry”; “Kempy Kay”; “Kemp Owyne”; and the “Knight and the Shepherd’s Daughter”); The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell (circa 1500); and Thomas of Erceldoune (circa 1400). I ascertain which elements of the motif are constant, working from the larger concerns of each text to the narrative loci of forest and court, in which the two main figures, one male and one female, become enmeshed in different kinds of contestation, resolved by their intercourse. Two subcategories of loathly lady, one virginal, one experienced, share similar traits in the medieval texts. I then contextualise Edmund Spenser’s Duessa as a loathly lady, which is possible once the motif is to be the basis of the story itself” (6) is a concise one which fits my usage.) However, here I import Northrop Frye’s definition: “I mean by an archetype a symbol which connects one poem with another and thereby helps to unify and integrate our literary experience [...] the archetype is the communicable symbol [...]” (Anatomy 99). The loathly lady is an embodiment of the archetypal principle delineated in Frye’s statement that “Archetypes are associative clusters, and differ from signs in being complex variables” (Anatomy 102). I explicate the loathly lady’s various complexities.

7 When I am treating these as one text, I will call this the Corca Laidhe. I will refer to the two separate parts by name when I am dealing with them individually: to the poem as “Lughaidh Mal,” and to the prose passage as “Lughaidh Laidhe.” The Coir Anmann is Stokes 1897 translation of “Lughaidh Laidhe,” which I use to support O’Donovan’s earlier translation of 1847. O’Donovan’s is the fuller, and Stokes the better translation.

8 All Canterbury Tales quotations are from Larry D. Benson’s edition.
untangled from its separate presentations. Thus I define the motif more precisely than has been previously done, and then show that the complex of ideas it embodies may be inflected and exploited in various ways.

Chaucer's version is a lodestone, the source which hooked my interest. As one whose body changes shape from the grotesque to the classically beautiful, Chaucer's loathly lady collapses boundaries promisingly, particularly from a feminist perspective. In this, she is curiously suitable to her author's organisation. Dinshaw argues that, "Throughout Chaucer's poetic corpus [...] literary representation is understood in terms of the body--the body as it enters into social interactions, as it functions in social organization, as it is assigned gender value in the transactions that constitute social structure" (15). Chaucer's redaction foregrounds the body, at the same time destabilising the relationship of gender to the corpus of text and of flesh, with evidence of intention to play in this slippage zone. Like Chaucer, his loathly lady is in control of her own shape-shifting.

Craftily taking advantage of a rapist knight's need for a life-saving answer to the riddle of what it is that women desire, the loathly lady coerces him into marriage when her form is hideous. She changes shape into a young, beautiful and compliantly obedient wife once he has both accepted her as a sexual partner and conceded her decision-

9 All Faerie Queene quotations are from A. C. Hamilton's edition.
making rights within their marriage, enacting the answer to the riddle: namely, that women want control over their husbands as over lovers. However, the final loveliness of the heroine is compromised by her incidental (and, I find, inherent) loathliness. The closure which beds the tale within the patriarchal fold is likewise undermined by an instability of the female flesh so vital in the comedic conclusion of marriage.

Chaucer's is one of the loathly ladies who is not a bespelled maiden, so not essentially virgin; her adaptation of a form which will please a young man is evidence of her own control. Packaged as lovely, she remains without the innocence that maidenly form normally represents. Nowhere in any of the texts is there the suggestion that the lady preserves a somatic memory of loathliness once she is lovely. But a beautiful bride who, a moment earlier, has been monstrous, is not equivalent to one who is simply beautiful.10

This thesis is motivated by desire to look more closely into a tale of wonder in which the after-image of beastliness problematises the loveliness of the bride in ways which are productive. By containing a

10 Weisl notes that “Chaucer is both bound by the conventions and traditions of romance and determined to challenge them; he is interested in the gender dynamics ordained by the genre, yet he still wants to rattle its cage” (3). She continues: “The Loathly Lady, who is the exact opposite of the standard romance heroine throughout most of the Wife of Bath’s Tale, must become ideal for the poem to end. Once a text has engaged romance’s terms, it must remain bound by them […].” (3) While Weisl's statements are valid within her context of genre and gender, this thesis shows that the loathly lady is not merely “ideal” at the end of the tale; the nexus of ideas which she imports makes this an instance when Chaucer is rattling the cage of the romance genre particularly vigorously. Furthermore, even when the loathly lady is a bespelled virgin, so that her maidenly form seems to more closely represent her intrinsic being, her recent experience of ugliness adds a dimension of knowledge which denies naiveté.
ghost grotesque within her transformed shape of youthful beauty, she scrambles the purport of the female body. Her body's ambiguity as a signifier is partly symptomatic of male anxiety about female flesh. Yet this very instability allows for escape from the semiotics of the female body, from that tacit system in which loathliness and loveliness are separated as different poles on a sliding scale whose signification brings about the objectification of women.

While shiftily eluding being formally catalogued, the loathly lady effects a union of opposites on pro-woman terms. Thomas Hahn describes the negotiations across the textual and societal boundary when he says of the *Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell:* “At the heart [...] lies the question of how the unknown, the marvelous, or the threatening is brought into line with legitimate, normative, idealized chivalric society” (41). Satisfied that Hahn is right (in terms of the motif in general, not just of Ragnell), I would add to his observations that the very action of bringing the unknown, marvelous and threatening into society introduces a potentiality for the expansion of what is normative or legitimate in the real world. In the case of the loathly lady, where what is unknown, marvelous, and threatening is grotesque female sexuality, and female authority, the medieval texts embody a feminist prospect. Hahn finds that “the narrative unfolds in ways that have the heroine clearly serve the interests of the male chivalric society that the poem good-humouredly celebrates” (42). Yet his own observation of the “more
pervasive mediation” which makes Ragnell the nexus of the poem (43) admits the feminine control of the very structure of the work, a pattern which is inherent in most of the earlier loathly lady texts.

These works also enable the instability of gendered role play to work to the advantage of the male protagonist. 11 In his itemisation of three main theses to his collection of essays, Beidler observes that “the patriarchy has through the years also done much damage to men by limiting the roles men can acceptably play [...]” (Masculinities 3). David Townsend concludes that “he who lives by the phallus is castrated by the phallus,” or, in other words, “the price of the phallus is the rest of the body” (83). The closure of these tales shows that female control rewards as it relieves the male from the stricture of role play. Writing about representations of masculinity in the Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale, Elizabeth M. Biebel asserts that “It is only through the events of Alisoun’s fictional tale of romance that men and women both gain recognition and respect as individuals who are free from the limitations of a culture that emphasises male dominance” (64). Biebel proposes that “Eradication of stringent gender roles is the key to human fulfillment” (75). Amongst the

11 Dudley declares “Real men don’t read Romance [...]” (21), while Weisl notes that, in the romance genre, the woman is essential and that “Through her, men become feminized (or aestheticized) [...]” (13). Although Weisl is right in terms of contrasting romance against epic, the romance convention encodes gender roles, so that one might equally declare that it restricts men to a masculine part, women to a feminine. (Indeed, Weisl goes on to note that “women are constrained by the roles that the romance constructs for them” [14].) I suspect that romance codifies gendered behaviour so strongly because, in the narrative of the erotic, role play stimulates (as Plath’s “Every woman adores a fascist [...]” registers).
boundaries which the loathly lady motif collapses are those stereotypes which separate male and female. The medieval tales provide relatively happy treaty-deals in these sorties of the battle of the sexes.

Nonetheless, these engagements are not lacking moments of panic. Shape-changing characters embody apprehension about duality within the narratives that attempt to deal with it. In the Irish sovereignty tale of the Sons of Eochaid, the hag withholds water from the sons who will not kiss her; Niall wins dominance over his brothers and thus kingship because he volunteers to do more than kiss her, and the water he wins gives him control of the essential ingredient for life. For the legitimate brothers who fail the test, the hag personifies the threat of denied access to water, that most basic need, and anxiety about survival is clad in the grotesque feminine flesh of the hag “loathsome in sooth” (197). In the Corca Laidhe, the hero is tested by the sexual demands of a huge woman who threatens him and his brothers with transmutation if one of them does not meet her demands for intercourse. Humility, self-sacrifice and a willingness to engage with the grotesque (in Bakhtinian terms) are prerequisite to kingship; the sexual arena is the one in which the king-to-be must prove himself. Once he accepts her challenge, she

Furthermore, Hahn points out that such “worrisome duplicity” has a tendency to be displaced on to women, when he observes of Ragnell that “Her double role—both Beauty and the Beast—endows her with a deep ambiguity, enmeshing both attraction and revulsion, fatal danger and life-giving knowledge; such worrisome duplicity often attaches itself to women [and to femininity generally] in popular romance, and throughout Western culture” (42). As I observe this duplicity in loathly ladies, I concur that Hahn’s point holds true, and locates the affectivity of the tales, the way that the motif mediates between myth and the gender roles of mortals.
changes shape to a glowing beauty. The double nature of sovereignty, that it is both a fearful challenge and a deeply rewarding, highly coveted prize, is conveyed through the hag's duality; the sequence of the shape-shifting affirms that the prize outweighs the challenge. Thus the shape-change is a sign that power has been invested in the hero upon his successful performance, endorsing the rightful position of the king; nonetheless, his earthly rule is bracketed within the parenthesis of an ultimate feminine power. As a shape-changer who self-deconstructs and reconstructs in the medieval texts, the loathly lady generates heightened meaning by the action of slippage. She is emblematic of the signifying surplus that a fissured text allows, of the feminine excesses which escape patriarchal closure, and of the social changes available when norms are contested.

In order to define the nexus of the loathly lady, I begin at the outer edges of the late medieval narratives in which she appears, and work inwards. Weisl notes of the lai genre that “interior, private or magical spaces are often in conflict with the public, exterior world of the court,” and she further declares that “this interior space becomes the locus for female concerns and feminine desire” (87). The instability of the loathly

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13 See the *Ancrene Wisse* Book Seven (Shepherd 19-30) for explication of the theology of the “heorte” and the “uttre,” the inner and outer dichotomy, where the less-important exterior should reflect the critical state of the interior reality. Book Seven's model invokes the concept of Christ as the lover-knight, demonstrating that the religious distinction between the superficial and the essential translates smoothly to the discussion of both gender and genre.
lady's body means that her true essence is evasive, so that the method of close-reading my way into her interior enables me to secure her within her context. In these tales, at the locus of the interior's supremacy over the exterior, and the interior's femininity, is the hag's maidenhead (or lack thereof), the covert symbol of her identity. I peel back onion-layers (from textual background, to locative background, to protagonists, to the marriage bed) to reach the core of the tales, the act of sex which transforms.

The first chapter, "The Shape of the Medieval Texts," presents the medieval texts as a background to my subsequent thematic investigation, and, following the model of Chaucer's General Prologue, subjectively: "To telle yow al the condicioun / Of ech of hem, so as it semed me" (GP 38-9). I review these works as to how they frame the loathly lady in terms of their larger scheme and underlying ideology, to shake the motif free from its textual environment as I determine what this setting is. Texts are treated individually in chronological sequence to the extent that this is able to be assessed. A final section notes that all of the texts are unstable of body, a characteristic they share with the shape-changing hag.

Moving inward, the second chapter, "The Beastly Bride and the Hunter Hunted: Denizens of the Forest and the Court," begins by showing that the locations in which the tales are set are significant: the forest from which the hag emerges is the source of her power, her
paradoxes and her beastliness; the court is the centre of mortal power, arguably patriarchal. The wilderness setting functions consistently throughout the different texts; the court is one of the variants which distinguish the tone of the texts from each other. In this section I briefly observe that language, the medium of social discourse and power brokerage, is in the control of the hag, in contradiction to what the two locations suggest.

Having worked inwards through the meta-textual and then locative settings to the protagonists who come from the forest and the court, I have one section on each of them in the second half of the second chapter. First, in “The Beastly Bride: Talons, Tusks and Bad Table Manners” subsection, I consider what the loathly lady’s beastliness might mean: it is funny, it is menacing and it polarises what is brute, the fleshly aspect of humanity, in apposition to what is cultured. But gender is important; when what is bestial is the bride to be bedded, male subjectivity projects suspicion of the body onto woman. Greed—a transgression against social mores for bridal behaviour—and large size, disproportionate to the demands of beauty, are both considered in this chapter. I observe the loathly lady’s relationship to animal figures, particularly the lamia. Ecofeminism gets a mention too. By effecting a change to beauty, the loathly lady makes beastliness seem tolerable, or at least, the moral is that it should be tolerated by the hero.
In the next subsection, “The Hunter Hunted,” I point out the connections which these tales share with the Actaeon myth. Noting that the male protagonist is hunted by a beastly woman, I consider the significance of the hunt itself in these narratives. The hunt is an extension of the court; it is the court’s well-organised excursion into the terrain of the wilderness, in order to flush out and kill the beast, with splendid displays of courage. The hunt brings to the tales ideas about social hierarchy, risk and winning, killing and being killed, good and evil, and the journey as Bildungsroman. I close Chapter Two by considering the hunt as a metaphor for courtship.

This provides an entrance to Chapter Three: “The Sexual Imperative of Bespelled Maidens and Independent Shape-shifters.” In part this motif initially attracted me because sexually active women are relatively rare in the canon before the twentieth century, and I wanted to look more closely at how this one escapes censure within the texts. In this chapter, I consider the Wife of Bath as the persona who relates the story of the hag, applauding Chaucer’s attempt to represent female subjectivity. Sexual experience enables distinction between two categories of loathly lady: the virginal, bespelled maidens, and the non-virginal independent shape-changers. The hymen—generally unmentioned—becomes emblematic of their difference from each other, at the same time that their similarity as active wooers suggests a solidarity.
I set aside Chapter Four for a separate study of Spenser's use of the loathly lady motif in the *Faerie Queene* (1590-96): Duessa. Although Spenser's later date is one justification for dealing with him separately, I do so primarily because his different inflexion reveals his attitude to the issues which inhere in the loathly lady, as established in the medieval texts. Spenser is concerned with the same issues as his medieval precursors--Irish sovereignty, and gender power contestation--but he turns the hag motif on her head so that earlier endorsement of female sexuality and power becomes condemnation. Furthermore, amongst a rich collection of scholarship concerning Spenser's sources, the motif of the loathly lady in the construction of Duessa has been overlooked, so I have the satisfaction of placing Duessa on a vector with the loathly lady set. I propose that, in the service of his own agenda, Spenser demonstrates an authorial manipulation of the motif which matches her own shape-changing. In terms of the structure of the thesis, Spenser makes a bookend canonical writer to counterbalance Chaucer. Because Spenser wrote with Chaucer as an admired model, his reconstitution of one of Chaucer's better-known motifs makes a fitting contrast to the

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14 I argue that, because Spenser is opposed to much that the loathly lady represents, he is unerringly accurate in using this motif as he does. Nonetheless, while dispatching Duessa, he displaces the positive energy of the medieval loathly ladies onto the larger figures in his Mutabilitie Cantos: Mutabilitie and Nature. He then enfolds them within an optimistic Christian project, one which looks forward to eternal union with the God of the Sabaoth. In this way, his structure is more similar to the redemptive pattern of the medieval texts than it first appears.
earlier works under discussion. The inclusion of Spenser brings the Irish sovereignty strand of discourse into a full, and firmly knotted, circle.

Gender and ideas of kingship are bound together in this motif. Sovereignty myths, in which the contest for kingship is resolved through a mystical process, have race or clanship at their foundation; they rely on a dynastic sense of nationality, but with the land personified and feminised to select the king by her choice of him as her sexual partner.

Lisa Bitel, in her consideration of the sovereignty hags, writes:

The war goddesses, along with other supernaturally powerful females in early Irish narratives [...] were not incidentally female; their power derived from their sexuality [...] Sex in the arsenal of women brought men down, but men could use sex as a weapon to tame war goddesses, beautify and domesticate hags [...]. (210-11)

I arrive at a more positive reading than Bitel's of the sexual consummation in the Irish material and elsewhere. That the motif embodies nationalistic as well as gender contestation in her mutable feminine flesh highlights the importance of her mutable body as a signifier. The body is the foundation of constructions of race, gender and arguably identity; and while these ideas are assembled within a cultural framework, it is the body which is the final location of cultural accumulations.¹⁵ The body is the stage upon which the narratives of race

¹⁵ Medieval literature obsessively considers the body as a locus of identity. Nonetheless, I too am a product of my times in emphasising the body; the twentieth century reinstates the body as a site of ideas. I might have begun this section with Hélène Cixous's 1974 imperative: "Write yourself. The body must be heard," and then a snip from Luce Irigaray
and gender are performed. The body is a sign of identity and signifies as a sometimes unwilling cypher within a social context.\textsuperscript{16} The loathly lady has a remarkable body, whose instability is productive.

In constructing a thesis from this body whose mutability offers alternatives to gender role restriction, I am working with two centre-canonical authors, a collection of ballads, and with works which touch upon Arthurian legend, as well as sovereignty: the motif claims a large domain. I am dependent upon so much previous scholarship, grateful for teachers and colleagues, and for glosses, dictionaries, histories, and theories; yet experience cautions me that the human world is chaotic, and that our desire for order, categorisation and linear progression fails to do justice to the complexity of literature. I applaud those who draw compelling vectors through the chaos, aware that these may be redrawn differently by future scholars just as compellingly. My criticism is personal, rather than founded in one particular theory.\textsuperscript{17} I justify on the multiplicity, and self-sufficiency of the female body (perhaps "Woman is always several" rather than the more hysterical iteration that "woman has sex organs more or less everywhere" [353]). \textit{Feminisms: an Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism}, ed. Robin R. Warhol and Diane Price Hemdl provides an overview of feminist consideration of the body, including seminal essays by Cixous (1975) and Irigaray (1977), and a summation by Ann Rosalind Jones (1981). A section on desire extends the implications of the gendered body, with essays by Irigaray, Jane Gallop, Julia Kristeva and Eve Sedgwick.

\textsuperscript{16} David Aers observes that "Human beings are necessarily born into communities they did not choose and they grow into given social identities with which they encounter their specific circumstances" (2). Literature is a part of all of our circumstances.

\textsuperscript{17} Jane Tompkins justifies a move away from theory (when she was one who had previously urged academic women to "get theory" in order to compete with men on an equal footing) and towards the personal as feminist strategy. She speculates that "theory itself, or at least as it is usually practiced, may be one of the patriarchal gestures women \textit{and} men ought to avoid" (1080). To this I add that I am grateful for the moments when secondary material illuminates the text in ways that also illuminate our culture.
proceeding according to my own sensibilities by merit of my newly-
inherited rights as a woman reader at the start of the millennium, when
the author is dead, the text up for grabs, and female subjectivity
approaches something that feels like its first birthday, in good health.\(^\text{18}\)
Furthermore, I cite Martin, who justifies an open-minded approach to text
(“Magpie”).\(^\text{19}\) Responding to Aers’s 1990 reproving label “magpie” to
describe Chaucerians who appropriate a range of critical buzz words,
“bits and pieces of this and that fashionable critical vocabulary without
being a card-carrying member of a distinct theoretical persuasion,”
indeed, scholars and critics “who pilfered gaudy fragments of trendy
discourse” (cited Martin “Magpie” 235), Martin comes out and identifies
herself as what Aers calls a magpie. She points out that reading within
the confined rubric of any single theoretical school imposes unhelpful
limitations. After demonstrating that Chaucer’s tropological use of
magpies makes them attractive from a feminist (and poetic) perspective,
Martin asks, “Since we live in and have to negotiate a world of plural
discourses, what can be the objections to critical pluralism?” (“Magpie”
237). She points out that “it seems like the hallmark of a closed and

\(^{18}\) Laskaya voices concern that “postmodernism and deconstruction” might encourage
the female reader “to locate herself anywhere but within an embodied female reader” (2);
her anxiety is perhaps overstated.

\(^{19}\) Laskaya notes too that “we can explore ways Chaucer’s text constructs and
deconstructs masculinity, ever mindful that what we may see ‘in’ the text is, in many ways,
an expression of our own ‘complicity’ with the text and an expression of our own culturally-
constructed vision” (7).
reactionary mind to reject wholesale and unconsidered every aspect of work produced by another party" ("Magpie" 237). I endorse Martin's observations that "critical pluralism" is a suitable approach to "plural discourses," and more appropriate than theoretical purism.

My simplistic identification as a "woman reader" emphasises that the individual preference for the glittery gems of theory which magpieism allows is also predicated upon the body. If I am (narrowly) avoiding defining myself as a feminist reader, I am certainly a woman reader, alert to the representation of gender. Dolores Warwick Frese and Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe note that the essays in their collection figure "the gendered body and the copied book as sites of pain, pleasure and desire," with combinations of "memory, nostalgia, longing and shame" (xii). They identify links between text and flesh relevant to both my authorial identification through gender, and to the motif of the loathly lady, whose mutable flesh is arguably a conduct book, which this thesis closely reads.

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20 Of her own approach to Chaucer's work, Martin confesses "As I had no one hypothesis, I had initially no alternative but to be empirical. I therefore analysed a large number of short passages with as open a mind as possible" ("Magpie" 241). Like the Wife, she stays with experience as her authority, stating that, "Although it is theoretically very dubious to assume that any reading can be wholly innocent, in practical terms this method proved fruitful" ("Magpie" 241). I too cannot profess innocence, but proceed without following any single theory.

21 Rebecca O'Rourke, after expressing concern towards "what sometimes seems to be the exclusively theoretical direction feminist critical practice has taken," says simply and sensibly "All we do as critics is see what we see, and say what we see following the long look" (61).
Chapter One
The Medieval Texts As Background

In this chapter I discuss those principles in the overall design of each of the earlier works which I deem most pertinent to the loathly lady motif. This chapter has a compare and contrast approach to the texts as background. Observing themes, schematics, and didactic intention where this is evident and relevant, I am working towards the specific foci of the following chapters, in which I isolate and interrogate common features, to bring forward elements which the works tend to share. Here I outline the individual works for the purpose of framing the motif which is my central quarry: the loathly lady.

Her very presence makes these texts similar in broad terms; presumably all authors who include her intentionally bring into their tales the nexus of ideas which she embodies. Writers shape their stories according to their own world view. Some fictions are transparently didactic. All may have subtexts teased out; none are innocent. Comparing and contrasting the different uses of the same motif reveals something about both the material, and the authors. Orality (that special quality of medieval works) emphasises the immediacy of tale-shaping; we all have stories that we do not have the willingness, the ability, or the credentials to tell, and audience appreciation is essential to the survival of the tale and teller, as Lindahl reminds us in Earnest Games. Yet in some elusive way stories (and the characters in them) do seem to exist independently of texts.
and their writers; motifs do survive the variations of transcription, translation and interpretation, and this survival suggests the existence of an essence resistant to incidental redaction. Motifs belong to a larger community.

I will look first at what is distinctive about the Irish sovereignty hag’s presentation in the *Corca Laidhe*, *Coir Anmann*, and the *Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid*, with the more familiar Chaucer’s *Wife of Bath’s Tale* as a comparison.¹ Then, following the discursive *Canterbury Tales*, which direct worldly fun toward salvation, will be Gower’s *Tale of Florent* from the *Confessio Amantis*, which converts the sexual to the spiritual, and deflates the virility which prompts chivalric performance. Next, I deal with *Thomas of Erceldoune*, and with several ballads collected by Child, both in generic and individual terms.²

The *Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* follows, a slightly later text than Chaucer and Gower’s. Despite the later execution, it is more similar than Gower’s *Tale of Florent* to Chaucer’s *Wife of Bath’s Tale*. The *Wedding* exists as a junction of the medieval versions because it ties in land ownership issues (the *Corca Laidhe*, and *Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid* motivation) with the theme of marriage, as well as firming up Chaucer’s links to the Arthurian romance. The *Wedding* has a hero who is virtuous, like Gower’s Florent, while

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¹ It is commonly accepted that the loathly lady originated in Ireland (Eisner, Loomis *Celtic Myth*). As far as scholars can discern, the trajectory of these tales moves from an Irish origin, to Wales, to Brittany, to France, and back to England as well as to other European countries. Chrétien de Troyes wrote his Arthurian *Conte del Graal* in the late twelfth century. The loathly lady tales emerge from an untraceable source: pre-Christian, oral tradition.

² These are impossible to date accurately, but this placing seems appropriate, given their language and form.
the incident of a wicked stepmother's curse makes a link with some of the ballads. Gawain's virtue is predicated upon male friendship, another connection with the Corca Laidhe, and Niall and the Sons of Eochaid, both of which quite literally involve bands of brothers. I look at what is specific to each medieval work in order to loosen the motif from the sites in which it is found, and with a final section which briefly notes that the manuscript status of all my sites is as unstable as the motif. The textual body is as fissured, as partial, and as resistant to definitive containment as the flesh of the loathly lady herself.

The Corcha Laidhe, and the Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid.

The Irish sovereignty material seems as old as the hills and makes a good starting point for a chronological ordering, despite Chaucer's greater centrality as the best-known of the medieval sources. Eisner declares that "The ancient Irish stories of this heroine are probably the oldest extant versions of the myth. Certainly they are closer to the source [...]" (41), a conclusion which is inevitable since there is a pagan goddess aspect to the sovereignty hag which insists that she comes from a pre-Christian origin. Indeed, Eisner premises that

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3 Loomis declares that the "most significant impulses and story-patterns" of Celtic romance "arose in pre-Christian Ireland. There lies the chief fountainhead of all these streams" (Celtic Myth 24). Loomis links Gawain to Curoi who is "generally called the son of Daire, who in ancient tradition was equated with Lugaid [...]" (Celtic Myth 55). While Loomis, along with other early scholars, traces the links between the tales, I add to their cartography by considering what the motif gathers through her different representations.
"The tradition of her union with the high king may well be prehistoric" (17). The loathly lady motif incorporates from the sovereignty hag, to bring to other tales, the feminine power source of the pagan goddess. As well, the central concern with national (Irish), rather than sexual, politics inscribes right rule as a theme. Formally, the simplicity of these tales (particularly of the Corca Laidhe) is imbued with mystery.

I choose to consider the Corca Laidhe first for its greater simplicity, and then show how the Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid explicates sovereignty issues more lucidly. Within the Corca Laidhe, there are two versions of the encounter between the hero Lughaidh Laidhe and the Irish sovereignty hag: a narrative poem "Lughaidh Mal", and a prose narrative "Lughaidh Laidhe and the Other Sons", which together comprise Appendix A to the Genealogy of

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4 Considering conservation and innovation in Early Irish literature, Mac Cana notes that "mythic themes were perpetually reconstituted," and that "the Celtic deities" remain "essentially unchanged in terms of function" ("Conservation" 115). Eisner itemises "Nine extant tales" which "are relevant to the loathly lady theme," noting, however, that only in the first three, is the heroine "the hideous Sovereignty" (17). These three are the ones I examine: "Lughaidh Mal," "Lughaidh Laidhe and the Other Sons," with Stokes Colr Anmann translation as support, and the Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid. The shape-changing hag belongs to an interconnected tribe of other Irish figures, some of whom are always beautiful. Innes supplies an inventory: "Throughout the history of its colonization, Ireland has been represented by British imperialists as well as Irish nationalists as female: she is Hibemia, Eire, Mother Ireland, the Poor Old Woman, the San Van Vocht, Cathleen ni Houlihan, the Dark Rosaleen" (2). Low lists "Eriu, Etain, Eithne, Mor Muman, Macha Mong-ruad" as "sovereignty motifs" (34). Arguably Queen Medb has a place in these lists. With shape-changing as my criteria, I do not examine all of these figures, but am aware that the hag belongs within a set of similar, but specifically Irish, personifications.

5 McCone compares the Irish sovereignty hag to the legend of Odysseus's return to Penelope. The Irish tales have a specific blend however, and are more dissimilar from the classical myth of the returned true king than perhaps McCone allows. McCone's overtly-expressed task is to disprove the "nativists" (for example, Mac Cana) who propose that medieval Ireland was isolated and resistant to change; McCone's challenge at times seems extreme, necessitating that a middle way be negotiated between these two critical schools.
Corca Laidhe (c.1390-1418). The poem “Lughaidh Mal” establishes the mystification of this kingship myth. The second stanza defines itself as “difficult knowledge”—“But since they are inquiring it of you, / If they like difficult knowledge [I will tell]” (67)—signaling that, as with Old English riddles, the spaces between language, idea, and world are active with speculation. After describing Lughaidh’s monumental success at battle (literally monumental, since a cairn of stones was built by the troops, and upon it Lughaidh gained his victory), the poem circles back to his youth. The following lines skip lightly over the inconvenience of living in a family in which seven people of the same generation share the same name:

The comely Daire had seven sons;
Lughaidh was the name of each:
In hopes the prophecy in them would be fulfilled,
One name was given to them all. (69)
Particularly equitable parenting allows the same chance at prophecy fulfillment, and future kingship to each son; the seven sons become one potentiality.

Prophecy, mystery, and superhuman force-fields set up the action, in which the hag will be an agent of mortal affairs.

As well as seven sons with the same name, Daire has “a magical fawn as a familiar / In the shape of a yearling deer” (69). A fawn or deer often precedes

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O’Donovan cites the sources of his translation as follows: ‘Two ancient vellum copies of this work are in existence, one in Leabhar Leacain (the Book of ‘Lecan,’) which was compiled from various other MSS. by Gilla Isa Mor Firsbisih of Leacan, in the county of Sligo, in the year 1418 [...]. The other copy is preserved in Leabhar Bhaile an Mhuta, (the Book of ‘Ballymote,’) which was compiled by various persons, but chiefly by Solamh O’Droma, from older MSS. about the year 1390, for Tomaltach Mac Donchadha [...].’ (141). Stokes translates from the Book of Ballymote, calling his translation the Coir Anmann, or Fitness of Names.
the appearance of the shape-changing loathly lady.⁷ In “Lughaidh Mal”, the fawn invokes an inexplicable magic world in which some of Daire’s boys, “four noble and very comely youths” (71), slew their father’s fawn at the stream of Sinainn.⁸ Then they cast lots to divide the fawn. The septs, or tribes, which sprang from these seven Lughaidhs are cited as though they follow obviously on from the cast lots and shares, a reminder that myth-making defies logic, and that fate—the governor of cast lots—is guiding the story. Then the scene shifts swiftly back to the house in the narrative, “the men within at the fire,” where the strangest apparition in the poem, the hag, makes her appearance, and her demands.

As well as being ugly, bald, uncouth and loathsome, she is huge: “High she was as any mast” (73).⁹ The size of this Irish hag loads her demands for sex ____________________

⁷ The chasing, and perhaps killing of a magic fawn occurs in other tales of magic besides the loathly lady ones, for example, the “Knight Without Laughter (Bruford 151), or Murchadh (Bruford 138); the fawn signals that magic is imminent. However, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight foregrounds the connection between the venery of hunting and the venery of sexual pursuit by balancing the trophies against each other. The hunt is extensively examined by Marcelle Thiebaux, in The Stag of Love: The Chase in Medieval Literature, (1974), and Anne Rooney, in Hunting in Middle English Literature (1993), and more fully by me in the next chapter.

⁸ Although the stream is not as significant in this tale as the well in Niall’s tale, the stream as a liminal geographic site of magic follows the same narrative course as Niall and the Sons of Eochaid, in the association of hunting brothers with water.

⁹ The same problems which attach to Grendel’s ability to fit into Heorot, Hrothgar’s hall, where he will devour thirty men in one snack, are inherent in the hag. In both works a lack of detail signals, by avoidance, that the excesses of exaggeration conflict with pragmatic logic. The breaching of boundaries by the huge intruders is another parallel, and one linking rape to being eaten alive. Grendel is called a “mearcstapa” or border-crosser, and his forced entrance into Heorot is troped as being an oral rape. E. Talbot Donaldson translates thus: “Driven by evil desire, swollen with rage, he tore it open, the hall’s mouth. After that the foe at once stepped onto the hall’s floor, advanced angrily” (13). Fear of cannibalism frequently seems to displace desire for the possession of the goods and bodies of the colonised. The conflation of sexual fear with assimilation in the Corca Laidhe is relevant to colonial concerns: rape is both a metaphor and a possibility which sharpens the edges of racial exchange during colonisation. Grendel’s mother
with a threat of death by assimilation, and ensures that her sexual coercion excites male fear, a gender role reversal.\textsuperscript{10} The superfluous interjection, that “in a woman it was unbecoming” (73), amongst a description of her monstrous nose and fists, is a pointer to the humour of this anti-blazon. But even while it is funny, it simultaneously keeps alive the fireside-tale quality of menace: “Heavy on each heart was the hag” (73), sustaining a balance of terror and ridicule towards female sexuality. As when gendered bodies are used to describe religious relationships, this trope is fraught with tension.\textsuperscript{11} Johnson and Cairn observe that “The notion of using a female figure to embody such contradictory qualities as this sovereignty goddess does is problematic from most feminist points of view. (3-4). Further, they speculate that the hag, “like all mythical figures, [...] is transhistorical, and thus appears to be beyond any comparison with mere historical women.” They raise the question of “whether the essentialism of mythically produced figures must inevitably be reductive and have disabling effects on mere historical women”, without addressing this problem in their own collection of essays (4 -5). Findon also notes a circuit of also plunders Heorot, and sets a precedent for the feminine grotesque, especially when Beowulf wrestles with her in a fatal struggle.

\textsuperscript{10} A similar representation is found in the Maori legend of Hine-nui-te-Po, the goddess of death, which recounts how the hero Maui (who originally fished up the North Island of New Zealand), attempted to conquer death by reversing birth. However, the tittering of watching fantails, amused by his efforts to crawl into the goddess’s vagina, awakes Hine-nui-te-Po. She crushes human hopes for immortality, along with the hero. See James Cowan (17-18), who also demonstrates the similarity between Celt and Maori in folk-belief, legend and poetry (59-62).

\textsuperscript{11} Herbert notes that “the sovereignty myth is based on gender difference,” and that “up to now its gender component seems to have been viewed as an unproblematic given” (“Early” 269), an observation which this thesis attempts to redress.
problems inherent in reading women from Celtic texts: any strength in women is seen as “the residue of earlier mythic discourse” (8); “female figures” become assimilated “into male discourse at the same time as it appears to empower them” (9); “Divinity [...] works to erase their womanhood” (9); and “the woman-nature association [...] becomes an interpretive strait-jacket” (10). Placing Spenser on a vector with the medieval texts shows that the motif has its own nexus of issues, but may exploited in different ways, so that there is nothing inevitable about its effect. The loathly lady embodies the contestation of sovereignty, and interpersonal will; she may be both written, and read, to women’s advantage or disadvantage. Mann notes that Chaucer is aware that “if anti-feminism is not the aim, [...] it may still be its unintended effect [...]” (Geoffrey 31), a complication which assures that exegesis remains an arena where critics compete to promote their own desired reading, in an effort to reconstruct society through the words of its cultural artifacts. Text, and the motif within it, remain sites of contention.

The “Lughaidh Mal” hag is described in terms of terrain, which emphasises her link to the land of Ireland: “A rugged, hilly, thick, black head / [Was] upon her like a furzy mountain” (73). This is the moment when the hag’s true identity as the country itself is close to the surface of the account. The use of the head as the site of revelation—the head not being the most hilly, or furzy mountain-like part of the female body—puts emphasis on the public and thinking part of the female body. One might expect that since she is the personified land, her active advances make a metaphor of the expansionist perception that the
land desires to be ploughed and made fertile. This would place her somewhat drearily amongst the sexualised discourse of colonialist desire. However, the sovereignty hag does not bear children. This female body, detached from its reproductive value, achieves independence. Her aid to her man is managerial rather than submissive. She advances with an alarming vigour which more usually belongs to the conqueror. The fertility implicit in youth and beauty is not privileged in the personification; instead a rampant sexuality marks her agency in mortal affairs. The hag seems to have chosen sex as a selection method for its own sake. Whatever the drawbacks are of troping the land as woman, this is a woman who knows what she wants, and will make a spectacle of herself to get it.

The threat which the hag uses as coercion is that she will transform the men and their hounds into monster shapes. Actaeon might be a point of reference as a man out hunting, transformed after a chance encounter with a vengeful female whose wishes must be obeyed. So might subjectivity: the hag, as a goddess, has control of the events of the narrative through her power over the shape of Daire's sons. Here we have the prospect of a firm feminine

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12 For example, Luke Gemon, in "A Discourse of Ireland" (1620), exposes himself when he observes, "This Nymp of Ireland, is at all poyns like a yong wench that hath the greene sickness for want of occupying" (Falkiner Illustrations 349).

13 The Corca Laidhe belongs to tales where shape-changing accompanies female agency. The hag threatens the same power dynamic that Diana had over Actaeon, but accepts sexual service as a test of male worth, so engages with the masculine. Nonetheless, Bhreathnach examines incidences in which the sovereignty goddess is a goddess of death, tales which are outside of the scope of the shape-changers of this thesis, but which show that the dark powers of goddesses who summon death are not far from the loathly lady motif (243 ff).
redefinition of the men in the tale.

The ominous personification is out to gain the attention of those noble and comely Lughaidh lads. Readerly imagination is invited to work upon phrases such as "Pitiful the deed, ugly the exhibition, / She made to them to excite them" (73). Since she demands in her opening "evil speech", "One of you shall lie with me tonight" (73), an erotic display of some kind is implied. This is the moment when feminine sexuality, perhaps a show of genitalia, is central to the dread and the humour of this monstrous caricature.14

When Lughaidh Laidhe accepts the hag's demand, he does so as a gesture of self-sacrifice; and in a dreamlike way, she immediately changes into a form of wondrous beauty. Sexual consummation is deferred. She advises him that it is not he but his son who will be king, and whom she will enjoy.15 The postponement of coitus to the next generation is unusual. Ó Cròinin, examining kings and kingship in early medieval Ireland, describes the initiation of a king, which "symbolizes his marriage with the tribal goddess (banfeis lit. "sleeping with a woman")" (77). If "sleeping with a woman" is the literal meaning of the king's initiation, it is possible that the poet of "Lughaidh Mal" made an editorial

14 The Sheelagh-na-gig figure of a woman with open legs and out-thrust vulva provides such a motif as an architectural feature. Anne Ross notes that these "are not 'pornographic' or 'erotic' monuments but have both a fertility and an evil-averting significance" (148), and notes that Sheelagh-na-gigs on Christian churches are evidence of Christian assimilation of pre-Christian deities. Maori have the same feature over doorways of some meeting houses, so that all who enter are given honorary tribal status because they have been born through the legs of the ancestress (or ancestresses, since they often come in threes). In both instances, the images predate Christianity, and conceptualise the female body positively.

15 Her independence from time as well as form in her anticipation of sex with the following generation is the evidence that she is a goddess; she is not named overtly as one.
choice to hold over sexual consummation to avoid distraction, since this would seem to make the initiation take place informally. More probably, an authorial decision to excise the sexual act through deferment in the interest of propriety is at work, since “Lughaidh Laidhe” features coitus, as do most other medieval versions.16

When the goddess goes on to proclaim that Lughaidh’s royal son will be “a druid, a prophet, a poet”, the text follows others which perform self-advertising of the poet in the process of narration or in praise of someone else: “Sir Orfeo”, “King Horn”, and “Lai le Fresne” also allot magical powers to the poetic or lyric skills of the king.17 The framework of oral performance is brought to our attention by the promotion of the poet to semi-deity within these texts. In “Ludhaidhe Mal”, the self-reference is enhanced by parallels between the sovereignty hag’s and the poet’s relationships to the king. In discussing the “traditional personalization or anthropomorphization of the country as a woman”, Leerssen points out that this personification, “coincides with the poet’s own relationship with his chieftain: more than a mere retainer, but not quite the king’s equal, the poet saw his allegiance to his patron largely in terms of a marriage” (173). Later, speculating on the Elizabethan prosecution of Irish

16 See below for other lacunae; the hag’s sexual activities are regularly removed from texts.

17 Carey finds that “from a very early date the Christian Irish displayed a lively interest in the heritage which had come down to them from their pagan forebears” (10). Patterson also notes that “The language of poetry, as enacted by the poet and received by the reader, is habitually conceived in the Middle Ages in sexual, and specifically feminine terms. The voice of the poet is inescapably aligned with that of women” (“For the Wyves” 659). The loathly lady shares attributes with her poet.
bards, O'Brien writes, "When his verse legitimised the ruler the poet was the
goddess" [original italics] (29). Dooley and Roe cite the legend in which St
Patrick endorses the pre-Christian bards. St Patrick legitimises the art of
storytelling and music, declaring to a poet before him: "men of your art will be
bedfellows of kings through eternity" (106). Thus the male poet becomes
implicated with the poetically constructed sovereignty hag, a faltering of gender
boundaries. The Corca Laidhe's introduction of the practice of poetry fosters my
speculation that the loathly lady is essentially referential to the poetic act which
constructs her. At the very least, both the bard and the loathly lady monger
wonder.

Connected to this self-referential verse is the only prose passage which I
consider: "Lughaidh Laighdhe" follows "Lughaidh Mal." The prose tale begins
with the mysteries of prophecy by asking the pertinent question: "what is the
reason that each [of the sons of Daire] was called Lughaidh?", and answering it:
"It had been prophesied that one of his sons would assume the sovereignty of
Eire, and that Lughaidh would be his name, wherefore each of the sons was
named Lughaidh" (77). After taking the precaution of giving all sons an equal
opportunity to the throne, Daire is instructed by a druid, at the fair of Tailltin, that
the kingship will go to the Lughaidh who captures a fawn with the colour of
bright gold which will appear at the fair.\(^{18}\) The story takes off with the chase for

\(^{18}\) In Stoke's Cor Anmann, the setting is an "assembly" rather than a fair. The Cor Anmann makes
it clear that Lughaidh Laidhe captures, kills and eats the fawn. Given that the magic fawn may be a
supernatural being, this is the moment when the hunt suggests the assimilation—psychic as well
as physical—of cannibalism.
the fawn. The moment of the killing of the fawn is shrouded not just in textual obscurity but in a "magical mist"; the chase, and then the flaying is all that the reader sees. A great snow immediately falls--the dreamlike operates in this medieval tale--and shelter becomes an urgent need for the sons of Daire. The nearby house crops up conveniently in the way that Spenser's interior/exterior spaces occur in the *Faerie Queene*, with a spatial organisation unbound by dimensions which might be logically mapped.

The house has that ominous luxuriance which ought to arouse suspense and dread in any experienced reader, having: "a great fire within, and food and drink in abundance, and dishes of silver and beds of Findruine [German silver]; and there was a large hideous hag in the house" (77). In accordance with fairy-tale convention, the youths approach one by one. The price of shelter for the first son is sharing the couch of the hag, and when he refuses this she tells him that he has "refused sovereignty and monarchy" (77). The other brothers go in, and the hag mysteriously gives names to them according to their self-declared activities. In this sequence, performative language constructs oblique prophecy through the designation of names according to actions. Names are bound to destinies; with Adamant authority, the loathly lady is the name-giver.

There follows a critical deviation from the preceding poem. Ludhaidh consummates his relationship with a fireside seduction scene:

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19 He who has eaten a wild hog alone is named Lughaidh Orca; he who fell asleep is named Lughaidh Cal; one who ate, "what the others left" (his version of what he ate; she calls it a "corrupt" thing) is called Ludhaidh Corb (79), while Lughaidh Laidhe is named for killing and eating the fawn. I am grateful to Harold Roe for his help in identifying the scribal error which encouraged O'Donovan to make it an ox which Lughaidh ate, and for his assurance that the seeming
At length Lughaidh Laidhe (Maiciadh) went with her into the house for food and drink. After this the hag lay down in the bed of findruine, and Maiciadh lay down after her in the bed, and it appeared to him that the light of her countenance was as the sun rising in the month of May, and the fragrance of her was as the smell of a flower garden. After this he cohabited with her (79).

The goddess accepts his performance: "Good is thy journey," said she, "for I am sovereignty, and thou shalt obtain Eire or one descended from thee shall. They afterwards took of new viands and old drinks, and cups were distributed to them alone, and he cohabited with the sovereignty" (79). The sexual consummation, which is repeated amid something of a little party for two, is amply fulfilled. The kiss of children's fairy tales has reached maturity here, with the hag using the metaphor of travel--"good is thy journey--in her evaluation of Lughaidh's performance. In doing so she recuperates the gloomier travel euphemism for death--"lost"--which is what Lughaidh fears he will be when he takes on the hag in the poetic version. Lughaidh has reached a most fortunate destination.

Dawn reveals the mystery and magic of the cohabitation; the lady and her house vanishes, and the brothers find that "in the morning they were without house or fire except the level mountain side, and their hounds were tied to their lances" (79). Lying with the woman who is an extreme of Otherness is a testing of the hero, an initiation trial of the king's ability to come to terms with the feminine and the strange, perhaps in his own psyche, as well as in relation to confusion of names is in fact in order according to Irish genealogies.
the land. In this tale the magic of sexual consummation dissolves in morning light. The hallucinatory quality and the mystery of the story suggest a psychodrama.\textsuperscript{20} A pattern emerges in which the hero's acceptance of the hag's demands, and his satisfactory performance of service is rewarded with significant benefit. The narrative reaches its climax in grace.

The Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid mingles pagan and Christian values in the element of water, foregrounding not just the furzy mountains of the landscape but the substance which makes it fertile.\textsuperscript{21} Water in this tale is an emblem of the syncretism underlying the tale. Water is the barest necessity for human life; it is also the seat of creation. In the void before anything was, the Spirit brooded upon the face of the water. It is the element of baptism, whereby rebirth into eternal salvation occurs as sin is symbolically washed away.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{20} The Lughaidh story has some similarity to the English Thomas of Erceldoune, in which Thomas cohabits with the fairy queen seven times before being taken away by her for an experience which is like a shamanistic initiation testing; after wading through water to the knee for three days, with the sound of the sea surging in his ears, and being forbidden to eat the plentiful fruit of the underworld when he is almost faint with hunger, Thomas returns with the gift of "carping," or prophecy, rather than the crown.

\textsuperscript{21} Stokes states that there are two extant manuscripts, "the Yellow book of Lecan, a ms. of the fourteenth century in the library of Trinity College, Dublin, and the Book of Ballymote, a ms. of about the same age, belonging to the Royal Irish Academy" (Adventures 172). Cf. note 6

\textsuperscript{22} For a theological consideration of water, see Tertullian's De baptismo (c200), which H. G. Wood notes "tells us more about the practice and doctrine than any previous authority" (386). Mac Cana addresses the problem of "how substantially the characteristic conservatism of Irish tradition has been modified by the externally derived innovations of Christianity" ("Mythology" 143). He notes the difficulty of untangling the strands of a text in which, "in recording native mythology, some specially gifted and imaginative authors were able to [...] adapt the received material to the artistic sensibilities of their own time" ("Mythology" 143); the Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid is more sophisticated, and more syncretist, than the Corcha Laidhe.
this tale, it is an element by which the power of women is measured out; the water comes from wells, a socially organised source: women control the wells.\(^{23}\) The pagan goddess who governs life and death is suggested in this hag who will not give water until her desires are met. For Niall, water is a life-and-death substance from before his birth. Niall’s father, a “wondrous and noble king” begets him on Cairenn Casdub, incurring the jealousy of his queen, Mongfind. Cairenn’s position in the court is not explicit; presumably from her treatment and her royal English father, she is a hostage.

In the hopes that the unborn child of her sexual rival will die, Mongfind orders Cairenn to draw water for the whole household while she is pregnant. When her son is born, it is outside, beside the well, during his mother’s work of hauling up water. Afraid of the queen, Cairenn leaves him there, unattended, and pestered by birds. Thus the first well in this tale is of the household troubled by the king’s illicit love; the legitimate queen, naturally enough wishing to thwart the development of a relationship which threatens her own interests, becomes a wicked stepmother from Niall’s perspective. Contestation between women bursts through to the surface of a story which more predictably might be about only masculine competition; indeed, these two women’s sexual rivalry will be

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\(^{23}\) Low notes that “Rivers were associated with Otherworld women in early Christian Ireland.” Many were almost certainly the old “river goddesses of Irish primal religion” (66). Low considers wells with Christian and pagan powers, proposing that “water-deities” were “mostly female,” despite the fact that “Most holy wells are nowadays associated with male saints” (66-7). See Jean Rudhardt for an explication of the feminine and sexual symbolism of water. In Niall’s tale, water is most certainly a feminine element.
played out by their sons. To be king, Niall must win out in all of the spheres of
contest. The well which was to have broken his mother’s strength and terminate
his life serves instead to strengthen and bless him. Mongfind is the precedent of
the wicked stepmother of some subsequent versions.

Niall’s start to life contrasts harshly with Lughaidh’s; Niall is cast out as
the only illegitimate son, Lughaidh is included in a family of siblings all named
Lughaidh, so is one of a cosy litter. The baby left by the well survives, protected
by the poet Torna, who takes him away to safety, and educates him in kingly
skills. Niall returns when he is adult to rescue his mother from servitude and
reinstate himself in the household. The queen’s power wanes; she is angry, “for
that seemed evil to her” (193), but she cannot avert Niall’s rise to dominance.
The men of the court decree that “Niall should be king after his father” (193),
and the queen’s petition to the king to “Pass judgment upon thy sons [...] as to
which of them shall receive thy heritage” (193-5) only results in Sithcenn, the
blacksmith, who is also a wizard, being called in as arbitrator. As the tale
unfolds according to fate, the shadow this queen casts over Niall rolls back
before the splendour of his success. It is the fate of wicked stepmothers to lose
control.

Niall’s first test is in Sithcenn’s forge, where Niall carries out an anvil, a
more successful choice of portage than his stepbrothers’, who carry sledgehammers; a pail of beer and bellows; a chest of weapons; and a bundle
of withered sticks. What is carried foretells the fate of the generations to come
from each son. Niall shows himself to be solid “forever” in his choice of the anvil,
which is arguably the feminine item compared to the sledgehammers. This psychological symbolism holds true to the sense that these tales are about kings coming to terms with the ability to withstand abuse, which women are able to represent more readily than men. Niall particularly incorporates womanly subjugation; he is born out of it at the well whose owner exacted her hatred of his mother upon her subject flesh at its weakest: in the travail of child-birth. Niall's selection of the anvil shows that his inception through his mother's tortured labour has endowed him with the quality of endurance.

Mongfind, unable to "abide", sends the boys to be armed by the wizard; he gives Niall the finest weapon, and advises all five boys to go and test the weapons he has made by hunting. Thus another set of sons, one of whom is to be king, are set off into the forest to hunt together. Niall has elevated himself from a newborn baby who looked likely to die beside an inhospitable well, to being one of the king's sons out hunting with his stepbrothers. These threaten him less than his stepmother; since it is their future he rivals, there is a sense that her sexual jealousy is accompanied by more foresight than her sons possess. Although the stepmother is wicked, she is not stupid.

Water returns to the tale as a lack; the boys are thirsty—"in great drouth" (197)—after eating their quarry, cooked over a fire. The first one to seek water chances upon a well, "and saw an old woman guarding it" (197). Old, diseased, with huge strong green teeth reaching to her ears, she is "loathsome in sooth" (197); when the hag demurs that the condition of drawing water is "one kiss on my cheek", the lad refuses, declaring that he "would rather perish of thirst than
give [...] a kiss" (197). This version suggests that compromise is essential to kingship by having the unsuccessful half-brother articulate his emphatic rejection of the hag's proposal.

The other half-brothers follow the first's pattern, which includes lying upon return, by saying that they could not find water, rather than that they would not trade a kiss with the loathsome hag at the well for the water they wanted. The boys are not only unable to cope with the physical demands of the hag, but are also unable to make sense of, or find the words which might describe, the embarrassing test which they fail. Their uncomfortable dishonesty marks their shame with silence. Male ineptitude with language is common in loathly lady tales. Finally, it is Niall's turn to seek water.

When he chances upon the well, he demands "Water to me, O woman", a terse imperative which contrasts with the more oblique enquiry of his elder step-brother: "Dost thou permit me to take away some of the water?" (197). His direct approach is compounded in response to her demands; he declares "Besides giving thee a kiss, I will lie with thee!" (197). The virility which Gawain emulates springs from this well-head. With Gawain, masculinity combines with courtly gentility--the unerring instinct to do what is decently required, even when

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24 Defending "the hateful fee who represents the sovereignty" Arthur Brown proposes in one throwaway footnote that the hag who guards water in this tale "may be a parallel to the damsel guarding the Grail" (210-1). Such a suggestion captures the syncretism of both motifs, and furthermore aligns feminine sexuality--I am suggesting that the Grail is a womblike source of grace--with these two images of women and life-giving water.

25 McCone notes that "female symbols of sovereignty are not infrequently represented as bestowing a drink upon kings-to-be," and itemises some other examples in which the women are not loathly ladies (109).
it is copulation with the monstrous--so that maleness provides the practical ability to follow such instinct through. At best these tales provide a model of masculinity which performs very well within weird intimacy.

After flinging himself down upon the hag and kissing her, Niall finds that she is most “loveable” (197), a quality which is itemised. This is the version which gives the most detailed description of the loveliness of the self-named “Sovranty.” Yet Niall’s response to her change acknowledges that he sees her as not just radiantly beautiful, but as preserving both loathly and lovely aspects. Niall says “That is many-shaped, O lady!” (201). Her single affirmative, “True” (201), affirms that the heart of all of these tales is the truth that the hero’s success rests upon his acceptance of a many-shaped femininity, one which is grotesque and willful, as well as plump and loveable. Despite other differences between the Irish versions and the English ones of the same period (Chaucer’s and Gower’s) the same kingly ideals which Gower promotes (so that his hag teaches against pride) are shown, in Niall’s tale, to be those which will past the hag’s test, and induce her shape-changing.

The hag awards kingship with the water, and explains “I am the Sovranty”; “as thou hast seen me loathsome, bestial, horrible at first and beautiful at last, so is the sovranty; for it is seldom gained without battles and conflicts, but at last to anyone it is beautiful and goodly” (201). Nonetheless, she promises that he and most of his children will be “kings without opposition” (201); thus her gift is of a kingship more congenial than her own person as tester. Her last words to Niall advise him to use the water to get the gift of
seniority in exchange from his brothers, so that to the end the fluid element
represents the power which flows through this family. Through the hag, Niall
gains control of the water, and thereby control of the family. Thus, when Niall is
rewarded with water from the hag's well, the blessing of Christian grace, and
the fertility goddess’s approval, along with her shrewd advice, coincide to give
him earthly power with a climax of syncretist union.

The paradox by which the sublime is predicated upon the body is
explicated in this tale; a feminine divinity is won through the ability to copulate
with her at her most loathsome. The protagonists's satisfactory service is
physical: sex removed from the societal service which courtly romance
demands, the kind of sex which belongs on the farm. The difference between
representation by the two Englishmen, Chaucer and Gower, and the Irish tales
is principally the factor of nationalism. However, they are further distinguished
by a country/city dynamic. It is evident that in the Irish texts it is the land rather
than the court whose approval a king must have. The courtly style which
tempersthe London writers is absent from the Irish work, in which sex is an act
rather than a cultural contract. The representation of a rural nation is central to
the Irish hag’s performance.

Loomis exclaims “What a bizarre culmination to the career of a pagan goddess personifying
Ireland, to become a personification of the universal Church!” (Grail 107), when he considers the
Bald Lady who bears the Grail in the French Perlesvaus, tracing her to the Irish hag, who is also
bald in “Lughaidh Mal.” The loathly lady is a motif with pagan beginnings turned to Christian use in
the “Matter of Britain.”

Herbert finds that, in early Irish literature, “The sacred marriage [between king and female
sovereignty] originally seems to have been a myth of agriculturally-based communities” (264). Herbert seeks to distinguish between the poetical and the political; whether “the concept of
This country perspective has an emphasis on land which preempts that of colonial discourse. Richard Helgerson considers the distinction between dynasty-based and land-based concepts of nationhood, and finds a Renaissance shift from dynasty to land. The location of nationhood in land is adumbrated by the sovereignty hag, who preempts early modern awareness that land provides identity, while at the same time her endorsement of the king arguably demonstrates dynasty-based nationhood as Helgerson describes it. I do not dispute Helgerson’s observation that Renaissance mapping fixes nationalistic concepts differently, but place this more poetic personification of the land as the loathly lady on a vector with the ideas of nationhood whose later forms Helgerson anatomises.

The city/country dynamic includes a dichotomy of complexity versus simplicity. Eoin Mac Neill’s observation that simplicity is a significant structural trait of Irish literature is applicable to the Corca Laidhe. Mac Neill writes:

One of the most striking characteristics of Irish literature is the absence of comprehensive design. Large design appears to be associated most with the complex life of cities or the complex order of great states. Ancient Ireland had neither [...]. A cognate characteristic of Irish literature is a female sovereignty bestowing the right to rule on male sovereigns did, indeed, remain as an active factor in Irish political ideology” (267), a question which seems impossible to qualify, and one I do not address.

Eleanor Knott and Gerard Murphy attribute simplicity to “the conservatism of Irish tradition,” and suggest that the Irish myths are worth studying to find “Celtic mythological themes and motifs […] often preserved in a more primitive form in the Irish tales” (114). This observation endorses the comparative simplicity of the Corca Laidhe, although perhaps not the resistant mystery which the female-gendering of the personification creates.
certain carelessness of proportion and symmetry [...]" (16)

The Corca Laidhe has a heightened drama provided by its direct simplicity, an effect later sought and achieved with similar methodology by the Romantics, much of whose work could also be accused of "a certain carelessness of proportion and symmetry", although the pejorative implications seem to miss the point in both instances. However, The Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid is more complex in organising its structure around the motif of the well, and water. To some extent it belies MacNeill's claim, although it is impossible to dispute that even this effective exploitation of syncretist symbolism is not as elaborate as Chaucer's redaction.

MacNeill continues, with an enthusiasm which invokes Romanticist values and terms in the service of generalisation: "The ancient Irish are noted for their extraordinary sympathy with nature. To them the marvelous was the familiar, and their literature did not shrink from it" (MacNeill 16). Herbert finds a direct embodiment of nature within the sovereignty hag herself:

We may interpret the sovereignty myth as depicting nature amenable to socialization [...]. the relationship of female/male, nature/culture, was not one of simple evaluation on the level of inferiority/superiority, but rather a system of complementarity in which the fortunes of the sociocultural domain were linked with its respect for the power vested in the natural world. (18)

Certainly the heightened ecological awareness of the twentieth-century reader enables the power exchange between hag/land and youth/sovereign to be
currently read as a viable allegory of the relationship between ruler and earth: that it is only possible to govern rightly by accepting the land's jurisdiction, and that the wells of earth must be preserved for such rule.

Yet the conflation of woman and land works to women's disadvantage, rendering them as a potentially productive, but passive entity, strong only in endurance. Ireland is a geographical site upon which constructions of nationality have a history of problematical feminisation. Arguably, the hag is appropriated for a masculinist discourse of king-making, in a hijacking of the feminine. Innes observes that one side-effect of the cumulative use of gendered metaphor in the construction of a sense of nationality is a specific, nationalistic form of male subjectivity: "Locked into confrontation with Britain and contestation over the motherland, Irish literature and Irish history have created males as national subjects, woman as the site of contestation" (Innes 3). He is right; and I would further argue that this phenomenon is endemic in nationalistic literature. However, amongst the paradoxes of the loathly lady motif, which entangle problems and solutions for women, the heterosexual metaphor for kingship is a relatively positive one, since the hag who personifies the site of contestation is a figure with agency. She is not Gemon's "Nymph of Ireland [...] "

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29 A parallel is the Australian swagger's song, "Waltzing Matilda," in which "Matilda" is the tramp's swag, and the song celebrates the almost exclusively masculine life-style of the road; the use of a woman's name, in what sounds like it might be a love-song, is sardonic. McConel's recognition that the fian (warrior-raiders of early Irish literature) were a "social institution" catering for "unattached young men past the age of puberty" (205-7), establishes their similarity to the males who shaped colonial identity, yet were surplus to a mixed-gender society. However, the appropriation into the lone world of the rogue-male wanderer of a parody of heterosexual mating lyrics, and textual hag-napping, are perhaps less problematic to mere historical women than most of the mainstream discourse on male/female relations.
at all points like a yong wench" (Falkiner 349), but a huge powerful hag whose demands must be met.

It is not uncommon for land to be portrayed as a fertile young woman, or as a mother (this happens graphically in the discourse of American as well as Irish colonisation); the hag duplication is what complicates the Irish figures. The grotesque physicality and active sexuality of the Irish sovereignty hags scramble the image of desire. There is potential for feminist ground to be gained in the dreamscape territory through which the hag marauds, seemingly in search of a good time. She makes an early emblem of feminine gratification as a precondition of peace and prosperity. At the same time that the Irish material points through the haze of mystery to the need for a symbiotic relationship between land and ruler, it also bears relationship in this pleasure factor to Chaucer's invitingly open text. The central quest of Wife of Bath's Tale is the answer to the riddle, "What thyng is it that wommen moost desiren" (WBT 905), proposing that this is a worthwhile consideration. It is a life-and-death one for the knight in the tale. The Irish sovereignty hag is not confined to a happy-ever-after state of marital bliss, and she is clearly a deity figure; when sexual union is consummated, it is on her terms. The shape-changing hag, at once dreadful and comical, steps through the limen of literacy from a past world long before Freud pivoted the axis of the unconscious around the penis.  

\[\text{She shares}\]

I was bemused by the centrality of the penis in Freud's work before I found Kate Millet's Sexual Politics, but endorse her rejection of the penis as a mark of socialisation, despite the usefulness of much Freudian theory.
successful achievement of her desires with Chaucer's loathly lady.

Chaucer's **Wife of Bath's Tale**

Chaucer's inclusion of the loathly lady in the *Wife of Bath's Tale* secures her a place at the centre of the canon. Chaucer's framing of her (within a tale set in the days of King Arthur, competitively told by the Wife, attended to by the pilgrims, reported by Chaucer's narrator, all of whom beckon occasionally to the reader) is a most congenial setting for a shape-changer: an evasive text with ambiguous signification.\(^3\) The trickery of linguistic play in *The Canterbury Tales* encourages the spaces between the tales to be busy, the reader/audience is compelled to make sense of these dense spaces, and critics for centuries have drawn vectors connecting different points to demonstrate alternative readings. Chaucer investigates the problems and potential of language as a deviously independent medium, one which is compatible with his shape-changing, power-conferring loathly lady. The *Canterbury Tales* structure itself makes an allegory between body and text, bodily travel and textual progression, and textual and spiritual advancement.

Chaucer's **General Prologue** establishes a framework which supports his

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\(^3\) Weisl notes that "Chaucer does not just say innovative things in a formulaic genre [...] he creates his innovations by manipulating the form itself" (9). (The same is true of his loathly lady, who problematises the romance genre and gender role expectation as she manipulates the form of her flesh.) Weisl also notes that the "intrusion of the Wife of Bath into her tale allows a greater narratorial presence than in the other Breton Lay[s], and through it the tale displays greater consciousness of its own fiction" (91). I agree, adding that this is typical of Chaucer's technique throughout the *Canterbury Tales*.\[43\]
tales. Insights into contemporary social values are made available by a set of partially stereotypical portraits drawn in the manner of estates satire with varying shades of humour and criticism. Estates satire, like sitcom, presumes that the audience is initiated into the complex semiotics of which social stereotyping is a part. Both deal in elaborate systems of bias which are often not expressed overtly, but nudged along in innuendo. Estate satire exploits non-verbal agents of social categorisation. Clothing, jewelry, speech patterns, gesture, coiffure, pets, accessories, affectations and physical afflictions are some basic signallers within this semiotic system. They are the phonemes of a language which mediates social values, skewed by the syntax of cultural bias, in a constant re-ordering. The immediate world of the complicit listener interfaces with the fictional society constructed within the General Prologue; Chaucer's loathly lady emerges from this sophisticated, interactive performance.

Yet, the opening sentence of the General Prologue applies the seasonal optimism of Spring to religious aspiration to go on pilgrimage. In this lengthy and inclusive sentence the deferral of "Whan [...]", "whan [...]", arrives at a terminal of a "thanne [...]" which declares a human desire to seek out sites of worship, especially of the martyr at Canterbury who has given help in time of sickness; a comforting and constructive conclusion. Such a union of seasonal

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32 See Mann, Estates.

33 Michael Wright's detailed unpacking of the opening sentence in a lecture at the University of Auckland, his enthusiasm towards its framework, and Stephanie Hollis's attention to the nuances of gender therein, helped me to locate my thesis topic.
and Christian motivations energises the Tales, and softens the descriptions of the more unsavoury characters who are set within the context of renewal and potential salvation. The Wife of Bath, in her situation of sexually active femininity, fits in happily here. She is an attractive character, despite her faults, partly because she is in a generous environment, established by the Prologue from which the pilgrimage sets out. The hag she constructs as an alter ego is thus the product of a beneficent textual world.

The comfort of the surroundings and the physicality of the pilgrimage group is foregrounded, and philosophical and religious debate which takes place through the tales is made in relation to the somatic needs of what Felicity Riddy defines as “the everyday body.”34 This acknowledgement of corporeality is another unifier, an authorial touching of the reader’s body, as a reminder of commonality between all of the folk involved in this project, of whom the fleshy reader is the most currently inspired. The Wife, in both her Prologue and her Tale, is very much interested in the physical, and her shape-changing loathly lady follows her interest.

The strategy of coercing the characters to consent to be part of a game aimed at entertainment is designed to support tricky shape-shifting. As the professional Host, Harry Bailly, blusters his way to be given control of the

34 At the Medieval Congress at Kalamazoo 2000, Riddy proposed the term to distinguish the body with its daily needs from the body as a site of gender and race. Chaucer’s bodies are inclusive, but the reward of a supper as the narrative goal foregrounds the everyday body at the outset of the Canterbury Tales.
narrative by the other characters, Chaucer protests that none of what follows is his fault. He is only repeating the other pilgrims' words.\(^{35}\) His appeal to his audience not to judge him vulgar acknowledges, and whets the appetite of, an active readership; and the reader, the author, the narrator, the characters as tellers of tales, and the speakers within the tales, who further refract the text, all become entangled in an active field of operation as consenting adults. The social ownership of physicality, of language, of myth, and of earnest game is implicit in the devious layering of authorial control established in the General Prologue.

In this context it is significant that no other pilgrim surpasses the Wife of Bath in a bid for subjectivity. The rhetoric used against women is transformed to produce a lively and somehow attractive fictive speaker.\(^{36}\) Mann examines the Wife as a person in the estate of woman who is constructed from misogynist ideas of women as vain, pushy and lecherous, and, nonetheless, concludes that "what ensures our admiration for the Wife is that she is fun to be with"
Martin identifies the Wife as being most like her author: “Of the pilgrims she is closest to Chaucer. Like her creator, she criticises through comedy, she weighs experience against authority, she is aware of the sexuality within textuality and she jokily subverts the conventions of male authorship.” (Chaucer’s Women 217). Monica Brzezinski Potkay and Regula Meyer Evitt note that the Wife “originates in textuality, not reality”, countering the temptation to treat her as a “real woman” (4); this observation points to Chaucer’s metafictional play without quite articulating such an idea. Hagen takes this further when she defines the Wife as Chaucer’s inchoate experiment in feminist hermeneutics (105). As the speaker who articulates the Canterbury Tales’ loathly lady, the Wife embodies the metafictional principle of the General Prologue framework; her deconstruction of canonical texts with an intention of undermining patriarchal authority continues the play of action established in the General Prologue into her own Prologue.39

The Wife does have her critics. For example, Reid observes that “The Wife is a stock figure and an absurdity” (74); Disbrow, who sees her as “an allegorical figure representing human carnality, much like her male counterpart, January” (60); Sands, who proposes that the Wife is “someone laboring under a character disorder which makes her acceptable to herself, but productive of conflict with others, a disorder which recent psychiatric texts label a sociopathic personality disturbance, an illness characterized by antisocial reaction, dysocial reaction, and usually addiction (in Alys’s case, probably to alcohol)” (171); and Palomo, who finds the Wife culpable in her husbands’ deaths (303-19).

Mann observes that consistently in Chaucer’s works ‘woman is at the centre instead of at the periphery (Geoffrey 3), while accurately locating Chaucer’s sensitivity to the causal nature of text by proposing that “the Wife’s Prologue is designed to make the reader conscious of the confining nature of ‘the prison house of masculine language’” (Geoffrey 80).

Introducing their anthology of feminist readings, Ruth Evans and Leslie Johnson suggest that the diversity of feminist readings is symptomatic not only the Wife’s lack of a single “meaning, but also her generation of ‘signifying surplus” (2). In an Afterword to her essay on “The Wife of Bath
This is approximately double the length of her tale, suggesting both egocentricity in the Wife, and Chaucer’s interest in assuming a feminine voice. Elizabeth Butler Cullingford discusses “cross-gendered composition”, and debates whether any “man has the right to speak for or in the voice of a woman.” Cullingford works towards a positive acceptance of “alternatives beyond ‘appropriation’ - instances, however rare, when [the male writer] has let femaleness transform, redefine [...]” (204). The Wife inhabits one of these rare instances.\(^4\)

In the process of verbally sparing no men, and teaching young men, as the Pardoner has urged her, the Wife addresses a wider audience of “Ye wise wyves, that kan understonde” (WP 225). She seems to be carried away by her

and the Painting of Lions,” Carruthers discusses the objections which her essay prompted, namely that she had “delineated much too ‘nice,’ too ‘liberal,’ a Chaucer” (39). She cites a compendium of other critics and their attitudes to the Wife of Bath, expressing her sense of regret that, “In their various ways each writer wants to deny or restrain the one quality which Chaucer deliberately gave to this character in abundance, and that is power” (40 –1). In a celebratory tone, Carruthers declares, “What is extraordinary about the Wife’s power is that she keeps it; no effective effort is made in the poem to restrain or squelch it. [...] She continues to bother [...]” (43). What this means, Carruthers proposes, is that, “The impulse to shut the Wife up comes from her readers, whom she variously frightens, repels and attracts [...]” (44). Carruthers’ observations are explicitly defensive, and perhaps couched somewhat negatively because of this. The Wife’s “signifying surplus” certainly makes her the character most akin to her author, as Martin proposes. (Hamlin shows that Chaucer gave the Wife of Bath something approaching his own horoscope, if this can be read as identification with her (158).) I examine her Prologue with closer attention in Chapter Three, because the bedroom is where her active sexuality and aggressive strategies in the battle of the sexes most align her with the loathly Lady. The osmosis between the two seems best covered in the section in which I deal with marriage.

\(^4\) I acknowledge the feminist writers who find misogynist material within Chaucer’s writing. An example is Delany, who moderates her early position—that Chaucer is an “outright misogynist” (“Sex 110)—to the guarded, and thus highly defensible, opinion that he “both is and is not’ woman’s friend” (“Sex” 111). On the other hand, Hallissy begins her book by postulating that that “if women define a friend as someone who is interested, who listens, and who therefore understands, then this long-dead medieval poet is indeed [...] all women’s friend” (xv). I insist that, in producing the Wife, Chaucer has served women well, regardless of his authorial intention.
own performance as preacher, for the only other woman present is the Prioress, with two shadowy second nuns out of sight at the back. This is a moment when Chaucer's reveals his awareness of a wider context than the fictional listeners. An audience which is more inclusive than the Wife's audience, and even more inclusive than an assumed listening audience to an oral performance, is conspiratorially dragged into the foray. This audience is feminine.

This moment when Chaucer addresses wise wives as fellow initiates is a piquant one. I am reminded of being hauled up by Malory's Fair Maid of Astolat's letter, clutched in her cold, dead hand, itemising her fatal love for Lancelot, but declaring: “Therefore unto all ladies I make my moan” (Vinaver 154). Because so much of our literature is levelled at a masculine audience, direct appeals to women readers are always arresting, even (or perhaps, especially), when the author is male, in which case we are aware that the distracting signaling is a literary device. In the case of Chaucer and the Wife, the avant garde attempt at womanly perspective is fore-grounded in the appeal to wise wives for their ability to understand.

The Wife begins her tale proper by setting in place some of the force-fields which prove to be her central concern: she conjures up the old days of King Arthur, when “The elf-queene, with hir joly compaignye, / Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede” (WBT 860-1). Thus, moving from her curriculum vitae

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41 Her tale is a lai, in the romance genre. Fradenburg considers whether this makes it a “regressive fantasy,” and finds that, conversely, it makes the Wife seem “progressive or modern” (34-5). She observes that “The very escapism of romance thus points, paradoxically, to the genre’s potential as an instrument for change” (41). One of my tenets is that this particular romance is indeed affective. Disbrow conversely finds the Wife’s genre an “antiquated fairy tale” (59), and proposes
as a professional spouse to a tale concerned with gender power politics, she invokes an alternative female sovereign to the King of chivalric renown. She turns to text to support her nostalgia for “manye hundred yeres ago,” to the “olde opinion” (WBT 862-3), gesturing with suitable vagueness to the past whence comes the enigma of magic, and of feminine sovereignty. The intrusive presence of male representatives of church authority, “limitoures and othere holy freres […] as thikke as motes in the sonne-beem” (WBT 866-81), is a contrast. Unreliability and instability is the quality of fairy; by implication this is preferable to the reliability of the male threat of dishonour with which Wife accuses the limitour, the religious professional whose task is defined by spatial boundaries. The limits which are drawn up by the church to contain the areas of his activity also enclose those at the mercy of his dishonour: the women who inhabit halls, chambers, kitchens, bowers, cities, towns, castles, high towers, villages, barns, sheds, and dairies. Women at all levels of society share the problem of the limitour’s predation; women as a group are put in apposition to clerics. Then King Arthur’s court is introduced by its possession of a lusty bachelor who bereaves a maid of her maidenhead by “verray force” (WBT

that the Wife is intended to be “an allegorical figure representing human carnality much like her male counterpart, January” (60). Disbrow speculates that, by giving her this tale, Chaucer “hoped to discredit Arthurian romance” (61). However, Chaucer is building up a convincing feminine perspective when he allows the Wife to deconstruct Arthurian romance, and since I agree with Mann’s summation of the Wife as finally likeable (as January is not), I am not convinced by Disbrow’s argument.

42 Weisl sees this moment as a “discourse on the absence of the fertile, generative qualities of the old world” (90). To this I would add that this nostalgia conjures up a distinctly feminised old world, compared, for instance, with the Confessio Amantis’s ubi sunt opening.
He is riding from the river; she is walking before him, so their inequity of strength is emphasised by their methods of transportation. The river is a natural boundary; the rape a crossing of boundaries by force. Territorial contestation between men and women is implicated in this opening act of hubris.44

Public outrage clamours against the knight's wrongful rupture of maidenhead, punishable by death according to the law of the time, but the queen and other ladies intervene, begging grace of the king. The word "grace" is especially loaded here, as a reminder of the discourse of chivalry, and its use of the language of spirituality. More usually, it is the role of the knight to seek grace from his lady, and, in the context of verse romance, "grace" discreetly carries the sense of concession and approval into the sexual arena. In the Wife's Tale, grace is conceded by the king. The court of ladies who intervene when the knight is condemned to lose his head regain the female authority imaged in the elf-queen, and it is the mortal queen who has the first direct speech act.45 She gives the knight a year and a day to come up with the answer.

43 I am grateful to Weisl for her observation that this knight is not even named, while many knights who are nameless throughout their quests, nonetheless, "usually gain (or regain) their names as their identities are developed through love and deeds" (95). Weisl declares "Unlike his counterparts, this knight is known for nothing" (95). I agree with her that he is the least significant knight in the versions which I examine; however, he is known for rape, cowardice, and for his final good sense in surrendering sovereignty to the woman who wants him.

44 Kurt Olsson, noting that Chaucer's version differs from analogues in "the 'wrong' answers to the riddle (or catalogue of women's other desires) and the bedroom lecture," finds that this makes the knight "almost [...] a non-character, a passio who must suffer his education" (80). Olsson's reading is made in the context of a defence of Gower's different characterisation, which explains his lack of enthusiasm for the Wife's feminist reworking of the material.

45 Weisl notes that "Even before the Loathly Lady enters the story, power and mastery have become female" (98). The king voluntarily relinquishes mastery to his queen, so that the Wife's subjectivity is in evidence, developing the potential of romance to allow such concession to
to a riddle if he is to keep his neck-bone from iron, a satisfying threat which verbally dissects the knight’s body as he has penetrated the prohibited membrane of the maiden’s. The “twelve months and a day” time allotment in which he must complete his quest hints towards a seasonal calendar, another indirect assertion of the goddess’s power over lusty bachelors. Feminine control is the force field which controls this narrative.

Yet against the affirmation of female control, the difficulty of the riddle “What thyng is it that wommen moost desiren” (WBT 905) is based on the diversity of female desire, and carries the slur against women that they are fickle and whimsical. The riddle on one hand endorses the unification of the estate of womankind (and the idea that marriage is a profession), but implies that this estate is so diverse that those who share it would be unable to agree upon a goal. The riddle implies that the estate of women exceeds the boundaries of a common goal, boundaries which the answer will reinscribe. The riddle contains a note of amused condescension, perhaps exasperation, toward the estate of women.

The knight, sorrowful to find he has been given such a problem, and

46 Weisl proposes that, at this juncture, “In an ironic reversal of the conventional romance, the knight becomes the damsel in distress” (98). Such a reading wittily underscores the subversive feminisation of the tale; nonetheless, strictly speaking, the knight, En being sent on a quest, remains in a masculine role.

47 Suzanne Akbari pointed out that “the very concept of an ‘estate of women’ is potentially misogynist,” or at least “certainly essentialist,” an observation which abuts medieval essentialism against that which problematises feminism today (p.e. May 2000).
bound under oath to return, takes his leave and wends forth to every house and place “Where as he hopeth for to fynde grace / To lerne what thynge wommen loven moost” (WBT 920-1). This repeat of “grace” adds the element of puzzle-solution to the meanings of consent and approval, to the implication of sexual fulfillment, nuanced with religious overtones of salvation. Grace is anatomised by this tale, becoming “grace /To lerne,” so that the knight is granted grace only when he concedes to feminine doctrine. Yet the Wife’s cynicism towards the Arthurian myth leaks into her rendition of the grace of Christian chivalry.

The slur against women implied by the riddle is compounded in the effort to answer it. Amongst the possible solutions to the riddle which fail to cohere into one thing, honour is the only suggestion which reflects worthiness. Riches, fun, rich clothes, flattery and great sex with multiple partners are amongst the list of things that women want. Women want men to say that they are wise and not foolish, showing that in the fourteenth century women were inured to the construction of themselves in the opinion of men.48 They also want to be thought of as “clene of synne,” “stable, and eek secrey” (WBT 944-6). From here things go downhill as the Wife misquotes Ovid’s tale of King Midas so that the secret of his ass’s ears is betrayed by his wife, to show that women are not “secree.” The Wife’s twist on the Midas story draws attention to the fact that at this stage of her tale-telling she is in league with the clerical misogyny which she berates

48 See Jankyn’s Booke of Wykked Wyves and Woman Defamed and Woman Defended for the textual background to the representation of women, and thus to their alleged self-imaging, as described by the Wife.
elsewhere.

Yet the list of replies she assembles registers the cultural shaping of female desire. The fact that half the list of desires involves being mirrored favourably by the opinions of others signals that a woman's well-being is predicated upon her social reception. Concern with appearance--reflection of herself as object--is heightened by heterosexual interchange; it is men who should flatter and please, and men who inhabit the lustful bed, providing women with the roles of wife and widow. The opinions are made or not made by “men” who might be generic, yet the gendered context suggests that the judgment of men is deemed more of a consideration than that of women relations, friends, gossips and neighbours. The “somme” who answer show interest in complementing male chivalry, and also show a dependence upon male approval which points to the womanly vulnerability to family and society. While the literary tradition of classical misogyny is one influence here, the community of women which the Wife constructs is also highly socialised within the framework of heterosexuality upon which such a tradition is based. Thus the loathly lady’s agency is contrasted more clearly against this fully articulated, internalised female objectivity. In her loathsome form, she is counter to the desired state of women, as women themselves want to be.

49 The lexicon signaling the importance of others opinion is: “ylatered and ypleased,” “flaterye,” “repreve,” “seye,” “seith,” “holden,” “holden,” and “telle” (WBT 930-948).

50 Many romance tales reveal this vulnerability, for example: “The Squire of Low Degree,” “The Earle of Toulous,” “Athelston,” “The Poison Apple” episode and “The Fair Maid of Astolat” in Malory’s Arthuriad.
The rapist knight first sights his loathly hag at the edge of a wood, another liminal space which, like the river, is where the magic and mortal worlds collide. This moment in the *Wife of Bath's Tale* is an example of Chaucer's use of thresholds as sites where his narrative may be advanced or may shift direction. A comparison is found in the Miller, an adept at that low-class male pastime of smashing down doors with his head, who demonstrates an enviable bloke-ist ability to reduce impasse to rubble and to penetrate liminality by means of vigour (GP 550-1). There is “no dore” able to resist the Miller’s prowess at head-banging. The hag uses a more subtle method than the Miller’s to haul the knight and the reader to connection with her at the liminal wood’s edge site; she manifests herself as a compelling “daunce.” The knight approaches this dance of twenty-four and more ladies to learn some wisdom, but the entrapment device of the hag is no sooner sighted than gone. What is there instead is “a wyf /A fouler wight ther may no man devyse” (*WBT* 998-99), who advises him that “heer forth ne lith no wey” (*WBT* 1001). The entire incident is a preview of this hag’s ability to provide an appealing masquerade as a way of attracting male attention, and her warning to the young knight that a through-route is not available foretells the impasse which will face him until he relinquishes his attraction to beautiful young women in motion. From here on the power which passed from the elf-queen to the court of women is in lovely and loathly hands; indeed, the knight is immediately gulled into plighting his troth to the hag, as she says, “heer in myn hand” (*WBT* 1009). Her riddling words ensnare him; he gives his hand, unaware of the symbolic implication, or
the ambiguity operating around the word “trouthe” (WBT 1009, 1013). Back at the court, once the knight has delivered the hag’s answer in a “manly voys” to the satisfaction of wives, maids and widows, the hag steps forward to petition the queen as judge of her rights to become the knight’s wife, and also his love. There is no grace about it; she presents an invoice.

Chaucer quickly beds the couple and proceeds to their problematic intimacy. The lengthy pillow sermon by the loathly lady, her response to the knight’s charge that she is “so loothly, and so oold also, / And therto comen of so lough a kynde” (WBT 1100-1) opens cracks in the Tale upon this wedding night. (I will consider the hag’s hymen later.) When the knight before his marriage bemoans that any of his “nacioun / Sholde evere so foule disparaged be” (WBT 1068-9), he is using the word “nacioun” in context of its derivation from the Latin “nascor,” to be born, and fitting himself within a class elitism. The word also has the meaning of nationality. The fact that both nationality and

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51 The Middle English Dictionary gives “marital fidelity” (1071) as well as “promise” (1072). Alexandra Hennessey Olsen argues that Gower also puns at this point in the Tale of Florent, by using the word “cleped” (44), meaning both “called” and “embraced,” a pun which is repeated upon the marriage, and the bedroom scene.

52 In an otherwise trenchant reading, Mann elides the significance of Chaucer’s inclusion of the loathly lady motif into his tale. Mann refers in mortal terms to “the old wife who has been inflicted on him [the knight] as punishment”, dismissively finding the hag’s transformation “no whit more miraculous than the transformation of a rapist into a meekly submissive husband” (Geoffrey 87). Mann would find her defence of Chaucer considerably reinforced if she also acknowledged his admittance of what the motif brings as cultural baggage.

53 Disbrow declares that “Like the foolish woman of Proverbs, the ‘olde wyf’ also packs her heresies in Christian wrappings” (67). Although I disagree with Disbrow’s reading of the Wife as an allegory of carnality, I feel that she has located the sense of a split narrative, a split which I interpret differently as showing flesh in apposition to words.

54 Suzanne Akbari alerted me to this connection between gender and nationality (p. e. 1998). The Middle English Dictionary gives “a class or group of people,” “social class” (815) for Chaucer’s
class hierarchy are categorisations into which one is born is emphasised by the
knight's complaints to the hag. The pillow sermon instructs that there is not a
physical, undeniably real basis, fundamental to birth, upon which status is
predicated; rather, the grid framework of pigeon-holing is changeable. Gender
might be included with nationality and class as something which is negotiable
rather than unquestionably inherent. The message of Chaucer's hag, the thesis
of her pillow sermon, is that performance defines true value, a proposal which
counters the limitations of fundamentalism as well as bigotry.

Arguably the loathly lady herself is a fleshly allegory of her Christian
exemplum, that "he is gentil that dooth gentil dedis" (WBT 1170); she is a life-
saver despite her repulsive appearance. Yet Chaucer's hag appropriates
Christian morality through self-interest, namely in the seduction of her reluctant
groom. In this the hag is like the Wife of Bath, who, in her prologue, also glosses
scripture to construe its endorsement of her active sexuality. Further, the hag's
sermonising from the intimate comfort of the bolster flies in the face of the
physicality of sexual attraction, and I suspect that Chaucer intends to make play
here between the weight of words and the weight of flesh. Although words may
be persuasive, there is a limit to the ability of language to override physical

usage here, while also providing "A nation, people; a race of people" (814).

55 Weisl notes that here "masculine authority becomes the Loathly Lady's most effective tool for
persuading the knight of the validity of her argument" (93), suggesting that the knight will only be
convinced by the patriarchal authority of the list of male authors she cites. I am not convinced that
the matter is this straightforward. Sexual imperative seems unlikely to be convinced by ethical
dialectics in the extreme situation of this marriage bed; I therefore find this to be one of those
highly promiscuous and in part apophatic textual moments when language works against itself.
revulsion, and perhaps we are intended to read against the grain. I find a vortex of self-deconstruction similar to the one at the centre of the Clerk's Tale, in which Griselda is a less-than-perfect wife when she fails to protect her and Walter's offspring from his seemingly murderous intent. (I am aware that lack of sympathy for Griselda is a modern response; however, I also believe that although a medieval audience would have approved unquestioning obedience to God--the moral behind the tale--they also would have found the vehicle problematic, as the clerk narrator signals he does. It is the malicious domestic cruelty, and Griselda's tolerance of Walter's unnatural psychosis in apparently ordering the infanticide of their children, which gives the exemplum its power.) While we do not lose sympathy for the hag--her sermon is acceptable and reasonable--we might still be sceptical about the knight's acceptance of its foreplay persuasion, and alert to the gap between text and body.

Nonetheless the pillow sermon interrogates the premises of bedroom dynamics. The hag's declaration--"syn I knowe youre delit, / I shal fulfille youre worldly appetit" (WBT 1217-8)--makes it clear that her transformation into one so fair and young that the knight's heart is "bathed in a bath of blisse" (WBT 1253) is within her own control. She displays her willingness to use her supernatural power as a marital aid, and leaves no doubt that it is she who authorises bliss, even though we are told that once he surrenders his will to her, seemingly in reciprocation "she obeyed hym in every thyng / That myghte doon hym plesance or likyng" (WBT 1255-6). Arguably, in shaping herself to fit the knight's idea of pleasure, she conforms to the pattern found in the answers
offered by worldly women to the knight’s riddle, wherein concern for male reception was foremost, as I have discussed earlier. Yet as the manipulator of his desire she retains control.56

The Wife’s immediate request to Christ to send “housbondes meeke, yonge, and fressh abedde” (WBT 1259)—it follows along joined by an “and,” so is in the same sentence—suggests that this describes the knight in his sexual relationship to his now-lovely lady.57 The word “meeke” in this context implies willingness, humility and accessibility—qualities which are traditionally feminine—which bodes well for playful sex by suggesting some kind of reciprocity. The Wife’s character bursts through in her conclusive objectification of men as either desirous as “housbondes,” or “olde and angry nygardes of dispence” (WBT 1263), whose lives she prays will be shortened.58 Her last words are an explosion from a battle-hardened campaigner in the battle of the sexes.

56 Weisl argues that Chaucer, while allowing the middle of his tales “capacious range, determines their endings, imposing a closure which, finally, asserts—or demands—a set of expectations created by readers but finally determined by the genre’s representation of the society it inhabits. Many of these are gender expectations, and they work with the genre to return the text to a hierarchical status quo” (11). I would counter that the authority of quasi-divinity which the hag imports destabilises the closure of the Wife of Bath’s Tale.

57 Fradenburg points out that the Wife avoids closure in her autobiographical account of her own life, in which “Fulfillment is presented as an impossible ideal.” She thus concludes that the closure of the tale “bids us see the happiness of ending, and then bids us see that happy endings are to be found only in books” (44). I concur with Fradenburg’s sense that this end is not naively happy.

58 Olson notes that “Here is no pious and perfunctory ending such as we find in many of the tales. We know exactly how the Wife of Bath feels, and that her feelings are not only individualized but strongly held. It is the most dramatically appropriate ending in the Canterbury Tales” (167). The Wife, I agree, is at a crescendo of performance. Fradenburg finds that “The power of the Wife’s final curse suggests the polarizations of bourgeois romance do not, finally contain her errancy,” and that the Wife “routs the pat closure of the tale” (55). This is in line with my own reading.
Gower's Tale of Florent

Whereas Chaucer's loathly lady is articulated through a plausible feminine subjectivity, John Gower's loathly lady is found in the Tale of Florent in the first book of the Confessio Amantis, under the rubric of a shriving of Pride. In contrast to Chaucer's prologue portraits, Gower's prologue places his set of tales in the context of social improvement, under the auspices of the religion of love. He brings the loathly lady within the folds of a lover's quasi-Christian confession which is based upon the tenets of the seven deadly sins. Genius, the priest of Venus, is Gower's moral counselor. Although the pagan Venus is

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59 Kurt Olsson insists that "Gower's end [...] is to promulgate wisdom," by giving his readers "strategies for ordering their complex experience meaningfully" (19). He proposes that the very act of tale-compilation with a serious moral agenda is a structuring which orders human wisdom. Olsson's defends Gower's organisation against Chaucer's (a tradition which is ubiquitous in Gower criticism). Andre Crepin's interpretation is that "Chaucer takes great pains to appear to distance himself from his materials, while Gower candidly involves himself and delivers straightforward lessons" (78).

60 C. S. Lewis finds it "obvious that the device of the lover's confession is the master-stroke which organises the whole of Gower's material," and designates him to be "'clever' Gower" in exchange for "moral Gower" (Allegory 200). Lewis's defensive admiration of the Confessio's "beauty of the architectonics" (Allegory 201) is a little effusive. To Olson's statement that "Gower uses the device of the confession to expose Aman's self-indulgence in his love affair and his need to recapture his integrity" (7), I add that Gower interrogates the dynamics of heterosexual mores with unusual stringency. At the same time, I agree with A. J. Minnis's observation that Gower's "moralising is by no means heavyhanded or narrowly reductionist" (1). Gower's very interest in morals makes him a careful and scrupulous anatomist. He is attentive to those same moral complexities upon which feminists base their case.

61 George D. Economou notes that "One of the most obvious aspects of the career of the character Genius in medieval allegory is his association with that great and meaningful figure the Goddess Natura" (Character 109). Economou maps the development of Genius's career in medieval texts, showing that "Genius was intended as a kind of double to Natura," observing some inconsistency as to whether "Natura's law" (which both Genius and Natura promote) "requires that sexual activity come under the rule of reason and that it be expressed only in the marriage bed" (Character 111). Economou shows how Gower redefines the figure he took from Alain de Lille and Jean de Meun, and firms up Genius's role as "the moral agent that bridges the worlds of true religion and the religion of love" (Character 115). Spenser's Nature fits compatibly into Gower's unifying scheme, as I discuss below. Denise N. Baker agrees with Economou that "Gower restores the moral authority which Genius originally exercised [...]" (153), and, like
ostensibly in charge of the world of Florent and his hag bride, it is the Christian schema, in which the loathly lady is a model against Pride, which dominates the world view. The goddess of love is a whimsical personification allowed nominal jurisdiction for the purpose of moral correction. Since Chaucer’s Parson’s Tale and Retraction assert a Christian intention in the Canterbury Tales, it is the difference in authorial organisation which fosters the difference between their two loathly ladies. Gower is at work not play in the linguistic fields of the Lord.

Although this is not a king-making myth, Gower labours to keep king and nation on the right track. The centrality of kingship is enhanced by the fact that Gower reports, perhaps fictively, that Richard II encouraged him to write the poem, a request made upon the river Thames, that most English of waterways, artery to the heart of London. But if the education of the king is one agenda (although perhaps this is suppositional), the edification of England is explicit.

Englishness is celebrated in this work: Gower’s decision to depart from the Latin Economou and others, she explicitly “refutes the charge of inconsistency leveled against Gower” (156). This thesis does not allow space to draw as full a comparison as I believe is possible between Gower’s use of Genius, and Nature as found in Spenser’s “Mutabilitie Cantos.”

George R. Coffman argues that the Confessio Amantis is “in part at least a King’s Courtesy Book.” Coffman goes on to contradict C. S. Lewis’s description of the work as “a general digression on education,” and to declare that “It is not a ‘general digression.’ It is a body of specific instructions as to the education and behavior of a king” (47). Russell A. Peck declares that “in the Confessio Gower appeals not to the officers of the land but to the officers of the soul” (xxiv). Peck proposes that “What is unique about Gower’s social commentary is its insistent correlation of social criticism with a benevolent psychology of personal ethics” (xxi). Gower persistently translates the personal to the political for the good of the nation, of king and country.

Peck notes a contemporary concern with the need to govern will, pointing out that “Sometimes [...] the question will be posed in terms of what constitutes good kingship, the true king being the one who can govern his will rightly” (xvi). Peck’s observations are predicated upon the way that general advice may have the king as one audience, while the ideal of kingship is one measure of behaviour codes which apply to all.
of his framework is made in response to the paucity of works in the English vernacular. The nationalistic choice of language is dealt with explicitly, with the speculation: “In oure englissh, I thenke make / A bok for Engelondes sake” (P 23-4). Gower’s overt labeling of his choice of medium is less sophisticated than Chaucer’s use; Gower makes the ponderous decisions overt.

Gower’s first words in the Latin-entitled Prologus establish a link with those who have written before, and raise the expectation that new matter will be modeled on the wisdom of old authors. In the first section, having said that his work intends to “go the middel weie” (P 17) and write more or less of love and of law, Gower asserts that the prologue belongs entirely to wisdom. His desire for the middle way might be seen as appropriate to a work which he says was conceived upon the Thames river.64 He purposes to write a book “After the worjd than whilom tok” (P 54), so although he chooses the innovative use of the English language, nostalgia for old and better ways runs deep. King Richard and patron Henry of Lancaster get one mention each in Gower’s versions: the chosen audience, specifically the supporters at the top of the real world hierarchy, are brought into the text.65 The work is embraced “with hol trust and

64 The advocation of moderation is a common theme in English literature. G. C. Macaulay treats Gower’s description of the Thames incident, when he “by bote came rowendn” (MS Harl 3490 18), as “an incident” “on a certain occasion” (6). However, it has the quality of a dream vision or literary device rather than the reported action of autobiography, and is thus perhaps an adumbration of the use of geographical features as a locus for nationalistic ideas. For the Thames as a symbol of Englishness, see John Denham’s Cooper’s Hill, 1642-55, and Joseph Conrad’s twentieth-century Heart of Darkness.

65 Gower dedicated his first recension of the Confessio Amantis to the young King Richard in 1390. In a 1392 revision he excises praise of Richard, and adds a dedication to Henry of
hol believe,” which contrasts with Chaucer’s disclaimer from genuine engagement, when he distances himself from his work by begging us not to account the “vileynye” his when he reports his pilgrims’ words. Gower is the truly earnest one of the two contemporaries.

The Prologus places the confession of the personal lover Amans and the exemplary tales told by Genius in the context of social order, and in a well-ordered sequence working from profane government to the church and then the commons. In “The State,” Gower compares the old days, when “the world stod thanne in al his welthe” (P 95), to the present of the poem. Titular tribute to social order adumbrates Hobbes, Dryden, Locke et al. and provides another piece of evidence that the social themes which are celebrated as proliferating in the Renaissance and Restoration are in play in medieval text, often centrally. Having allowed the worldly hierarchy to enter his page in the persons of Richard and Henry, Gower pays tribute to the proper order of the world. Thus the context for his loathly lady is more overtly ordered than Chaucer’s. In amongst Chaucer’s destabilisation of order, a multiplicity of voices are heard, including the Wife’s, proposing a proto-feminist agenda at length. However, although Gower is not at play with subjectivity, he too can be seen as a friend of women: his desire for a sturdy moral framework prompts his awareness of gender inequity. Gower’s insistence on fair play is both consistent with his Lancaster. The third recension, 1393, is dedicated to Henry of Lancaster (Peck xxiii).

66 Lewis draws attention to how worthily Gower “deserves the name of ‘moral’ Gower” (Allegory 213). Christopher Ricks exalts that “The greatness of Gower is his entire freedom from prurience”
ontology, and surprising, given his obsession with traditional order.

While Chaucer launches into estate satire, making Horatian fun of social order, Gower seriously mourns the loss of the time when “The privilege of regalie / Was sauf, and al the baronie / Worschiped was in his astat” (P 103-5). To the “tyme passed” he ascribes health, plenty, riches, knightly “pris,” justice of law, lack of debate, obedience to the rules of government, peace, righteousness, charity, courage, absence of deceit, unenvied love, elevated virtue, with vice put under foot (P 94-117). In the topsy-turvy present of the poem, however, the root is above the crop. Gower finds that especially love, that foundation of all good, has fallen into discord. Finally he calls upon the Lord who keeps all to amend these complaints, and reconcile love again. God is the “king sovereign / Of all the worldes govenaunce” (P 186-7), and the last word is that the godhead will “also be plesed” (P 192). Gower’s classical ubi sunt complaint, his dread of inversion, and his yeaming for God’s control, along with his nationalistic fervour, nonetheless provide the framework for a loathly lady who is a benign teacher of moral values. Florent and his bride are quite dissimilar from Chaucer’s knight and hag because of the different preoccupations of their authors.

Their difference flavours their representation of the church’s short-

(45). Derek Pearsall observes that “No man could have better striven for or deserved a reputation as a moralist” (“Tradition” 182). Perhaps the twentieth century’s return to a non ultra respect for restriction (sexually, ecologically, culturally), enables keener appreciation of Gower.

Spenser shares many of Gower’s overtly expressed values, but is unable to endorse the shape-changing hag as Gower does. See below, Chapter Four.
comings. While Chaucer uses satire to create a procession of worldly church professionals, Gower speculates on a past when church officials were chaste in word and deed, compared to a “now” which is disastrously rather than comically “otherwise” (P 193-240). Gower regrets the contemporary gap between word and work in the church: that charity is unknown, there is no grain of pity, and sloth keeps the library (P 319-21). Charity and abstinence are spoken, but by a “body fat” which “thei” keep with dainty meats (P 460-75). A final visual metaphor invokes a reflective example: good clerks are “the Mirour of ensamplerie / To reulen and to take hiede / Between the men and the godhiede” (P 496-8). Gower adumbrates Spenser’s use of the metaphors of the speculum (although Spenser also uses mirroring as an authorial principle). Gower’s use of that glass through which we now see but darkly is less playful than Spenser’s, and less artful, yet his vision is more charitable, more tempered with pity, according to the ontology expressed in the Prologus. Both Gower and Spenser privilege many of the same moral referents; sometimes their tropes are the same; yet their different loathly ladies register the difference between their eras and between their understanding of the moral landscape which they share.

Perhaps in part the difference is due to Gower’s greater expectation from the individuals who make up what Spenser sees as rabble. Under “The Commons,” Gower reiterates the need for order--“Wher lawe lacketh, errour groweth” (P 511)--and for individual responsibility for the state of the world. Complaint against a “world that is miswent” is found pointless unless each man looks to his own conscience, “For man is cause of that schal fall” (P 513-28).
Fortune and the stars may be blamed, but we must accept that the world is “evere untrew” (P 536), and that, in negotiation with such a world, man finally is “His oghne cause of wel and wo” (P 547). Boethian endurance of the spin of Fortune’s wheel when “every worldes thing is vein” demands that in the face of certain uncertainty man must himself be culpable, and exert proper governance (P 557-84). Gower’s loathly lady embodies the principle of fickle fortune. The happy ending which follows her knight’s acceptance of her demonstrates a Boethian exemplum.

The Prologus moves on to its final quarter: Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream is expanded from Daniel’s Old Testament version, a personification of the diminishing sequence of gold, silver, brass, steel and clay. The world has now deteriorated to “the last tokne of alle; / Upon the feet of Erthe and Stiel” (P 826-7). The cause of daily degeneration is “divisioun,” that “rnoder of confusioun” (P 851-2). Gower provides further matriarchal lineage by stating that sin is the mother of division (P 1029-30). He finds that the world “now is old and fieble and vil / Full of meschief and of peril” (P 887-8), and repeats his judgment from the Church section, that man is to blame: “The man is cause of alle wo (P 965). The division of the elements “of cold, of hot of moist of drye” in man’s own complexion is blamed for corruption, for the fact that we “may noght laste” (P 966-89)). Body and soul war against each other, with the most feeble of the two winning the victory (P 995-1001). Amans’s desire for romantic love is placed in the context of a lamentable world with clay and steel feet, in which the flesh itself represents frailty. This view is a commonplace, yet Gower’s representation
of heterosexuality suggests that he is genuinely repulsed by red-bloodedness. Later I compare the sex scenes of the loathly lady tales in detail, and there particularly Gower contrasts with Chaucer, whose knight finds the bliss of a transcendental sexual fulfillment which is not within the scope of Gower's schematic framework.

Having led the world to the brink of judgment day and lamented its demise, Gower begins his first book by declaring that since he may not “setten al in evene” he will change his style and write on love. He notes immediately that “loves lawe is out of reule, / That of tomoche or tolite” (1 18-9), an observation which Malory’s Fair Maid of Astolat amongst many others will later endorse in complaint. Gower then identifies his poetical persona as one who is taken into the school of love, and he offers to tell “a wonder hap which me befell” (1 67). He writes of his woeful care, his woeful day, his woeful chance, that “every man” might take as an example; Amans is to be Everyman in love, or “a Self-Portrait as a Lover” who “has no other business” as J. A. Burrow puts it (11). Yet Amans is a lover motivated by Gower’s genuine mistrust of flesh; hormonal urgency will not drive this narrative. On the contrary, Amans is to be

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68 James Dean notes that “If C. S. Lewis is correct that Gower formulated his love story and his characters of Amans and the Confessor from Jean’s French poem [the Roman de la Rose], it is also true that, at the last, Gower swerves away from the Roman in a distinctive and I would say comic way.” He defines the humour he sees: “The joke is that whereas Amant of the Roman plucks his Rose in a passionate, idolatrous gesture, Amans of the Confessio discovers that he is too old to pluck, too old to plow” (21-22). Dean is perhaps unusual in declaring that it is funny when Gower “wittily repudiates the carpe diem conclusion of Jean’s Roman” (24).

69 Despite varying visual illustrations adorning different editions, we are textually only told that Amans is an old man, and therefore unsuitable as a lover, at the end of the Confessio Amantis. While the late revelation adds an almost detective-novel sense of denouement, Gower allows a
withdrawn from his quest for love, and this is the purpose of Genius, the narrator who presents Gower’s loathly lady.

Then the poem proper sets off with a walk in the month of May, when singing birds, the woods and sweet grass suggest the same Spring energy of the opening sentence of the Canterbury Tales. But instead of falling into chance company at a tavern with strong wine, the poet flings himself to the ground so hard that he loses his breath, which puts a brief end to his complaining, wishing and weeping. A dream vision otherworldliness places the Tale of Florent at a remove in comparison with the Wife of Bath’s Tale’s foregrounding of physicality, comfort and companionship. Amans recommences complaint when he awakes out of his pain, and berates Cupid and Venus for lack of pity and meekness. He seeks Venus’s grace to heal the malady which he has had for a long time; a proliferation of apostrophes to Venus—“thou lif, thou lust, thou mannes hele”—attribute to her the pleasure of the season, with overtones of the redemptive power of Christ (l 121-33). The “kyng of love and qweene bothe” appear, and the king with angry eyes hurls a fiery dart into the poet’s “hert rote” and passes forth (l 139-51). But the queen stays. Just as Chaucer’s tale begins sense that Amans, as Everyman the lover, is in need of rebuke. Olsson observes that Amans is the opposite of “an ideal ancient and medieval figure, the puer senilis”; Amans is a “puerilis senex” (232). Gower’s moral scruples, his advocacy of individual responsibility (see George R. Coffman’s identification of this as Gower’s “most significant role” (40-48)) enable this trenchant dissection of the anatomy of the male lover. Olsson disagrees with me, I suspect, for he insists that “Gower cannot tell ‘every man his tale’” (236). On the other hand, J. A. W. Bennett concurs in his recognition that “If Genius’s prime concern seems to be with a lover’s faults and failings, we are never allowed to forget that these reflect vices common to all mankind” (52). In the context of courtly literature, with its specific gender roles, mankind in this instance is the man kind of humanity rather than the woman kind, although I am aware that this is not Bennett’s intended implication.
with the dancing fairy queen, is redirected by the mortal queen, and then placed within the hands of the hag, so Gower's operates under feminine rather than masculine auspices.

In an interview with Venus, the poet protests that he is a “Caitiff” who has long served in her court, and he claims that he deserves “som wele after my longe wo” (l 161-71). At first she is suspicious that he is feigning his complaint, and demands “Tell thi maladie” (l 13), and “Schew me thi seknesse everydiel” (l 185). His reply--‘that can I do wel, / Be so my lif therto wol laste” (l 187-8)-- suggests that his itemisation will be lengthy as well as over-dramatised. Perhaps with a touch of irony the queen suggests that in case he does live he should first be shriven by her priest, and she commands “O Genius myn oghne Clerk, / Com forth and hier this mannes schrifte” (l 196-7). The confession is designed to test against feigning; the organisational principle thus underscores Gower's desire to be open and truthful.

Venus’s Genius is the instructor who will shrive the poet of “the felicite / Of love and ek of all the wo” (l 206-7). Amans accepts that if Genius shrives him “Fro point to point, thanne I suppose, / Ther schal nothing be left behinde” (l 226-7). His words are prophetic; his acceptance of this nothingness is to be the outcome. Genius will examine each vice in the context of love. He promises plain speaking; Amans promises to obey (l 281-93). In accordance with Gower's mistrust of flesh, the shriving is of the somatic. The amending of Amans's “wittes fyve” begins with his eyes, those gates to the soul which are “The moste
principal of alle, / Thurgh whom that peril mai befalla" (l 308-9). Genius declares that the eye may be thief to love, and do great mischief (l 319-20). Suspicion of the flesh motivates his tales, and love-sickness is treated as a physiological phenomenon. The Tale of Florent is thus secured within the framework of the Confessio Amantis's interrogation of the guilt of the body, a contrast to the Canterbury Tales which impacts directly on their two loathly ladies. Gower cautions against a pride which seems to be located in the body.

Gower's narrative persona in The Tale of Florent is not a strident feminine one, but a masculine voice which, nevertheless, has a sexual neutrality, being "softe and faire" (l 232). Although the speaking priest is in the service of Venus, he is a confessor, a faceless servant, whose stories emerge from a professional performance rather than a personality. Chaucer's Wife is actively sexual, raunchy, aberrant, proud of her own pride. We know that her hips are wide and her teeth widely-spaced. Although the Wife and Genius speak from very different rhetorical stances, nonetheless Gower's priest, as the male stripped of pride, somehow matches the inflated feminine Wife; both voices are apt for a feminist didactic.

Perhaps the most striking contrast between Chaucer's and Gower's versions is that the two knights are intrinsically different, casting dissimilar reflection upon the two loathly ladies of their Tales. The Wife's knight precipitates the action by raping a maiden; Florent is established as "worthi,"

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70 A comparison may be made with the knight's manly voice in which he delivers the answer to the riddle to the court of ladies in the Wife's Tale.
“chivalrous and amorous” (l. 1408-14), and he is at the onset a victim, seized while he “rod in a pas” (l. 1421-22). The attack on Florent is described with a passive verbal construction which does not identify those who take him by strength. The initiators of this story, who grab Florent, are unnamed workers of the whims of Fortune, that fickle fabricator:

Fortune, which may every thred
Tobreke and knette of mannes sped,
Schop, as this knyght rod in a pas,
That he be strengthe take was [...]. (l. 1419-22)

The faultlessness of Florent makes his later happy ending unproblematic. In his blamelessness he is like Lughaidhe Laidhe, Niall, and Gawain of the Wedding. However, it is generally speculated that Chaucer and Gower had the same source, so their difference at this point is evidence of Gower’s concern with poetic justice, and his rejection of fleshly excess, compared to Chaucer’s penchant for complication and play.72

As the victim of this unspecified and inexplicable assault, Florent kills Branchus, who was, “the worthieste of al his lond” (l. 1432). The killing of Branchus fits the motif of hunting and killing; Branchus conflates with the deer whose slaying starts the story in the Corca Laidhe version, and in The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell. Just as there is no guilt in those killings, so

71 Olsson observes that Florent “learns without a teacher”; “respects his oaths”; “will not be untrue,” and “is never witless” (80). Florent is a thoroughly decent and even likeable knight.

72 It is generally accepted that Gower and Chaucer probably shared the same source but that this is unknown. See Benson 872, Eisner 9. Maynadier is less willing to commit himself, observing that the questions of whether Chaucer and Gower shared the same source, or one borrowed from the other “cannot be answered definitely” (6).
Florent is innocent according to chivalric ethics. Gower's knight is dragged into his nemesis without committing an act of hubris.

Florent's innocence is highlighted as the riddle is posed to him with malicious intent. Branchus's vindictive grandmother, "the slyheste / Of alle" (l 1442-3) and 'so old sche myght unethes go" (l 1444), that is, walk, poses the question to Florent. Her desire for revenge upon her grandson's killer, who is beyond her legal reach, makes her a travesty of a revenge hero, perhaps in the grotesque lineage of Grendel's mother. Given the outcome of the Tale, this unforgiving grandmother might be dubbed a revenge comedy hero. She entraps Florent in an agreement to play a guessing game with his life at stake so that his death may be secured without a breach of chivalric etiquette. His assent seems like a young man's indulgence towards old age; he takes the crafty grandma's bait, which is that the test by riddle will appease men who "schal respite / As now to take vengement" (l 1457). Florent's acquiescence springs from his chivalry, and his faith in his ability to answer hard questions. Decency is added to his innocence in his acceptance of the grandmother's challenge.

We are first directed to see Florent as a mindful man by the formulaic,

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Derek Pearsall misrepresents the posing of the riddle, giving patriarchal agency where it does not exist. Pearsall says that "The father of Branchus [...] wishes to revenge his son in a quasi-legal manner and so, on the advice of the grandmother, asks Florent to set his life on a question ("Gower Tradition" 79). Instead, what happens in the text is that "the fader and the moder both" are "wrothe," and "they wolden do vengeaunce" [my italics] (l1429-33), so that mother and father are equally vengeful. However, it is the grandmother who "seide how sche wol bringe him inne" (l 1457); that is, it is granny's idea. She is also the agent who performs the entrapment by posing the riddle: "thus to him sche seide" [my italics] (l 1554).
"This knight, which worthy was and wys," which is further expanded: "And thus he went forth his weie / Alone as Knyht adventurous / And in his thoght was curious [...]" (1 1522-24). The adventures of Malory's knights suggest that frequently the young male warrior is equipped with more vigour than his capacity for curious thought can cope with, and the Wife's knight maintains this tradition. In contrast Florent, alone as knight adventurous, thinks.

Florent is awarded more agency and control as a thinker than Chaucer's knight, whose loathly lady deliberately leaves her demand for matrimony unspecified until her desired object has accepted her contract, whereas Florent's "lothly wommannysch figure" (1 1530) lays her cards on the table before she gives him the life-saving answer. Chaucer provides a dramatic irony at the gullible knight's expense in the loathly lady's coyly ambiguous "Plight me thy trouthe heere in myn hand" (WBT 1009). Gower's version is less tricky: it does not take pleasure in women's wiles with words; and it allows Florent the opportunity to make an informed decision. We are given a sight of this process:

Tho fell this knyht in mochel thoght,  
Now goth he forth, now comth ayein,  
He wot moght what is best to sein,  
And thoghte, as he rode to and fro [...]. (1 1569 -1571)

This to-and-fro motion, the movement of distraction, is one associated with furious thought, although the pacing is usually done on foot rather than on horseback. Lewis observes that motion rather than "shapes and colours" is Gower's forte: "What he sees is movement, not groups and scenes, but actions and events. In so far as he approximates to the visible arts at all, it is a cinematograph rather than a painting that he suggests" (Allegory 206). The
same to-and-fro action is made at a later stage of the _Wife’s Tale_ by Chaucer’s knight, who, “Whan he was with his wyf abedde y-broght; / He walweth, and turneth to and fro” (WBT 1084-5). Chaucer’s knight shows feverish petulance more akin to a tantrum as he tosses and turns in bed with the bride who is “so loothly, and so oold also” (WBT 1100); Florent’s pacing up and down in the effort to make a truly hard decision is the physical manifestation of his cerebral activity.

Florent is finally able to accept the hag’s proposal by reasoning that someone this old must be soon dead (good logic based on inadequate information), and the tale proceeds with the hag carefully allowing an escape-clause should the knight find the answer he requires by any means other than her teaching. This clause is not invoked, despite Florent’s tarrying long and late in the hopes that the solution might come to him. He also tries inventively to find his own answer first, saying “al that evere he couthe” (l 1641). However, although he is more evidently a rational man than Chaucer’s knight, he has no greater success with the riddle about womanly desire. He must use the hag’s solution, is acquitted gracelessly by Branchus’s grandmother, and rides out to where his bride waits for him.

As he shared the to-and-fro motion of agitation with Chaucer’s knight, he now shares a shame described in avian terms. Both knights are owlish as they face matrimony to their life-saving loathly ladies. While Chaucer’s knight hides like an owl as he approaches his unwelcome marriage—“And a day after hidde him as an oule, / So wo was hym, his wyf looked so foule” (WBT 1081-2)—
Gower’s more actively flees back to his own castle by night with his bride-to-be, holing up at day-time:

Bot as an oule fleth be nyhte
Out of alle othre briddes syhte,
Riht so this knyght on daies brode
In clos him hield, and schop his rode
On nyhtes time [...]. (l 1727 –1731)

Shame rather than wisdom is denoted by the owlishness of both knights.

Florent’s shame is murkier than the Wife’s knight’s, by merit of his greater worthiness and intelligence; since Chaucer’s knight has inflicted shame through rape, his own sense of shame does not invite pity. Florent’s avoidance of daylight, his claustrophobic hiding, is undeserved, and we pity this owl who seeks to flee from other birds.

He is finally shown his bride’s fair form, and must then choose whether to have her fair by night or by day. Florent concedes sovereignty by allowing his wife to “ches for us bothen” (l 1829), and in doing so breaks the spell a wicked stepmother has cast. The lady explains that she was bound by magic to stay loathly until she wins the love of a good knight, revealing that her stepmother

Forschop me, til I hadde wonne
The love and sovereinete
Of what knyght that in his degre
Alle othre passeth of good name [...]. (l 1846-9)

Spelling out a requirement for sovereignty on top of getting the best knight around seems a thoughtful prioritisation to come from an ill-wisher. Just as prohibitions--the commands not to open this door, unlock this box, or eat this fruit--in any narrative most usually anticipate their own transgression, spells such as this exist to push the recipient towards their solution. The kind of clause one makes is therefore critical, and a truly malevolent stepmother could
wickedly prescribe something just as improbable but much more tedious as spell-breaker than sovereignty in marriage over someone surpassingly perfect.

The happy ending is unproblematic because poetic justice follows the moral concerns of Gower's overall design. Peck declares that Gower's ending "gives a dramatic statement of the rejuvenescence of kingship," while, too, "Obedience to truth redefines the community" (49). I concur that Gower is more committed to the preservation of truth than Chaucer. Chaucer applies himself to construct female subjectivity, and the fertile chaos which this suggests; Gower turns the same tale to the promotion of good rule. Yet this is predicated upon humble obedience to the particularly monstrous truth which the hag represents.

**Thomas of Erceldoune**

If Gower's hag is in the service of truth, the next shape-changer is a fairy one who withholds the truth, and perhaps changes her shape to disguise her sexual misdemeanour. Her fairy nature allies her with the otherworldly sovereignty hag; she is in control of her own shape, and uses it to test her man. Fairy status connects her obliquely to the setting of *Wife of Bath's Tale* in the time when "Al was this land fullfd of fayere" (*WBT* 859). Thomas's fairy queen changes from fair to loathsome as a result of coitus. The sexual act determines the sequence of events, although here it is not the climax of the tale, but the catalyst for what happens. Furthermore, Thomas's shape-changing fairy queen endows her mortal lover, if not with a kingdom, at least with insider information as to who will be king as victor of immanent battles. Although she does not
choose the king as her partner, the fairy queen tells Thomas "Who shalbe king, who shalbe none" (345), giving the poet bardic foreknowledge. Thus, like the sovereignty hag, she authorises her man once she has tested him. Thomas's story about her is a route to his prophecies, as the title indicates: "Here after followeth the Prophecie of Sir Thomas of Astledowne" (Albrecht 80). A sovereignty issue underlies the poem's prophecies. The poem is intended to be socially and politically affective, and to direct the outcome of the battles it foretells. For all these reasons, the first fytte (of three) of Thomas of Erceldoune merits discussion.

The agency of Thomas as teller of the tale makes for a difference from the other tales; the redaction is told in the autobiographical first person pronoun at the start of the poem, in a way that suggests that the original was written by Thomas of Erceldoune himself, a man who lived in Berwickshire in the thirteenth century (Albrecht 7, 106). Near the end of the first fytte it becomes apparent that his authority to spaeak comes from the lady. A parallel might be drawn with religious who cite Gwd as their authority to witness to the visions He gives them. Although this is a convention, it is a more essential strategy for the women (such as Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe) who claim a public voice not normally available to females. Here the gender factor is switched: the fairy woman is the author who uses Thomas as a vehicle. The fact that Thomas is found in court records means that this is one version in which the

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74 Thomas thus appropriates the hagiographical method of ascribing authority to a higher being into a secular dream vision. He is not especially grateful for his gift of prophecy; the gender
male protagonist is of the real world, and, as with writings by religious
visionaries, a non-believing reader has the task of interpreting the recorded
experience. Whether Thomas is someone who had some kind of hallucinogenic
experience he believingly ascribes to the fairy world, or is politically motivated
to exploit a popular belief system, or perhaps something in between these two--
something happened which it suited him to elaborate--is impossible to
establish. Perhaps a later writer appropriated his identity (Akbari p.e. May
2000). It seems unproductive to address, at this late date, the motivation behind
Thomas’s redaction of a supernatural experience here; however, I note that in
this text the fictional has moved closer to lay claim to the actual, and that the
author attests his prophecy to the shape-changing lady of the tale. The same
circular movement of self-justification which visionaries operate, in which the
text is produced out of an experience which it describes, which validates the
writing, motivates this tale alone, of those on my survey.

Thomas (and seemingly Thomas) begins with the traditional oral
imperative “Listen,” in the first person, attesting to the truth of what is to come: “I
shal you tell as true a tale / As ever was told by night or day.” He then promises
to tell of “doughty deeds that have been done,” but swings from the usual bardic
recitation of past deeds, to promise to tell “Of Battels that done shal be.” Thus
the first person narrator, in the commanding tone of the orator, identifies his
redaction with the prophetic side of bardic business, and goes on to guarantee
hierarchy seems to over-ride the human/deity one in terms of Thomas’s lack of humility.
And in what place, and how, and where,
And who shal have the high degree,
And whether party shal have the wor,
And who shal take the flight and fly,
And who shal dye, and be slaine there [...]. (18-22)
The offer of such a specific account seems a promising way to get the audience to “take good tent” (2), and establishes expectation of the supernatural powers of divination, in relation to the epic topic of war. Thomas the bard who redacts in the first person is a self-professed agent of the fairy queen.

The tale proper begins as a dream narrative on a May morning when the poet is heading west to the sound of birds. Like Gower’s Amans, Thomas does not get far on his own: by the end of the four-line description of the birds he is lying “Underneath a seemly tree [...] / Alone in longing” (33-4), and seeing a gay lady who approaches on horseback. Thomas’s denial of his ability as poet to describe “all her faire array” (39) extends to eternal time—with all the time till doomsday and ink and paper he still could not describe her—although, typically, he goes on to do so for thirty-two lines, perhaps the limit of patience in an audience who have been promised battles. We are told very little about her person: only that she “shined and shone” (48), and that her hair hung about her head, which is not much to go on, even according to formulaic description. Her clothing and trappings get the attention for their bejeweled richness, and she has the accessories of a hunter, which I will discuss in the hunter hunted section of the next chapter.

At the point where the many arrows in her belt are described (although as Albrecht notes [96], there is no mention made of a bow) the narratorial
perspective swings to the third person, a disjunction which signals the composite nature of the text. At the same time the dream-vision quality is made more apparent by the spatial organisation: Thomas, having seen “where a Lady gay / Came riding over a faire long ley” (35-6), avows “I wil go fast with all my might / Her to meet at Eldon tree” (79-80), and he “ran over the mountain high” (82) to meet her. Realism is lacking from the geographical setting in which one might lie under a tree and see a lady riding, decide to meet her, and do so by running, because this is a dream-like series of events in which the action is everything. Thomas, on foot in his dream, has the energy and agency to catch up with the priceless lady, even though, upon entering the dream’s action, he is distanced to the third person.

Upon their meeting, the lady does not tell Thomas that she is fairy, although her knowledge of his name is the first sign of her otherworldliness. Her use of the temporal metaphor, “livelong,” to describe the landscape suggests that she sees it as full of the living, rather than the dead; of mortals rather than fairies. With her splendid costume and hunting accessories she bears a similarity to the fairy inhabitants of Sir Orfeo.75

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75 In Sir Orfeo:
The king o fairy with his rout
Com to hunt him all about
With dim cry and bloweing
And houndes also with him berking (259-62).
Orfeo follows a troop of fairy ladies who, like Thomas’s fairy queen, are out hunting at the start of his chthonic trip to rescue his wife:
Sexty levedis on hors ride,
Gentil and jolif as brid on ris;
Nought o man amonges hem ther nis.
And ich a faucon on hond bere
And riders on haukin by o rivere [...]. (280-4)
The presentation of fairy women as jolly hunters, of which Thomas’s lady is a splendid individual example, shows a reversal of the opening of Chaucer’s *Wife’s Tale*, in which the maiden is on foot and the rapist knight is riding down by the river, presumably hawking. Thomas’s fairy queen is, indeed, an expansion upon the very thing that the Wife had fondly in mind at the start of her tale, when she opens her tale by reminiscing about the fairy queen. Here such a queen is shown enjoying what middle earth has to offer, while out jauntily hunting in a splendid outfit which the Wife would no doubt envy.

Thomas’s somewhat unusual loathly lady is out hunting and available for folly so that she might authorise the prophecies about the outcome of battles in a text with a didactic intention of influencing national power contestation: kingship. Fairy-woman promiscuity, and pleasure in pastoral pastime, is textually put to work in the service of soldiery. *Thomas of Erceldoune* foregrounds the fairy element as a parallel to the quasi-divinity of the sovereignty hag. In both instances the feminine power of an alternative world is directed towards a political contest between men.

**The Ballads.**

Francis James Child observes that “Tales resembling the Marriage of Gawain must have been widely spread during the Middle Ages” (II 292), and he provides many of these in his collection. I use the following from Child’s
collection: “The Marriage of Sir Gawain;” “King Henry;” “Kempy Kay;” “Kemp Owyne;” “Thomas Rymer;” and the “Knight and the Shepherd’s Daughter,” but will begin with a few general comments on ballads before examining each of these in turn. Buchan notes that “The habit of thinking in balances, antitheses, appositions and parallelisms is intrinsic to the oral mind” (88). His analysis of structure is confirmed by consideration of the ballads which I have chosen from Child’s collection, and illuminates how well-suited to the oral composition of the ballad is the loathly lady motif, which is also based on “balances, antitheses, appositions and parallelisms” (88). The resitantly excessive nature of the loathly lady suits ballads, works whose beginnings and boundaries are elusive and fluid.

In considering the development of the ballad, Donald Ward notes that the traditional ballad is formulaic in the same manner as medieval love poetry. He conjectures that the new genre of ballad developed in the “neo-urban period of Europe,” the fourteenth century, and finds it significant that the ballad genre came into existence at the same time as the emergence of the new urban social milieu (53). He concludes tentatively “that the ballad was already around as early as the twelfth century and its emergence can be attributed to the demands for new art and entertainment forms among the new urban populace,” although he acknowledges that the peasant class developed the form (55). Penny Fielding, however, claims that urbanization is a traditional enemy of orality (4).

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76 Child has some other ballads with tangential themes, which I do not examine here, choosing only the most relevant, and those which I cannot resist.
Whereas the sovereignty hag belongs to the land, the country, and Chaucer’s to the sophistication of the city, the ballad hags seem condemned by scholarship to remain vagrant. As for locations within the ballads, Buchan notes that “The distanced settings of court, castle and greenwood have rarely any precise, geographically identifiable, location, for they belong to a stylized landscape—a starker version of the Spenserian landscape—that represents both the imagined aristocratic world, and the wide world of adventure [...]” (77). Buchan observes a departure from reality in the protagonists of balladry: “The folk did not sing about the folk” (81). He notes too, however, that the “preference for doing rather than being and for the concrete rather than the abstract is of course what generates much of the ballad’s particular power, and what distinguishes oral from most literate poetry” (83). The mixture of the mythic with mundane detail makes for haunting resonance. Ballads seem to be the start of a trail still lurid with blood which might lead us back through darkness; their relic quality conveys another world both strange and yet psychologically familiar. Yet the vivid world which they invoke eludes categorisation more than any other loathly lady redaction.

77 This is untrue of the “Marriage of Sir Gawain,” which, like the *Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, is set in the countryside around Carlisle.

78 Bruford points out that “It is possible to think of oral transmission in terms of the survival of the fittest; only what is easy to remember, and interesting enough to be worth remembering,” is passed on (167). Bruford suggests that rambling dull tales would be made “more striking” if they survived (168). This theory suggests that the anonymous teller has more chance of producing a gripping yarn than the self-conscious author.
Some scholars propose that this balladic world is feminine. Fielding draws attention to “the association of the oral with women and its consequent demotion as a medium” (3). David Buchan points out that “Anna Gordon's ballads are stories of a woman's tradition; her three immediate sources were women [...]” (64). Pointing out that, even within Brown's historical repertoire, “in each [ballad] a female character occupies a central, and normally emphatic, role,” Buchan establishes that “Brown's stock, therefore, very definitely constitutes a woman's corpus, and may perhaps represent a woman’s tradition within the regional tradition” (76). While such a proposal has feminist appeal, it represents an interpretive response to the enigma which surrounds ballads.

The ballad the “Marriage of Sir Gawain” (Child No. 31), which is similar to the *Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, is extant in seven fragments. The ballad location of “Carleile,” with the confrontation occuring at “Tearene Wadling,” places the tale in the same location as the *Wedding*’s Inglewood; this is an unusually specific locus. The ballad includes other round table knights: Lancelot; Steven; Kay; Banier; Bore; Garrett; and Tristeram. The land confiscation which is the source of Sir Gromer Somer Joure's animosity to Arthur in the *Wedding* is less precise in the ballad, where the giant baron who seizes Arthur cries, “I have thee and thy land, Arthur, / To doe as it pleaseth me” (Child 295); yet his mention of land is vestigal rather than a concrete accusation. Later, at the moment of marital bliss, Gawain declares, in a metaphor which takes its erotic charge from the grass roots of the soil, that he is “as glad as grasse wold be of raine” (Child 296). The land (which, remember,
the Irish sovereignty hag represents) earths the ballad, or, as Robert Pogue Harrison notes of forests, “the humus grounds the human” (7). The grass, glad of rain, is a metaphor for sexual satisfaction which might be based upon the loathly lady, given her affinity with the land.

If land is one issue residual in ballad form, so is female sovereignty. “King Henry” (Child No. 32), for which Brown is Child’s source, begins with the advice to never let a man “wend a wooing” who lacks three things: a routh (abundance) of gold, an open heart and one which is all full of charity. Thus wealth and largesse are requirements. The narrative begins in the second verse: off on a jolly hunt, Henry has slain the fattest buck of the flock and is in the hall making cheer when, with a loud wind, and an earthquake and darkness which cause the dogs to howl, “a griesly ghost stedd stappin I the fleer” (Child 298). This version focuses upon the appetitive nature of the hag. Appearing as a fiend in hell she demands meat, and eats her way through the animals beginning with the horse and working down to the goshawks. Having eaten the household pets she demands drink. Henry sews up the horse’s bloody hide and serves her wine in it. The next demand is for a bed, and that he take off his clothes and join her. A discreet row of asterisks signals that there is a missing stanza, or that Brown’s modesty has intervened, and then when day comes and the sun shines the fairest lady that was ever seen lies between King Henry and the wall. She commends him for being courteous and giving her all her will; the use of this word directs that her demands are a contestation of rights rather than purely desirous. This ballad thus links submission to female will with right
kingship.

The bespelling stepmother is also found in ballad form. Child introduces “Kemp Owyne” (Child No. 34) with a comparison to an Icelandic saga in which a maid is put under a weird by her stepmother, and becomes a monster until kissed by a king. She has a splendid sword, and her king kisses her on a woody island as a deal to win the sword, needless to say getting more than he bargained for: the hand of the fair maiden in marriage. Child goes on to cite other ballads from Grundtvig, the Icelandic ballad collector who was a mentor of sorts to Child, which involve the release from spell by one or three kisses, in which the bespelled woman is sometimes a snake (Child 306-8). Buchan points out that the stepmother frames the entire “Kemp Owyne” ballad (107). “Kemp Owyne” begins with the death of a mother and the remarriage of a father to “the warst woman / That ever lived in Christendom” (Child 309). The ballad is thus unusual in being a stepmother story which starts at the beginning, rather than revealing the stepmother only at the denouement. The maiden’s name is Isobel, and her status as scapegoat is made clear by the stepmother who throws her over Graigy’s sea with a curse and the command to lie there, “And all my sorrows lie with thee” (Child 309). The stepmother names Kemp Owyne as the spell-breaker who might “borrow” Isobel with three kisses. When he hears this news he hastens to the sea to meet his destiny. Isobel offers three magic gifts—belt, ring and brand—which she has found in the green sea in exchange

79 Lamia shape-changers have some connection to the loathly lady, which I consider in the next chapter.
for his kisses, but with a prohibition against touching her, "tail or fin" (Child 309).
The ballad ends with the maid's transformation and smile, and in the laying of a
return weird upon the stepmother. There is no marriage at the end of the ballad,
which seems more genuinely interested in the stepmother relationship.

Child provides three versions of "Thomas Rymer" (Child No. 37); the first
has Brown as a source (whom Child notes omits the sex scene), and the last is
a compound of this first one with "another version" (Child 317). The relation of
the fairy world to the Christian schema, with the devil coming for a tithe from the
fairy, and with three roads, one to heaven, one to hell and one to the fairy world,
makes the fairy reality an in-between one which seemingly has more commerce
with the devil than with the divine. The fairy queen is first mistaken by Thomas
for "the mighty Queen of Heaven," but this is not who she is, even though she
later saves Thomas from being paid to the devil. This tale introduces a different
kind of test of the hero, a little like a shamanistic initiation rite, in which Thomas
wades through blood in the dark with a roaring noise, which sounds like a kind
of rebirth (Child 326). Buchan draws attention to the trinary patterns in the
ballad, finding a "triad of taboos"--"those against physical contact with fairy folk,
against the eating of fairy food, and against speech with fairy folk"--to be a "key
element" (117). In an appendix, Child places the Thornton MS "Thomas of
Ersseldoune," which includes the sexual act insisted upon by the enthusiastic
Thomas: "Seuene sythis by hir he laye" (Child 327). The multiplicity of Thomas's
performance compares with Gawain's willingness to marry anything that moves:
virility is another recurrent factor in these tales.

“The Knight and the Shepherd's Daughter” (Child No. 110) is introduced by Child with acknowledgement of the “parallel with the tales belonging to the class of the ‘Marriage of Sir Gawain,’ the Wife of Bath's Tale, ‘Dame Ragnell,’ and the Tale of Florent” (458). This splendid ballad works incrementally; it balances opposites: courtesy and love; riding and running; a gay gold ring and a maidenhead; compensation of gold or of flesh; fair water and wine; puddle-water and ale; shepherd’s daughter and duke’s daughter. After this admittedly classist metamorphosis, the ballad ends with a joining of hand in hand which might make for a Miltonic paradise, as the knight is wittily awarded “both purse and person too” (Child 460). The ballad begins with the rape of a shepherd’s daughter by a “courteous knight,” who abuses chivalric formula when he declares he will die if he does not have his will with the maiden (Child 459). This speech act is balanced by his denial of her in court, when he bemoans his misfortune that any shepherd’s daughter should be telling him such a tale (Child 460).

But the shepherd’s daughter has control of the dialogue, bringing the issue of language control into the ballad set. After being laid down on the plain, used according to the knight's will, and then “took up” again, she inquires as to what his name is, addressing him as “good sir” and a “courteous knight.” He offers a trinity of names: Jack, John and Sweet William; and setting his foot in the stirrup, he rides away. In Kinloch MSS VII 69 his third name is Mitchcock, which she translates from “the Latin tongue” as Earl Richard. In Buchan's
Ballads it is Lithcock, also Earl Richard when translated from Latin by the lady. The lady's command of Latin, the fact that she is "well-learned" makes this one of the medieval stories, like Apollonius of Tyre, which commends education for women specifically as an antidote to sexual exploitation.

The knight rides away, but the lady runs close by his side, swims across the broad water, and comes to the king's fair court. There she complains to the king that one of his knights has robbed her not of purple, or pall or a gold ring, but of her maidenhead; the king orders that if the knight is a bachelor he will give his body to the girl, but that if he is a married man he shall be hanged (Child 460). In the Kinloch MSS V 255 the knight attempts to disguise himself as crippled and blind, in Kinloch MSS VII 69 he is "hauping on ane foot and winking with ae ee" (Child 463). This literalises the moral ineptitude of Chaucer's knight into physical handicap, or pretense thereof; this knight fully realises Chaucer's.

The shepherd's daughter picks out Sweet William from a line-up, and he offers her gold if she will seek another love. True to type, she insists on being paid with his own body. When he rues that he had drunk wine and ale, implying that he was drunk at the time of the offence, and bewails his fate, she crisply points out that she did not seek him out at the king's court to crave his love (Child 460). In the Buchan version she taunts the knight with "cauld and eerie words" (Child 466), claiming punningly to have got her gay clothing and her Latin from her mother, who nursed an earl's children. The role of the lady's mother, an "auld carline," "a poor woman," and "a mean woman" is the ground
of the lady's taunts, a contrast to the patriarchal claim on royalty in the
denouement in which she is the king of Scotland's daughter (Child 467). If
wicked stepmothers are as problematic for maidens as rapist knights, in this
moment a real mother is invoked as an ally in the ground plan of thoroughly
humiliating the knight.

**The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell.**

*The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* survives in a manuscript
dated to around 1500 but the text has an earlier origin (so that Donald B. Sands
is willing to call it “roughly contemporary” with *The Wife of Bath’s Tale* and *The
Tale of Florent* [Verse Romances 323]); it might be seen as central by merit of
the features it shares with the others. The opening exhortation to “Lithe and
listenithe” suggests an oral performance. The *Wedding* is Arthurian like
Chaucer’s *Wife’s Tale*, although different in having male friendship as a theme,
for the one protagonist knight of the *Wife’s Tale* is split into two: King Arthur, who
initiates the action by killing a great hart, and who, under threat of death, has the
riddle of what women want posed to him by Sir Gromer Somer Jour; and Sir
Gawain, Arthur’s nephew, who redeems Arthur by marrying the hag Dame
Ragnell, the supplier of the correct answer. This incident in which Gawain will
marry because of loyalty and love for Arthur suggests that homosocial
relationships might provide greater impetus than heterosexual ones in courtly
romance.

The Arthurian element is in clearer focus in the *Wedding*, in that the male
protagonists are named, unlike Chaucer's knight, and behave according to character type. Arthur, although eulogised in the opening, is somewhat inadequate, and depends upon Gawain to extricate him from the dilemma. Gawain, the knight who is both courteous and experienced in love in other tales--for example, in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, and "The Carl of Carlisle"--behaves with typical grace when he agrees to marry the loathly lady to save his king. This characterisation places the Wedding firmly within the Arthurian set, the background which Chaucer gestures towards but does not develop. The narrator's hurry to finish Ragnell off once she has taken Sir Gawain away from jousting signals to an impatience with the happy marital closure, and a desire to return to the masculinist action of romance. Ragnell's life and the teller's story are both to be dispatched briskly with the declaration "Nowe for to make you a short conclusion / I cast me for to make an end fulle sone / Of this gentille lady" (817-9). Although the Wedding is the only loathly lady tale which includes male bonding centrally, in many ways it is a text which revealingly incorporates themes and traits from all the others.

Consideration of property motivates the Wedding's action, so that a link with the land of the Irish sovereignty tales is brought into the English set of tales more firmly than in Gower or Chaucer's tales. Specifically, Sir Gromer is motivated to vengeance because previously King Arthur had wrongfully seized his property and given it to his nephew Sir Gawain. Sir Gromer claims the status

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80 Hahn declares that "Only in the popular romances in English, however, does a genuine cult of Sir Gawain emerge, making him the unsurpassed flower of chivalry" (6).
of a revenge hero when he grimly says to Arthur “Thou hast done me wrong many a yere / And wofully shalle I quitte thee here” (55-6) and proceeds to the grievance which motivates him: “Thou hast gevin my landes in certain / With great wrong unto Sir Gawen” (58-9). The two are alone in the forest, that background for deeds done outside of social stricture, and although we have been primed at the start of the poem with the knowledge that “Of alle kinges Arture berithe the flowir, / And of alle knightod he bare away the honour” (7-8), the moral terrain is well wooded and it is not entirely evident that it is the ogre-like Sir Gromer who is in the wrong. The accusation of “great wrong” addresses the actual power of the Arthurian court, and the potential for abuse, casting on the military elite of knighthood a slur comparable to the rape which begins the Wife’s Tale. Courtly abuse of power is sexual in the tale told by the woman, and in the Wedding the alleged abuse is land appropriation, a breach of masculine identity and rights rather than of feminine. The intrusion of land parallels Corca Laidhe sovereignty, that is, the control of a large number of people and the land upon which they live; however, here concern with a smaller parcel of land seems to make the issue more comprehensible, believable, and more pressing.

The Wedding is in affinity with the ballads in its perlocutionary performance as it refers to the hard-edged social competition of a believable world beyond the text. The balladic emphasis on low class as a disqualifier for a knight’s bride puts social realism ahead of the importance of youthful beauty, or, at least, insists that social considerations are inherent in the attraction factor of
sex, while the *Wedding's* property franchise motivation aligns it with balladic pragmatism. The Ingleswood and Carlisle location confirms the ballad setting, acclaiming a central English geography which counters the Irish as well as suggesting a real event of some kind behind the story. 81 Whenever a tale conjures the actual geography of any country, a mapping of territory inheres, and the miracles and marvels of the fiction take the shape of the actual landscape, enriching the sense of nationalism. 82

Later the wonder of the bride’s transformation is complicated because in the *Wedding* she is Sir Gromer’s sister, and, upon reflection might be seen as complicit in getting the family property back through marriage to Gawain, by working in league with her brother. This reading is a stretch, given Sir Gromer’s rage when he finds that Ragnell has given Arthur the answer to his riddle—he rants “I pray to God, I maye see her bren on a fire” (474)—but the role of women as peace-weaver brides to rival factions is another consideration to this version. Once Ragnell’s transformation is acknowledged publicly and privately—all have marveled at her beauty, and Gawain is regularly kept in bed by his love for her—she approaches Arthur to intercede on her brother’s behalf: enchanted by her, he agrees to be a good lord to Sir Gromer, for her sake. The transaction shows

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81 Hahn discusses the “considerable ambiguity, overlap, and confusion around Arthurian place names” and notes that “Carlisle is specified as a setting for *Wedding, Carlisle, Avowyng, Awntyrs, Greene Knight, Marriage and Carle*” (4). The locating of Carlisle in Wales in some works with the speculation that it is a misnomer for Caerleon-on-Usk in the south of Wales is discussed by Hahn.

82 The early English narrative poem *Athelston* is historically inaccurate, but geographically logical, for example; however, especially in the instance of new colonies, the relocation of tales in the new environment is one way of colonising the mindscape of a new identity.
peace-weaving at its most successful: discordant social intercourse prepares the bed for a sexual intercourse whose jouissance brings social concord. If male bonding begins the tale with a pragmatic grounding in the interest of the men in land ownership (as well as in saving their own lives, proving virile to save their mates, and enjoying great sex when it turns up), the power of heterosexual love to penetrate this system is shown at the end of the Wedding.

Ragnell’s piecemeal family includes a wicked stepmother, whose relationship with Sir Gromer is not addressed. While the bewitching stepmother invokes real-world conflicts of interest at the domestic level, it also creates a heroine who is an innocent victim in her loathliness. In contrast to the ballad brides who return the curse to their stepmother once they are freed from it, Dame Ragnell is forgiving, praying “God have on her mercy,” so that her transition to a fair lady is endorsed by her generosity of mind. Nonetheless, the detail of the bride at her Wedding wedding feast, where she “ete as moche as six,” ripping into her food with three inch long nails, shows a connection to the ballad “King Henry,” in which the gluttony of the loathly lady poses a threat to the knight’s household. The juxtaposition of hunt and food in so many of these stories suggests an underlying anxiety about food, and pulls in the colonialist concern with assimilation, and with cannibalism.

The Wedding comes to a halt with a prayer from the narrator to “Jhesu” to “Help him out of sorrowe that this tale did devine” (842), a link to Thomas Malory, since as well as a prayer to God for his soul, the writer complains that his body is “beset withe gailours many” (844). The poem seems to terminate
with an ambiguous reference perhaps to the body as a prison, an appropriate spiritual metaphor to affix to Dame Ragnell's romance, in which the imprisoning flesh is both grotesque and feminine.

The Instability of Textual Status.

The instability of the loathly lady's body is matched by the instability of the textual body of work in which she is found. Scholarly opinion agrees that the extant manuscripts of the Canterbury Tales, the Irish tales, the Confessio Amantis, Thomas of Erceldoune, the Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell, and the ballads are all copies of earlier originals which no longer exist. Academic speculation is often crucial in determining the boundaries of the texts. The unfinished status of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales and Spenser's Faerie Queene also calls for a little consideration.

The ambition of these two projects suggests that, in both undertakings, completion was not the main goal. Spenser died in his late forties, and might reasonably have hoped for time to complete his epic task; Chaucer was working on his fragments in his sixties. Yet completion of such composite works is a state of mind. Furthermore, post-modern preference deems avoidance of closure to be a legitimate convention. Since Coleridge's person from Porlock, and Stevie Smith's yearning for such a visitor, we recognise incompletion as both an alibi which might ease authorial anxiety, and a method of gesturing to the sublime: to a fullness best expressed by gesture rather than by explication.

Conjecture, albeit informed, is an essential component of any reading of
the *Canterbury Tales*. Derek Pearsall, enabled by the scholarship which has previously contemplated a larger design from the fragments of the *Canterbury Tales*, is able to observe in 1999 of Chaucer that "It seems likely that he [...] decided to postpone impending closure by introducing a new and impossibly grandiose scheme" (79). Pearsall’s assumption is plausible given a human reluctance to broach the closure which reduces a splendid project by defining it. A similar conjecture might be made about the *Faerie Queene*, with its closing "Mutability Cantos." Both composite works function convincingly as they stand.

If we accept these cultural icons as being complete as they are, there is still a problem with the lack of the original with many of the works I examine, most conspicuously with Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The manuscript status of the *Canterbury Tales*--the original manuscript hovering like a ghost behind more than eighty witnesses--conceals the shape of the larger work in terms of overall structure. Editors of the *Canterbury Tales* are faced not with a text, but with the survival of 82 manuscript copies, with 55 complete or near complete. The earlier rougher Hengwrt and later more polished Ellesmere (or more "heavily edited" according to Donald C. Baker [xvii]) are the two most outstanding (Pearsall 79-80). The Hengwrt was probably transcribed sometime between 1400 and 1410; the Ellesmere a little later, and there is debate as to whether or not the same scribe wrote both. The modern standard edition, the

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63 John M. Manley concludes that "None of the extant MSS exhibits an arrangement which with any probability can be ascribed to Chaucer" (2: 489).
Riverside Chaucer, acknowledges on the title page that it is "Based on The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer Edited by F. N. Robinson," while in his work Robinson makes the refreshingly candid declaration: "The entire text has been made afresh by the editor" (xxxii), a reminder that the extant copies are also made afresh by someone who is not Chaucer, and that what we are dealing with, whichever text we use, is mediated at several levels.

F. N. Robinson also observes that "each century has its own Chaucer" (xviii). Brewer, while constructing a case for the nomenclature of "Gothic" for Chaucer's poetry, notes that Chaucer's "strange lack of tone was in the nineteenth century thought naïve, while in the twentieth century it has been taken as infinitely subtle [...]" (170). Peggy Knapp, armed with a knowledge of semiotics theory, explains that "words [...] derive authority from a social community and are therefore subject to change as it changes" ("Contest" 4). Manly and Rickert's extensive eight-volume collation, Text of the Canterbury Tales (1941) is a monument in terms of textual scholarship, while Peter Robinson's CD ROM compilation of The Wife of Bath's Prologue manuscripts shows the direction of twenty-first century erudition. Textual comparison is more accessible with the click of a mouse. Peter Robinson first analyses the limitations of the Manly and Rickert's project, and then goes on to extol the potential of the computer: "The advent of the computer [...] offers ways past the difficulties. Computers thrive on the sorting, organization, and presentation of just such vast collections of data as this"
(manual). Yet, the human ability to comprehend seems to be the final restraint, a very real one, rendering the *Canterbury Tales* an intrinsically elusive text, and this is the final boundary of even computer-enhanced study.

There is similarly no one original of the *Confessio Amantis* in which the *Tale of Fforent* is found, but approximately 50 extant copies. The *Fairfax* is considered the authoritative one (Peck vi). *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* has only one manuscript, the Rawlinson (1500), considered to be a copy of something composed perhaps fifty years earlier. Similarly, the Irish manuscripts, written in the fourteenth century, are copies of considerably earlier work. The Irish sovereignty hag’s goddess status suggests that she has been translated from pre-Christian orality into Christian literacy, but even the earliest dates suggested (circa eleventh century) place her after Ireland was converted to Christianity. Nonetheless, there remains a sense that she and her chosen Lughaidh or Niall exist in the half light where myth and legend are appropriated as history.

*Thomas of Erceldoune* exists in six versions, of which the Thornton MS (1430-40) is the oldest and perhaps the most accurate (Albrecht 9), but “None of these texts is the original, and none is derived from any of the others” (Albrecht 10). The original must have been written after the battle of Otterburn in 1388, since this is described, and the vaguely couched prophecies—for example, “the prediction that a bastard will rule all the land” (Albrecht 12)—allow for further speculation on dating. The shift of personal pronouns from first to third suggests that Thomas himself wrote the original, perhaps empowered by his gift of
carping, a gratuity for sexual favours. A real Thomas existed in Berwickshire in the thirteenth century” (Albrecht 7), who “(as contemporary records show) was born about 1210 or 1220 and who was probably dead by 1294” (Albrecht 16). Albrecht points out that, in light of the prophecies, this man could not have written the poem in its present form. Albrecht notes “numerous parallels” between Thomas and other early texts, finding that, even though no specific fairy-mistress story is an unquestionable source, there are “certain features in Thomas […] commonplace in stories of this type” (20). The fictionality of Thomas’s account is highlighted by its inclusion of elements which are common to other stories. However, the extra-textuality of a life led in thirteenth century Berwickshire, and of the political agenda of the poem’s prophecies, which have a Scottish sympathy in the wars between Scotland and England, sharpens the edge of mystery in Thomas of Erceldoune.

The curious status of the ballads makes available a metaphor for the mediation of unstable text. Henry B. Wheatley, in his introduction to Thomas Percy’s ballad collection, documents the “imitators and forgers who published, under the guise of ancient songs, mere figments of their own imaginations” (xlvi). Percy was subsequently criticised by Joseph Ritson for editing the ballads. Ritson regarded Percy’s emendations as “so many acts of fraud,” indeed, “forgery” (Gilfillan viii). Wheatley and Ritson thus indignantly question whose imagination might authentically produce figments; who was a genuine bard; and who, on the other hand, was an imposter who was just making something up. Does the song belong to any who choose to sing it? My point is
that to some extent we are all just making it up, and all also are transmitters of our cultural tradition, whatever our individual talent

A rose is a rose is a rose, but without Wordsworth's "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads" would his daffodils have enjoyed such a flutter? Actually I believe that they would, but stress that not only is it impossible to envision what might be missing from the *Canterbury Tales* and *Faerie Queene*, it is also impossible to think of them except in terms of the scholarship which has accumulated around them. Mrs Brown is heralded as the mediator of ballads, who bridges the gap between the elusively oral and the permanently printed. Critics and academics, as collectors, repositories and translators, together make up something like the body of Mrs. Brown.
Chapter Two

Denizens of Forest and Court: the Beastly Bride and her Hunter Hunted.

There is a centrifugal structure to the section of this thesis which deals with the medieval works. The previous chapter investigated, identified, and discussed themes, schematics, and didactic intention in the individual texts in order to establish the redactive backgrounds of the loathly lady motif. I now move to a more topical organisation. This chapter considers the beastliness of the loathly lady, and her groom as a hunter hunted by her,

beginning, however, with another level of background: the settings within the texts where the action takes place. As with the backgrounds of paintings, the locations of narratives add critical meaning to whatever, or whomever, they frame. Given the antithetical nature of the two main figures of the loathly lady tales, the oppositional locations of these tales are particularly relevant to characterisation.

I first met the loathly lady as she manifested herself as a dance of ladies at the edge of the forest in Chaucer's Wife of Bath's Tale. Her beastliness is the

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1 The drama of Actaeon and Diana is the paradigm for the hunter hunted; in very broad terms, the loathly lady belongs in the configuration of powerful women which includes the classical model: Diana, who is also known as Artemis, and Circe. Surveying the Diana myth and the fairy tradition, Lucy Allen Paton notes that “Throughout the middle ages she [Diana] is connected with streams and forests” (278-9). In this aspect, the loathly lady is an especially similar hunter of men. A difference is that Actaeon's metamorphosis is fatal, and masculine; yet the loathly lady shares with the goddess Diana the ability to effect change. Furthermore, Loomis declares that “the mysterious Loathly Damsel of Arthurian romance [...] can claim descent from the shape-shifting Demeter and Hecate” (Celtic Myth 296), which he expands to “Isis, Europa, Artemis, Rhea, Demeter, Hecate, Persephone, Diana; one might go on indefinitely” (Celtic Myth 301). I agree that the loathly lady is a humble relation of this set of goddesses.
physical mark which suggests that she belongs in the forest wilderness; her superhuman power also comes from nature. Yet the forest is also that uncharted space where societal stricture falters. The loathly lady reverses gender roles by taking on the sexual pursuit herself and feminising the male; the boundaries which she collapses so profitably are established in the settings of the tales.²

In many versions, although the loathly lady is introduced in an outdoor setting, she is intent upon getting herself within the court, particularly the bedchamber therein. As the narrative progresses, she brings the wilderness into the court. My chapter follows her progress, moving from the wild space to the court, the site which at first seems to belong to her groom. To state the obvious, the royal court is the heart of the nation, the centre of the body politic. When the groom is Gawain, the court is Arthurian, a national heart beating new blood into the body which rose up sure that it was great; in fact, finding itself to be the inchoate Great Britain.³ While predicated on the moral and religious ideas which underlie a sense of nationality, the courtly romance of the Arthurian

² I tend to conflate the forest with other outdoor spaces, such as the "grene mede" upon which the fairy queen used to dance, and, in the case of the Franklin's Tale, I have eyed the greener grass over the wall, within the artifice of the garden. These spaces do have distinct differences: the pastoral has a productivity, unlike forests, and the garden is the enclosed cultivation in which female sexuality is implicated, after the Song of Solomon. However, the countryside spaces have a similarity to each other when compared to the architectural interiors where these tales generally end. The parallel fairy world operates outdoors, or gains access to the mortal world through transitional natural spaces: the streams and rivers which are often mentioned in some of these tales, the shade under trees, and the edges of the forest. The outdoors contrast the house, the hall, and the court which are the centres of mortal society.

³ Much could be said about the Arthurian court, so this section is brief in an effort to avoid becoming lost in the mists of a Celtic twilight zone, or in a vortex of productivity: Helgerson's observation that "Texts, nations, individual authors, particular discursive communities—all are both produced and productive, productive of that by which they are produced" (13) is particularly apt in describing the efficacy of courtly romance literature. The loathly lady tales have an affective relationship with the societies in which they are produced, a similar agency in the courtly elements of the tales. A circular process is at work however; it is impossible to distinguish cause and effect.
legends codifies gender roles; thus there is a parallel of sorts with the loathly lady, whose origins are predicated upon nationality, but who challenges codified roles. The hag remains my central interest.

She is the hero of the medieval tales about her. Upon their meeting, the hag represents the wild and her groom the court. Although this might encourage anticipation that he will be the dominant one of the two, the situation is not that simple. Her unstable flesh is chaotic like the forest and wilderness, and often gigantic as evidence that she exceeds to any single venue. The court and all it represents is contrasted with the wilds and all they represent, and the hag herself embodies these two antithetical spaces. In the end she belongs to both worlds, being larger than both, and this immoderation and extravagance measures her superiority to her male partner.

The two lead figures of the tales--the beastly yet superhuman bride from the forest, and the courtly groom who finds himself a hunter hunted--initially represent the spaces under discussion in this chapter, and their marriage happily unites the principles which these spaces signify. The marriage, prompted by the hag, apparently effects her enclosure within the court. Yet by the time each of the medieval narratives reach the epiphany of sexual union (which is the topic of my third chapter), the hag's superiority over both wilderness and court is established. When the marriage unites both spaces, it is because both knight and bride become subsumed into one body, which, in contrast to the mores of patriarchy, is hers rather than his. Moving from the
wilderness to confront, entrap, and wed her man, the loathly lady achieves a union of opposites which defies traditional hierarchy. The celebratory conclusion is predicated upon her authority, his compliance. Although she then confers her power onto her chosen groom, he often seems a puppet patriarch, overpowered by his bride and all she signifies. So first, into the medieval forest, the locus which empowers the loathly lady as the narratives begin.

Forest

It is not coincidental that Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale* dramatically contrasts the court and the natural world: this dichotomy has a classically established discourse, as Harrison demonstrates in his book on forests.⁴ Chaucer would have been aware of literary precedents, such as Virgil's *Aeneid*, an example used by Harrison to show that "the governing institutions of the West [...] originally established themselves in opposition to the forests [...]" (ix). Moreover, opposition between forest and city has an essentialist logic: the city establishes order against the beauty and chaos of the wilderness. Perhaps this is an instance where Chaucer is not just following in the footsteps of "auctorite," but uses his own experience, the empirical method flaunted by the Wife as her

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⁴ Harrison declares that "It is not only in the modern imagination that forests cast their shadow of primeval antiquity; from the beginning they appeared to our ancestors as archaic, as antecedent to the human world. We gather from mythology that their vast and somber wilderness was there before, like a precondition or matrix of civilization, or that the forests were first" (1). Harrison's assessment, which he demonstrates with literary evidence, supports my feeling that the loathly lady emerges from the forest because her own mythology draws from a world which is primal. Harrison finds that forests are "everywhere in the fossil record of cultural memory" (x); the loathly lady, whose origins in antiquity are lost to us, is also something of a fossil lodged within cultural memory.
Prologue opens. The real forest has an impressive presence; perhaps Chaucer’s hag takes her magic and her menace from this actual world as much as from textual authority.

Chaucer’s redaction allows a glimpse of the forest side as alluringly magical, in line with other medieval texts in which wilderness space is the juncture between the mortal world and fairyland. The loathly lady is a denizen of this mystical natural world. Yet Harrison points out that the forest has its own structure, one which is often ironically a model for society (for example, “the genealogical tree” [6]), despite the fact that there exists “at the deepest level, the enduring hostility between the institutional order and the forests that lie at its boundaries” (8). Chaucer harnesses this hostility between forest and court to add energy to a tale whose contestation finally reconciles opposites. He makes play with the incompatibility of the two spaces.

One example of such play involves Chaucer’s use of an outdoors dance to signal that something abnormal is afoot. The forest is the place for the hunt

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5 Chaucer had experience as a forester, first as clerk of the kings works (appointed July 1389), then as deputy forester of the royal forest of North Pemberton (appointed June 1391) (Crowe and Leland xx-xxi).

6 Medieval representation of the wilderness affords a haunting psychological quality. In A Psychiatric Study of Myths and Fairy Tales, Julius E. Heuscher notes the psychological meaning of the forest motif as “a threshold toward another aspect of human existence” in which one enters “the confrontation with the forces from the unconscious” (301). Heuscher expresses in twentieth-century terms what seems evident in medieval text, although one is aware that the lexicon of exegesis has changed.

7 In the Franklin’s Tale, the dance at which Aurelius declares his love for Dorigen and sets their problematical interchange in motion is another instance of a fateful external dance, being set in a gardyn ful of leves and of flores;
And craft of mannes hand so curiously
Arrayed had this gardyn, trewely,
That neveere was ther gardyn of swich prys
and for adventure. The dance, however, is a metaphor for social interaction: for courtship, sexual congress, and even for life itself. When the dance is shifted from the halls, palaces, and city venues to the meadow or forest edge, the inherent opposition of dance and wilderness are pressed together like the earth's tectonic plates, producing eruptions through the collision. A travesty of spatial order produces a disturbance of social norms.

Before the hag appears at the forest side, manifesting herself as a dance of ladies, the Wife sets the scene with a rural dance. She conjures up a fairy queen who once danced upon "many a grene mede" (WBT 861), a nostalgic reminder of a fairy influence over natural space. Just as the Irish sovereignty hag takes her authority from the land of which she is a personification, so the fairy aspect of the loathly lady takes strength rather than weakness from outdoor space. Since this contrasts with medieval mortal women, who are typically narrated within domestic interiors, and are vulnerable to danger when they are found outdoors, her location in natural settings signals that the loathly lady is superhuman in some way or another.

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But if it were the verray paradys" (FranT 908-12). The garden, the artificial contrivance which uses nature as raw material, conveys different nuances from the forest and wild outdoor spaces; Eden is the original garden. Nonetheless, outdoor dances—the Franklin's and the Wife's—precipitate a fateful change of direction for the protagonists of their tales.

Weisl briefly notes the spatial significance of this outdoors dance, proposing that "by moving the outside inside, the friars have chased away those who lived in the natural world" (90), although she is more interested in the temporal comparison which the Wife sets up than the implications inherent in the interior and exterior spaces.

Perhaps the most striking example of the danger of the outdoors to medieval women is found in the narrative poem Sir Orfeo, where Dame Herodis is snatched away by the fairy king as she sleeps outdoors under a tree. Malory's "Knight in the Cart" episode shows Guinevere kidnapped while out on a May picnic.
However, this scene-setting at the outdoors location of the fairy world is not inert. As the Wife of Bath conjures up a dance in green meadows, she harnesses the fairy force-field to her own desire to leave the confines of domesticity in order to wander, to socialise, and to play. The Wife demonstrates one of her talents: the collapsing of boundaries in her own interest. Here she elevates her mortal propensity to get out of the proper sphere of the housewife by associating such escape with a bygone fairy world, in which the pleasures of dancing on the meadow are a manifestation of the power of the magical.

Once she has set the stage, she passes control of the guilty knight to "the queene and other ladyes mo" (WBT 894), who successfully petition for his life; in setting him the riddle, the ladies send the knight off on a quest with his life in hazard, so that his vulnerability enables the loathly lady to get him in her grasp. The two meet "under a forest syde" (WBT 990). The knight travels homeward, "In al this care" (WBT 990), presumably contemplating his imminent fate, when, by the side of the forest, he sees a dance of ladies, to which he is drawn "In hope that som wysdom sholde he leme" (WBT 994). Since he is looking for the answer to the riddle of what women most want, and this is a convenient group of women, the unlikelihood of seeking wisdom of a dance might be overlooked, although it should be noted that his inquiry would necessarily disrupt the dancing women: dispensing wisdom is an activity antithetical to dancing. The Wife of Bath's Tale is one in which Chaucer continually foregrounds flesh and form, and contrasts the physical with the linguistic, the cultural and the religious.
Chaucer allows his knight to wander at the forest side on his way back to the court of women and to chance upon the attractive energy of the dance, which repeats the fairy queen’s dance upon the meadow. Yet this dance prefigures the hag, and would seem to be her chosen representation of herself. In light of the hag’s transformation at the end of the tale, this dance is to be seen as a more bizarre performance of femininity: a road-side attraction designed to ensnare the knight. It works. It may be chance on the knight’s part, but the hag seeks to encounter him with the skill of the hunter who knows her prey’s predilection. The Wife reinscribes the Actaeon myth, conspicuously according women the more powerful agency in the hunting grounds of her tale.

Then, before the knight “cam fully there” (WBT 995), the dance vanishes, “he nyste where” (WBT 996). Baffled, he is swept into what the outdoors dance means throughout the tale: the disruption of stable social order while feminine fairy power controls. Poetic justice aptly punishes the knight’s crime of rape by his subjection to the wild dance of the hag’s device. She now has him in hand. Arguably the knight does learn “som wysdom” from the dance (since this dance proves to be the hag), but through a lengthier and more painful process than he anticipates. He will not be able to pluck the answer he seeks from the dance of ladies which is the hag, as he previously seized a maidenhead; instead of appropriating the feminine “wysdom” he needs to save his life, he is to be assimilated into the loathly lady’s alternative method of teaching, an empirical one remarkably like the Wife’s, as expressed in her Prologue.
He must go the long way round the woods to gain his wisdom, and the hag tells him this in somewhat enigmatic words, rising towards him and declaring “Sire knyght, heer forth ne lith no wey” (WBT 1001). Seemingly she has attracted him to herself by a dance of ladies. Now she advises him that there is no way through the forest against which the dance was briefly superimposed. Her meaning is laden with dramatic irony which will become apparent as the tale unfolds. His lesson about discerning trees from woods begins at the side of the forest. He will graduate through his submission in the marriage bed within the court, humiliation in that social sphere being part of his education.

The place of the hag and the knight’s meeting, the forest side, is, then, a significant site for his entrapment. Harrison locates in the forest the very uncertainties—”enigmas and paradoxes”—which are essential to the loathly lady, and to none more so than Chaucer’s. Harrison’s Forests confirms that the loathly lady is an appropriate denizen of the wild:

If forests appear in our religions as places of profanity, they also appear as sacred. If they have typically been considered places of lawlessness, they have also provided havens for those who took up the cause of justice and fought the law’s corruption. If they evoke associations of danger and abandon in our minds, they also evoke scenes of enchantment. In other words [...] the forest appears as a place where the logic of distinction goes astray. Or where our subjective categories are
confounded. Or where perceptions become promiscuous with one another, disclosing latent dimensions of time and consciousness. (x)\textsuperscript{10}

In these terms, Chaucer’s loathly lady is at one with the forest at whose side she is first found, since all of these enigmas and paradoxes exist in her person. She is sacred through her sovereignty goddess connection, profane in her sexual aggression, fearsome and enchanting, one who breaks rules and yet upholds their ethics at some deeper level. Confounding subjective categories is what she is best at; this can be said of all the medieval ladies who are both loathly and lovely. The \textit{Canterbury Tales} is perhaps the canonical text in which it is most evident that perceptions become promiscuous with one another, to usurp Harrison’s language. Chaucer’s hag is part of this play. If, as she emerges from the Wife of Bath and merges with her, she suggests rather than discloses latent dimensions of time and consciousness, she is nonetheless one of her author’s figures whose excesses push these latent dimensions to their limit.

In contrast to the Wife’s knight who must be taught a lesson, Gower’s Florent is a truly worthy knight. Nonetheless, he similarly meets his hag under a tree in a forest: “[In a forest under a tre / He syh wher sat a creature [...]” (l. 1528-9). Despite other differences between their redactions, differences which push the moral of the tales in quite opposite directions, both Gower and Chaucer

\textsuperscript{10} Haskell, considering Chaucer’s use of gardens and “wild woods,” proposes that “the ideal garden [is] the locus for man and woman in their first age, their prime, but the woods, by contrast, represents wisdom and age, extending to the end of life, the natural end of age, which is death. [...] [I]t also represents the death of the ideal, the prime, the first age” (198). This reading of the forest as a place of lost innocence is apt to its site as the hag’s terrain, although her overthrow of ideals enables a new model of heterosexual accord based on female sovereignty.
include the forest meeting as an essential ingredient of the tale. The magic of
the forest is fundamental to the loathly lady.

Peck distinguishes Florent’s bride from Chaucer’s as one who dallies
longer in the forest. He points out that, “Unlike the Wife of Bath’s hag, who trails
her prey right into Arthur’s court in order to trap him, Gower’s loathly woman
remains in the woods” (47). Peck goes beyond championing Gower as poet to
find that Florent’s bride is of higher moral judgement than Chaucer’s hag. He
itemises her superiority: “She tells Florent outright what the price of the
information will be—marriage” (47). She rejects his cash offer. She relies upon
Florent’s “trouthe” to bring him back to her (instead of pressing her case in
court), knowing that “Truth is the foundation of a free estate (which is what she
seeks), not land” (47). Overall, Peck is right; the good Florent gets a less
devious partner than the rapist knight. (I want to turn the equation around,
though, to applaud the deviant female wit which outsmarts the fleshly deviant
knight of Chaucer’s tale.) Florent’s hag ends up in the court like the other loathly
ladies, and she waits trustingly in the forest for just one episode further than the
wily and less trusting hag of Chaucer’s tale. I am not sure that the forest is in fact
a source of truth in the terms in which Gower espouses truth. However, Peck

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11 Peck misreads Chaucer at this point, declaring that “The Wife of Bath’s surrogate hag would
have been sorely tempted by such offers” as Florent’s ones of “lands, rents and parks” (1978 47),
presuming that the Wife’s hag will be as interested in material possessions as the Wife. However,
he overlooks the fact that the Wife’s knight pleads “Taak al my good and lat my body go” (WBT
1061), and is met with a negative response. Chaucer’s hag is no more tempted by material goods
than Gower’s, a fact which I attribute to their over-riding interest in the bodies of their knights, the
aspect I examine more closely in Chapter Four.
identifies (without fully articulating) the dynamic of “the woods” which I am explicating here.

Gower’s specific locus “under a tree” provides a link to Thomas of Erceldoune, a tale in which the tree, that single unit of which the forest is comprised, is a liminal space where the magical action commences.12 “By Huntley banks” (28), so by a river, on a spring morning Thomas lies “Alone in longing” (33). “Underneath a seemly tree” (34) is interposed between Thomas lying, and his first sight of the lady, creating ambiguity.13 One might read: “Alone in longing as I lay, / Underneath a seemly tree, / [And ] Saw I where a lady gay [...]” (35), making the tree the place where Thomas lies. Equally available, if a little less likely at this point, is the reading that Thomas saw the lady riding over a lea under the seemly tree, that is, the tree is located by the lady and not by Thomas. The ambiguity lifts what might be merely formulaic into greater significance as a doubled mirage.

The ambiguity is insistently repeated: once the lady has been described for her splendour of clothing and accessories, “Thomas lay and saw that sight / Underneath a seemly tree” (73-4). If at this stage Thomas seems to be the one lying, in the appropriate posture of a dream vision narrator, under the tree, the confusion is nonetheless compounded. Thomas reverently refers to “the childe

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12 Low devotes a chapter to trees in her study of early Irish traditions, noting that “trees had a particular association with sacral kingship” (81); that “Some of the sacred trees of Ireland were believed to have counterparts in the Otherworld” (94) and she notes the association of trees with Christian ideology.

13 The ballad version “Thomas of Erszeldoune” (Child 37), follows the same pattern of a “semely tree,” and the “Eldoune tree.”
that died for me," casting the shadow of that other tree, the cross, onto his tale, as he vows to run fast and meet the lady "at the Elden tree" (79). Albrecht footnotes this named tree as one that "stood on one of the Eildon hills, near Melrose" (96), suggesting a prodigious tree, one which would be known by the name of its location. Yet either Thomas begins by lying under one tree and then runs to another, the Elden tree, to meet the lady, or else the tree is the same one, perhaps part of the dreamscape.

The poem ambiguously offers a two-tree setting a little more readily. If Thomas sees his lady when she is under a seemly tree, the seemly tree which is the Elden, and runs to meet her there, the linguistic tease makes that tree more of an emblem, for although she rides "over a faire long leye" (36), she does not, in fact, move from the beneath the tree. The seemly Elden tree becomes her emblem, a tree which belongs to her as fairy queen as much as the cross of Christ would be an emblem for her were she the Virgin Mary. These two readings--either that Thomas and the lady have one tree each, or that the lady is riding under her tree but never away from it--both make monuments of the trees, an emphasis underscored by the ambiguity. The Eldon tree is the distinctive icon of the fairy queen, and her entrance point into the mortal world, or at least, into Thomas's consciousness. His passive, dreaming position of lying, perhaps under another tree, enables him to be receptive to her

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14 Ovid's tree people, for example, Daphne fleeing Apollo, exploits the awareness that trees have a presence like people, and yet really are not at all like people, particularly in their unavailability for sex. Spenser later imaginatively develops the motif of the tree/person. See Chapter Four.
presence. The tree-or-trees ambiguity functions like a conduit, allowing and emphasising the meeting between two separate species.

Trees continue to be important to Thomas when he must restrain himself from eating the fruit from "a faire arbour, / Where fruit was growing great plenty, / Pears and apples, ripe they were, / The date and the damase, the figs, and the wineberry" (177-181). Apples are included in a short list of fruits, but along with dates, which bring an international flavour to this impossible garden, so that there is not as great an emphasis on the Fall as if the description were of apples alone. Yet the Edenic apple is ripe in this poem: Thomas and his lady, who is not the mother of Christ, but is mistaken for her, meet under a tree; the fairy queen compares Thomas's eagerness for sex to that of a "bird in bough" (126); his form of obedience to her involves not eating fruit which has a chthonic taint; and Thomas is returned "again to eldem tree, / Underneath the green wood spray" (297-8). The image of the tree brings to Thomas a wide range of literary and cultural associations, including the Christian myth from Fall to crucifixion. The poem is supported by the structure of the tree; the enigma of the parallel fairy world is held firm by all the symbolism that the tree is able to sustain.

If the generic tree has metaphorical potential, this may be narrowed down when particular kinds of tree are specified. We have just met with a list of

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15 Again I quote Harrison: "Human beings have by no means exploited the forest only materially; they have also plundered its trees in order to forge their fundamental etymologies, symbols, analogies, structures of thought, emblems of identity, concepts of continuity, and notions of system. From the family tree to the tree of knowledge, from the tree of life to the tree of memory, forests have provided an indispensable resource of symbolization in the cultural evolution of humankind [...]" (7-8). The far-reaching role of the tree in Thomas of Erceldoune demonstrates Harrison's analysis of what trees mean.
fruit trees in *Thomas*, whose inclusion of dates makes the list of forbidden fruits seem medieval by putting together trees which would not flourish in the same climate.\(^{16}\) Whereas the *Wedding* introduces the hag in Inglewood forest, the ballad version “The Marriage of Sir Gawain” has the lady first met when she is sitting “Betweene an oke and a green hollen” (Child 294-5). The holly and the oak represent winter and summer, maintaining the link to seasonality inherent in these tales. In a dictionary which is flagrantly subjective, Ad de Vries notes that the oak is “sacred to the Great Goddess to Cybele, Rhea and Artemis”; that the Oak king is killed at Midsummer(347); that holly is “related to the Celtic Green Knight; he is the Holly-Knight, following (at the Midsummer’s ‘New Year’) the Oak-Knight (Gawain), who was to reign from the Midwinter New Year” (254). According to these entries, these two trees incorporate Gawain, seasonality and the great goddess, so are highly appropriate to the landscape in which the hag belongs.\(^{17}\)

Like Chaucer’s version, *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* also has its male protagonist meet the loathly lady in the forest, specifically Inglewood forest, but he, having filled “a boke great” (208) with possible answers to the riddle, goes there “to seke a litelle more” (214) when he has but a month left. Comparison with Chaucer’s placement of a chance meeting when

\(^{16}\) In this non-realistic orchard, I am reminded of other medieval texts, for example, the “Squire of Low Degree,” with its inclusive itineraries.

\(^{17}\) This is the edge of a forest where I do not belong: the legends which seem to be relics of goddess religions, as reclaimed by Robert Graves, and again by John Matthews, who identifies Gawain as the “knight of the goddess.” It is not my intention to penetrate such dark groves in this thesis.
the knight is returning home highlights the incongruity for King Arthur to head to Inglewood forest in search of the answer to “whate wemen love best in feld and town” [my italics] (91), and to read an early hint in the Wedding that the forest, as an especially wild part of “feld,” and a direct contrast to “town,” holds an alternative wisdom.

It would seem that the parallel fairy world gains access to the mortal world through transitional natural spaces: the streams and rivers which cut through the landscape, the edge of the forest, and under trees, where the trunk plunges roots under the earth, and the shadow from overhead branches makes a circle of dappled shadow, as though mapping out the hidden root system below. The tree accesses eternal salvation in the Christian context of the cross; it is also a gateway for the fairy world. Through this limen the loathly lady first enters her tales, to appear under a tree, or waiting at the edge of the forest.

If magic is one of the aspects of the loathly lady which emerges with her from the forest, beastliness is another: the fleshly grotesque which humans regretfully find they have in common with animals. What is beastly about the hag enters the court to become a travesty as a beastly bride; the court is the locus in apposition to the forest and outdoor spaces. In many of the tales the court is Arthurian, which places the loathly lady within this narrative framework, that is, at the heart of a royal court which is also the heart of English national identity.

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18 The fairy intrusion into mortal company may be good or bad; Launfal’s lady Triamour is superlatively convenient a companion, whereas Sir Orfeo shows the bad graphically, when Herodis is abducted by the fairy king and taken to a kind of living death.
The Court

The court is less ubiquitous than the forest in the loathly lady tales. In the poem “Lughaidh Mal,” and in the ballad “King Henry,” the hag does not meet her man in an outdoor location, but comes in out of the wilderness to approach the men indoors. The men have been hunting, so have penetrated the wild space prior to meeting her, but she is not explicitly connected to the forest. In “Lughaidh Mal,” the brothers, having chased, slaughtered and shared their father’s magic fawn, are in the house--“within at the fire”--when “A hag approached.” Seemingly she has let herself in, in accordance with a narrative pattern which is consistent throughout the tales: she emerges from the wilderness to negotiate herself into human shelter, more usually the court than the house. The general movement is that she comes from the forest or wild space to the civilised space of the court, and thence into the intimate domain of the bedroom.

She directs this progress. Indeed, “King Henry” conveys the sense of a forceful entry when, as Henry is in his hall, “in it came a griesly ghost, / Steed stappin i the fleer” (Child 298). It is as though “King Henry” and the “Lughaidh

19 Previously I began my section on forests by acknowledging a conflation of forest with other outdoor spaces. Here, although I introduce the topic with versions which do not include the court per se (although King Henry’s hall might be regarded as part of the court), I want to move quickly to the many versions which do specify a court, because these provide the greatest contrast between outdoor and indoor space.

20 Kelly Quinn pointed out to me that the tradition of using the house as a metaphor for the body is relevant here (p. e. 2000). The Ancrene Wisse’s eroticising of Christ as the lover places the soul as the lady trapped in an earthen castle; Shakespeare’s Rape of Lucrece picks the trope up, and here too the hag’s penetration of male buildings, like Grendel’s of Heorot, is a kind of rape.
Mal” place the meeting of protagonists at a later point in the narrative (than Chaucer’s and Gower’s, for example), a point when the hag has gotten herself out of the wilds and into the comfort which the house represents, with its fire and the bed. In both these tales, the men’s earlier hunt establishes the wilderness at the edge of the narrative. Instead of luring the male to her in the forest so that she might use them to get access to the court, the hag steps in herself in “King Henry” and “Lughaidh Mal.”

In “Lughaidh Laidhe,” the sons of Daire seek shelter from “a great snow” and find the hag in a “large house with a great fire therein” (77). The house is marked by its luxury, as an oasis of comfort against the snow outside, yet the hag is first mentioned as though she were not the owner of what proves to be a mirage, but some wild animal who is there: “and there was a large hideous hag in the house” (77). She is added to the other items there, such as “food and drink in abundance” as the one detraction. Since the house has vanished by morning, we might conclude that, like Chaucer’s forest-side dance of ladies, it is a manifestation of the hag, a conjured pose in her performance, designed to attract the man of her choice. Her introduction as another thing inside the house does not suggest such agency. This redaction is in keeping with the principle that she is never what she appears to be, but always has a greater potential for benefit.

“King Henry” and the Corca Laidhe set show the hag forcing a meeting with the male protagonist within the interiors of mortal dwellings; although they
imply a court through the fact that the man is, or will be, a king, they do not invoke the court. The Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid’s return to the court adds to its sophistication to make it closer to Chaucer than the Corca Laidhe tales. In the Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid, the well where Niall meets his hag is found by chance once the brothers have gone “far astray, every side being closed against them” (197); hunting to try out new weapons leads them into a particularly dense forest. The enclosure of the forest against the sons of Eochaid emulates the moment when Chaucer’s hag advises her knight that “heer forth lith no wey” (WBT 1001); the forest resists the young men’s penetration, directing them towards the trial which it has for them. Resistant forests are another similarity, then, between Chaucer’s and Niall’s loathly lady tales.

Niall’s forest well exists according to narrative logic, counterbalancing the earlier well of his jealous stepmother, where he was born, and narrowly saved from death. The motif of the well and water displaces the forest setting, or shifts emphasis as it works in conjunction with the forest locus. The hag dispenses water, wisdom, and sovereignty; her water is the source of life, the syncretist symbol of Christian grace. Niall follows the hag’s advice to trade the water with his brothers for “every boon that he asked of them”; “he thus binds them by oath never to oppose himself or his children” (201). They return to Tara, the named court of Eochaid, where Niall demonstrates his now unchallenged dominance over his generation.
First, the boys raise their weapons and Niall raises his "the breadth of a hero's hand" above those of his stepbrothers (203). Niall is "among them in the midst" (203) when they sit; he is neither elevated, nor separated through his inferior status as illegitimate son. However, his main method of signaling that the hierarchy has changed is by narration; when Eochaid asks "tidings of them," it is Niall who "made answer and related the adventure" (302). At the end of his account Mongfind, his jealous stepmother, asks why Brian, her senior son, is not the one who tells the tale. Her sons explain "We granted our seniority and our kingship to Niall for the first time in lieu of the water" (203). Sithcenn, the blacksmith wizard who tested the boys earlier in his forge, recognises that the exchange is permanent. His prophetic declaration concerning Niall that "henceforth he and his children will always have the domination and kingship of Erin" (203) is made in the court, and seemingly takes legitimacy from the court. The Irish court thus endorses the decision made in the forest by the well, where the hag transforms Niall into a king as she transforms herself into fair form. The change is then taken to the heart of the nation, the king's court, and acknowledged there; Mongfind is no longer in dominance over Niall, who has peacefully displaced her sons from their heritage.

The Wife of Bath's Tale specifies that the tale is set in the days of King Arthur, that specifically British king, although the Wife does not go on to name the protagonists or give them befitting characters.21 This is in keeping with her

21 Weisl declares that the Wife of Bath's Tale is "an essentially court-based one," since all within it speak the "language of courtly romance" (91). Granting this, the court within the poem is no ordinary one, being insistently feminised.
own subjective reconstruction of “th' olde dayes of Kyng Arthour” \(\text{WBT}~857\).

The Wife does not valorise the knights of the round table. Instead, she shifts the gender of the court which is the loathly lady’s wedding location; the Wife’s court begins as masculine and quickly becomes feminine.

In the first instance, the male lead is a young knight who belongs to Arthur: “And so bifel that this kyng Arthour / Hadde in his hous a lusty bachelet” \(\text{WBT}~882-3\). Below I note the Wife’s cynicism towards the chivalric code in her initiation of the narrative through a knight who rapes a maiden; additionally, this rapist is not just a knight, but one of Arthur’s knights. Her specificity challenges the golden era of nationalism which Arthurian legend represents. Chaucer precedes Malory, yet his redaction is conspicuously more sophisticated in licensing a female perspective. Malory’s knights are often bunglers of the adventure which God gives them, but their misadventures are still related with respectful regret. In contrast, the Wife presents the house of Arthur as unquestionably the source of sexual aggression. Arthur’s unnamed knight is errant and erring; his “opressioun” \(\text{WBT}~889\) is towards the innocent and the feminine. The Wife’s viewpoint undercuts the heroism of Arthurian adventure. It is as though she sees that maidens are grist for the mill in the chivalric scheme, objects to be either rescued or raped. Her response is to rewrite the script, making this objectification of young women overt, while deflating knightly ideals, and allowing the hag to dictate the errant knight’s re-educative programme.

The reaction to the rape is “swich clamour and swich pursute unto the kyng Arthour” \(\text{WBT}~889-90\) that the knight is condemned to death through
“cours of law” (WBT 892). King Arthur is the ultimate adjudicator, pressed by the people to punish his own; we might be reminded that the knights provide an elite military system of justice in the king’s service. However, the last we see of Arthur is when he concedes jurisdiction over the knight to the queen, who has prayed for his “grace” in this matter for “so longe,” along with “other ladies mo” (894-5). The sense of a full court surrounding the king and queen is thus achieved only by the inclusion of these ladies, who beg for control of the knight with a persistence which seems to match the earlier clamour for his punishment.\textsuperscript{22} Although Arthur is named and Guinevere is not, and although his household looses the “lustye bachelere” into the countrysyde, it is women who people the Arthurian court interior. The Wife briskly usurps the male prerogative of justice and redistributes it to the women of the court.

The feminisation of Arthur’s court, and of justice, is compounded when the knight returns either to answer the riddle correctly or submit his neck-bone to iron. “When they be comen to the court” (WBT 1023) to judge the knight’s response, “they” would seem to be made up entirely of women: “Ful many a noble wyf, and many a mayde, and many a wydwe” (WBT 1026-7) assemble. Each section of the estate of womanhood is present, although not just a full coverage of social possibilities, but something like the triple-moon deity is suggested in the life-or-death power over the young knight which the women of

\textsuperscript{22} The clamour is not given an agent; we do not have any way of knowing which stratum of society demanded that the knight be punished for his crime against a maiden. Since it is “clamour” and “pursute unto the kyng Arthour” (889-90), I have a sense that the protest comes from people with access to the king, and hence from within his own court. However, this is conjectural; there could just as plausibly been a crowd at the king’s gates intended, and finally, a lack of agent suggests that Chaucer does not intend us to be distracted by the protest.
three life-stages communally hold. The sense that Chaucer's original is related to the Celtic pagan goddess tales is reinforced in this detail of the three stages of womanhood.

The head to this feminine body politic is the queen, “hirself sitting as a justise” (WBT 1028). It is evident that when Arthur relinquishes the matter to his queen, his surrender is complete, and she is authorised to take over the king's power as ultimate judge. Not only does the Wife undermine the codes of chivalry to which Malory later defers, but she reconstructs the Arthurian court as ruled by the queen and her ladies. In contrast, Malory's Guinevere is isolated from feminine company. Her masculine companions resent her as a breaker of male bonds, as a single representation of the dangerous sexuality of the female species. The Wife appositely places Guinevere in the seat of judgment, surrounded by a court of curious women, who “Assembled ben, his answere for to heere” (WBT 1029). This feminine jury will help her to decide the knight's fate.

The bedding of Chaucer's loathly lady does not restore the world of the court to a patriarchy, despite the fact that she offers her groom ultimate jurisdiction over her person, declaring somewhat excessively, “Dooth with my lyf and deth right as yow lest” (WBT 1248). Her concession of will is a problematic moment for a feminist reader, yet the Wife's tale ends in a narrow world peopled by two, who share “parfit joye” (WBT 1258); her offer is made in the context of

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23 Malory never hands over judicial power to Guinevere. He maintains a feudal currency of gifts and favours, in which Guinevere is often influential, but she is more usually a victim of justice in Malory's accounts, perhaps most conspicuously in the "Poisoned Apple" episode, in which Arthur as judge cannot protect his queen, and she is rescued by Launcelot after a fire to burn her has been lit by the members of her court.
consensual sex. The Arthurian world does not intrude again in this redaction. The sense remains that if it did, it would be made up of women: maids, wives and widows.

In contrast, the *Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* brings closure within the fold of a patriarchal world, one established as masculine from the first sentence’s imperative to listen to “the lif of a lord riche” (1). The opening disguises the fact that the hero is Gawain by introducing Arthur and his hunt; the hunt’s convincing drama suggests that Arthur is to be central. We are given spatial detail. The king is “at his trestille-tree” (19), a forest tree used by hunters as a base from which they might hunt down the forest denizens. From this arboreal depot, the king “stoupid lowe / To stalk unto that dere” (32-3), coming “fulle nere” (34), and following “fulle faste” (45). The forest is seemingly controlled by the huntsman. When a “quaint grome” (50), Sir Gromer Somer Jour, challenges Arthur with the charge that Arthur has usurped Sir Gromer’s land, legal details of a masculine world of property encourage the sense that this wilderness is mapped, staked out by enterprise and exploitation. The magic of this poem is predicated upon a hard-nosed concern for ownership; the wilderness made over into something like real estate, or territory as a natural resource, with dominant males competing to control it.

After his unfortunate tangle with Sir Gromer, the King returns to Carlisle with his lords, the men who surround him from the beginning of the poem: “alle his bold knightes good” (17). These men perform the same task which the Wife
gives over to the ladies; they people the background, establishing the
civilisation which supports the protagonists and their adventure. When “many of
his knightes mervelid” (136) at the King's heavy mood, their concern reflects the
unity of the group. The women of the court are a chorus who weep together for
two lines approximately two thirds of the way into the poem, once Gaynor
(Guinevere) has responded to Ragnell as beastly bride with one word: “Alas”
(542). In this instance Gaynor seems quicker at assessment than the men, since
“bothe king and knight” immediately follow her summations with a second
echoing “Alas” (545). The court ladies are summoned by Ragnell, however the
background community is overwhelmingly masculine, in contrast to the Wife's
feminine court.

Amongst the general concern of the court regarding Arthur's gloom, it is
Gawain who broaches the topic of the King's despair with him. Arthur
immediately tells the reason, albeit with the caveat that he is commanded to
keep his council on the matter, a secrecy to which Gawain immediately
promises allegiance. Yet the confidence which Arthur so instantly puts in
Gawain, in breach of his promise to Sir Gromer to “kepe all thing in close” (111),
shows the same looseness of tongue which the Wife ascribes to women, whom
she declares to be incapable of “secree” (WBT 946). The Wife, using the first
person plural pronoun, declares of women, that “we kan no conseil hyde” (WBT
980). The Wedding's court is masculine, yet it shows a tight community, in which
the intimate language of shared secrets, as well as concern, links the men.
Arthur blabs his secret to Gawain with an indiscretion which is arguably
feminine—the Wife of Bath might argue that it is—and instead of any censure of poetic justice as he breaks his word, he gets help with his problem.

Gawain's loyalty to Arthur motivates the action from this point, at which the masculine court's nurture of Arthur is conspicuous, particularly in contrast with Sir Gromer's bullying. The very oath between Sir Gromer and Arthur signals that the two men are living by different ethical codes. When Arthur makes the bargain with Sir Gromer, he offers to swear with his hand, "lo, here in my hand" (88); Sir Gromer rejects the fleshly seal of oath with a counter-command "thou shalt swear upon my sword" (90). Sir Gromer's sharp steel over-rides Arthur's soft hand as a more masculine oath-maker. Back in his own court, however, Arthur is able to confide, and to get help from friendly hands in a masculine community.

Nonetheless, Gawain's allegiance to Arthur, and his willingness to put his sexuality in the service of Arthur, makes an emblematic moment in the chivalric romance genre. Gawain declares three times that he will wed Ragnell—"I shalle wed her and wed her again [...] / Her shalle I wed [...]" (343-6)—since "or elles" he would not be a friend to his honourable king. He sees it as his duty to marry "the foulist lady" to save his king, because otherwise he would be "false and a great coward" (352). He recognises that, more importantly than his own inclination, his worship of the king through a disadvantageous marriage is the better option before him: it "is the bet" (353). Thus he expresses the bonds which tie the Arthurian court together, a homosociality to which the heterosexual imperative of love is subordinated, indeed, made almost irrelevant. Gawain's
evaluation of the situation is telling. The relationship of love to combat, and to masculine loyalty, in the adventure of romance, is a balance; what is weighed up repeatedly is, on one side, the futuristic potential of the maiden, the lady to be won, whose fertility promises another generation of chivalric episodes, and on the other, the masculine competition which structures the patriarchal society of which families are units. This balance coincides with the battle of the sexes, as the worth of male/male allegiance rivals male/female loyalty; patriarchal round-table loyalties exclude women from the scheme which the ideal of knightly service to women promises. Arguably courtly romance seeks to balance these counter-weighted loyalties, to stabilise by equalising. Yet feminist critics may feel that the balance leaves women short-changed. There is something perverse, and perverted, about a marriage entered on account of homosocial allegiance. The bride becomes a female proxy. Her flesh will receive sexual service in a performance which translates the homosocial service of love across genders.

The Wedding explicates the problem, exploiting the narrative tension between masculinity and femininity of space, human performance, and flesh. The functional male bonds in Arthur's court weave, in a somewhat womanly way, the masculine social fabric which Ragnell intends to hack into and stitch up to her own purposes. She is well aware of her challenge to the court, demanding, once her riddle solution has saved Arthur's life, that Gawain be brought to her "Before the knightes" (526), and "Before alle thy chivalry" (529). Particularly in the latter demand there is a sneer (reminiscent of the Green
Knight's challenge to the round table) accompanying simple insistence on legal procedures which will guarantee security. Her declaration that she will "now be made sekir" (527) shows her awareness of contractual legality, but her demand for not just knights as witness, but all of Arthur's chivalry, implies that she is taking on the chivalric system with an alternative one of her own, and is determined that all will witness her success.

Ragnell insists on a highly public wedding. She refuses to marry at all, "But there were made a crye in all the shire" (558); she demands full publicity. This proclamation is addressed to the women who are absent while the story sets out: "Alle of the ladies nowe of the lond, / She let cry to com to hand" (560-1). Ragnell summons the women into the tale; they come, and they "pitey," with a chorus repeat of "Alas." Gaynor pleads for the wedding to be conducted "As privaly as we may" (571), intent on supporting Gawain by minimising his shame, but Ragnell insists that "This daye" (585) is hers, and that she will be wed "In middis of alle the route" (580). When Ragnell calls in the women, they support the values of the court, and Gawain: all the chivalry which she is monstrously challenging.

From there on, the court is returned to "all men" (612; 615): the "meny men" (622) who make up a court which lacks nothing able to "be gotten withe mannis hond" (626). It is men rather than pitying women who watch the feasting bride's bestiality before the tale sweeps into the bedroom and the physical confrontation between the newlyweds. When Ragnell is restored to beauty, she blames the necromancy of her stepmother--Ragnell seems consistently at odds
with the women in her society—although stepmotherly ill-will fails to account for her own boldness in not only entrapping the husband she needs for her release from the spell, but humiliating all the chivalry of Arthur. She gets herself into the masculine court by out-witting the men, and enforces a full display of her triumph.

I have stated that the *Wedding* explicates the conflict in the chivalric tradition between male bonding and heterosexual courtship. The poem resolves the conflict in the favour of women: Gawain begins with a greater instinct for homosocial responsibility, but is won over by Ragnell, to privilege her above his allegiance to the Arthurian court. When the door is undone the morning after the wedding so that Arthur might see how Gawain has fared, the transformed Ragnell is successfully ensconced within a court which is also integrated: it is the king who comes to check of Gawain “howe welle that he hathe sped” (729), but the queen who declares when all is well “I thank God” (753). Gawain and Arthur tell the court their stories, Ragnell tells hers, and, when genuine public vows between the nuptial couple override the earlier parody, it is the queen and “the ladies alle” (793) who judge Ragnell the fairest in the land. I enlarge upon this happy ending in my chapter on sexual imperative, and note there that the bride is integrated into the men’s world of property, while Gawain is converted from allegiance to king and comrade to allegiance to his wife and sexual companion. The loathly lady’s triumph integrates society through the union of forest and court.
Thus, the Wife of Bath tells of a feminine Arthurian court, the **Wedding** of a masculine one in which the feminine is integrated as Ragnell challenges and overpowers all of Arthur's chivalry. In **Thomas of Erceldoune** the court is a fairy one, in contrast to a rural mortal world, and with a focus on futurity: the battles about which Thomas prophesies. This fairy court is seen through the promiscuity of its queen, whose somewhat careless response to Thomas's desire for casual sex with her allows for a wayside consummation. We are not told whether her consent is reluctant, as her initial protest suggests it might be, or whether, as she eyed Thomas, she found him to be to her liking and actively reciprocated his desire. A range of options are available within this lacuna, although since she is mounted on a palfrey and Thomas is on foot, his rape of her does not seem to be one of them. We are told, in one version only, that her terrifying shape-change during congress was a strategy to hide her infidelity from her husband, the fairy king.24

The fairy queen is the ambassador of her court--indeed, of her level of reality--in the world of mortals. As such, she reinforces the belief that women

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24 In Lansdowne 672, approx 1530 (Albrecht 9), The following section appears:

Thomas said [...]/
I pray you that ye wyl me say,
lady yf thy wyl be,
why ye war so blake and graye?
ye said it was be cause of me.'
"For sothe [...] / I shal the tell;
Me had been as good to goo,
To the bryning fyre of hell;
My lorde is so fers and fell,
that is the king of this contre,
And fulle sone he wolde haue ye smell,
of the defaute I did with the.' (237-252. Albrecht 98).
The explanation is obscure, implying that (but not explicating how) a change of appearance means eluding the tell-tale smell of recent sex which an attentive partner might detect.
taking their leisure alone in the country-side are prone to promiscuity, while also
suggesting that the fairy court is an equitable one where men and women share
rights to wander in every sense of the word. Two factors are at work: gendered
behaviour, and behaviour as emissary, and it is difficult to ascribe her actions
definitively to either. However, she can be contrasted with the rapist knight
conjured up by the Wife as evidence of the arrant errantry available to courtiers
alone in the landscape. Thomas’s lady is no rapist; she does not breach the
borders of consent. She is, however, married. Her coitus is thus a breach of faith
towards her own king and court rather than to her casual partner. The
implication is that her court is a more lax or a more benign one in terms of
tolerance towards such a breach, as well as less predatory towards way-side
strangers. In allowing its queen the opportunity to hunt alone, as Arthur does
when the *Wedding* begins, the fairy court seems to apply equal opportunity
rights.\(^{25}\) The fairy court licenses female freedom to a greater extent than the Wife
in her feminisation of the Arthurian court.

The court itself is set as an alternative space to the heaven and hell of
Christianity; indeed, *Thomas* provides the helpful, spatially literalised model of
the fairy world position in the medieval Christian schema. When Thomas lies his
head on the fairy queen’s knee, being “full glad” (199) to please her, this contact
enables him to see the pathways to four strata of eternal habitation for souls,
ranging from “the joyes of paradise” (208), to “the burn[n]g fire of hel” (216).

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\(^{25}\) By comparison, when Guinevere is kidnapped by Meliagaunt while she is out maying, she is
accompanied by sixty knights, which makes it a much more ponderous jaunt than that of the fairy
queen out with just her hounds.
Against these paths, which inherently offer moral options, as "ways," stands "yonder faire castle" (217), which the fairy queen, the extra-terrestrial tour guide, explains, "is mine own, / And the kings of this country" (221-2). Again equality is suggested by her first gesture towards the fairy court: she owns the court with the king. The contact of Thomas's head on her knee as she shows him the way affirms his inappropriate intimacy during this guided tour of optional eternities.

The queen's sense of responsibility returns once she sees the fair cojointured castle. She articulates her realisation that her sexual dalliance with Thomas is a capital problem in her own court: "Me were lever be hanged and drawn, / Then he wist that you lay by me" (223-4). She remembers that her lord is "served at every messe / With thirty bold Barons and threen" (229-30), summoning up the threat that such a staunch inner core of guards might pose to an adulterous queen. In keeping with the threat from the Arthurian court which Guinevere had on this account, the fairy court’s seeming equity may well have the same kind of limitations as the mortal Arthurian one. Yet the solution lies in simply keeping mum; committing Thomas to silence and assuring him that she "shal say nothing" (231) is the end of the dilemma. She approaches her court restored to her former beauty, and revitalised: now "so gay" (234), "faire and good" (235), with her hunting dogs--greyhounds and rachets--fed on deer's blood. The lift of mood, and the coupling of the words "good" and faire," suggest

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26 Protection provided for women in royal households is two-edged; their chastity is sometimes guarded in a way which might seem like imprisonment. The Erle of Toulous has a loving, yet tyrannical husband, whose wife is watched closely, so that she must be sly in her communications with any man other than him.
that, despite the Christian ethics implied by the ways to heaven and hell, when “good” is applied to the fairy queen it means only beautiful again. Arguably this equation of beauty and goodness, particularly in women, underlies much of our culture; indeed, it is this assumption which the loathly lady subverts by shifting shape. Later we see Spenser doing something similar with Duessa; her credibility relies on her fairness. But in Thomas, with her silenced lover, the discreetly adulterous fairy queen rides home “fresh on her palfrey” (236). She blows her horn “with main and mood” (251), a clarion call which celebrates how simply language might be controlled, and with it, men.

Effective performative speech is another mark of the loathly lady. The fairy queen’s control of language, her silencing of Thomas and then her gift to him of skill at carping, makes this poem perhaps the most emphatic regarding a general emphasis which runs through the tales: the beastly bride dominates her knight because she has dominance over the spoken word. She has superior control of the medium of language in all the tales. The knight comes from the court, and is supported by the civilisation which the court, a manifestation of the successful control of discourse, represents. The loathly lady bears the humiliation of grotesque flesh as the sign of her wilderness origin; she is risible according to that non-linguistic semiotic system of evaluating female flesh in terms of beauty. Although the forest holds its own magic, it is not the place

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27 WeisI notes of the Wife of Bath’s Tale that “The female voice becomes that of justice, grace, wisdom and authority” (100-101), however, she declares that, in the pillow sermon, the loathly lady “must ‘speak like a man’ in order to stop him [the knight] thinking ‘like a man’” (101). I do not fully agree with her reading of the pillow sermon, although her identification of the way that speech is awarded to women in the Wife’s tale is accurate.
where language has power. It thus runs counter to the logic of place that the
hag should be the protagonist who knows the answer to the riddle, who entraps
through ambiguous language, and who can preach the sermon which may not
be denied. The allocation of language competency is one of the inversions in
this set of tales. If speech ought to belong to the court rather than the
wilderness, by extension into the gendered terms of these loci, it ought to
belong to the masculine rather than the feminine. Yet the forest from which the
hag emerges is one thick with contradictions; her skill at insinuation is linguistic
as well as spatial.

It might be more accurate to identify her rhetoric as a symptom of
knowledge and power than to suggest that her authority comes from her
language-competency in some versions. The Irish sovereignty hag performs a
ritualistic naming of the sons of Daire as she foretells their future; although she
controls the discourse, this is the result of her supernatural insight as to what
will happen. On the other hand, Chaucer’s articulation of the hag seems part of
his larger experimentation with feminine subjectivity in the Canterbury Tales--
the Wife is a prime but by no means the sole example--in playful apposition to
the misogynist viewpoint that women are transgressively loquacious. The
Merchant’s Tale’s Proserpyne, who swears, in January’s pleasure garden, that
she will give “alle wommen after” the enterprising May “suffisant answere”
(MerT 2266-7), overtly promises sufficiency in the language of defence to us
still. She articulates Chaucer’s outfitting of women in the armour of language.
Whereas the sovereignty hag’s control of language is a symptom of her
goddess status, with the Wife’s hag, the causality works the other way: her control is predicated upon the “suffisant answere” which is the legacy of women. Whether Chaucer intends that his regular ascription of rhetoric to women contain an element of ridicule or reproach is difficult to tell. His allusion to misogynist authors shows that he was well aware of this discourse; whatever the rules of his disport be, he plays in the context of these writers. His import of the loathly lady brings to the tales one of that most infuriating species: women who have all the answers.

The Beastly Bride: Talons, Tusks and Bad Table Manners.

I began this chapter by proposing that the outdoors locus where the loathly lady is first met is significant because she steps from it as representative of the “enigmas and paradoxes” of the forest, that space where “the logic of distinction goes astray,” as Harrison demonstrates (x). Nowhere is the antithetical nature of the hag more apparent than in the beastliness which she manifests as bride, a beastliness--not simply human weaknesses as her old age and low social class are--which also emerges from the forest, accompanying her fey wilderness power. If nature mandates her pagan quasi-deity status, elevating her above her merely human groom, it also grounds that authority in flesh which is degradingly sub-human. She is one of the literary figures who is at once engagingly magic and repulsively base.

\[29\] An analogy between the pagan goddess as beastly bride, and Christ as the Son of God who deigned to lower himself into the mortal flesh of a clean womb might be made.
A recurring motif in folk-stories is the character who is part beast: the satyr, the were-wolf, the lamia, the bird woman, the mermaid, the prince who was once a frog. Most of these are beasts who want sex, love or marriage with human partners. Mistrust of the beastliness of humanity, as well as of the beastliness of sex, motivates these motifs, rather than positive desire for alignment with the natural world. The shape-changing lady’s loathliness manifests human depravity, the abomination of the flesh, while simultaneously incorporating repulsion towards female sexuality.

Representations of the loathly lady do not involve the introspection which gazes into the heart of darkness at the core of a masculine world of enterprise.

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29 Under the rubric of studying the “popular elements of the Wife of Bath’s Tale, Joseph Warren Beach focuses his 1907 Harvard thesis on the loathly lady’s relationship to beast-human hybrids. Unpublished, Beach is nonetheless one of the early detectives who charted some of the connections between the loathly lady and other tales; he considers only her beastly aspect in his field work.

30 Despite the new age fantasy that we might learn to dance with wolves, the nearest most of us get is the fox trot, which accentuates the clumsiness of our courtship rituals. While the fox trot aspires to elegance, it is often a trial by discomfort, the discomfort of the attempt to force flesh to conform with social formula. The supper waltz and the last dance are even more disconcerting. My point is that, within the loathly lady, there is a conflation of what these dances represent, and that although folkloric use of beast-people interrogates what is unattractive about beasts (so not their speed, grace, and beauty, but their talons, claws, and sliminess), it is in the context that humans are animals too. The reptilian-inhabited bars of Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas confirm, with their drug-enhanced literalisation, that beasts continue to dwell within the human race, their scales and claws visible to the out-of-it outsider. People who are beasts (and other people who recognise them) are still part of our world.

31 Ross declares that “Duality is then at the basis of all Celtic thought; everything had, for them, a double meaning; many of their artistic forms are meant to be seen in two different ways” (146), a proposal which makes the sovereignty hag a most suitable goddess. Albrecht includes the loathly lady (Chaucer’s, and the sovereignty hag) amongst shape-changers whose “transformation has been traced to stories of an animal visiting a human lover, to totemism, to menstrual and lying-in taboos, even to the changing seasons,” and observes that “Perhaps these ladies and their two-sidedness have persisted because, more often than not, human experience is two-sided” (8). Eric D. Brown offers a Jungian interpretation of the loathly lady as “the mother archetype,” a meld of the “terrible or bad mother” and “the so-called good mother and/or the anima figure” (202). To these observations I would add that gender-repulsion is significant, and that masculine experience of woman as beastly is also evident in the construction of sexualised shape-changers.
Gender is important here; the beast within male subjectivity is a different threat from the beast within woman, the abject object. Both the humour and the terror which the loathly lady solicits, and from which she is constructed, function as a response to woman as Other.

The crux of these narratives is that this Other must be embraced, and pleased, as a testing of the hero which turns him towards reward. The role that beauty plays in the definition of the feminine is a backdrop to the loathly lady's beastliness. What is animal-like about her is an extreme of unloveliness, an actualisation of the metaphors by which we conceive of ugliness. The re-formed body of the shape-changer is superlatively beautiful (although usually not described with much detail); yet the beast who also inhabits her incarnates a femininity which is active, strong, independent, and which desires, violates, and controls.\(^{32}\) As a beast, the loathly lady fails to perform femininity by normative standards.

Teleologically her failure is laudable as well as ridiculous. Naomi Wolf maps the way in which the beauty myth is internalised by young women to their severe disadvantage; while her work has a histrionic tone, it also has a core truth. Wolf declares that “Young women believe [...] that they may not have sex, food and flesh in any abundance” (165). She rages at the real damage inflicted

\(^{32}\) Considering “beauty as a socially constructed normative standard, which supports a discourse of feminine oppression and male dominance,” Karen Callaghan finds that “Women are expected to beautiful, but because it is a potential threat, the feminine must first be neutralized (made passive, weak and dependent) and then reformed (violated, desired, controlled) to reify the masculine order” (ix). The loathly lady deconstructs this “normative standard.”
upon the female body as a result of cultural prescription.\textsuperscript{33} The loathly lady enjoys sex, food and flesh in abundance with a beastly enthusiasm; the medieval narratives endorse her right to such excess.

Wolf fumes that “Since the fourteenth century male culture has silenced women by taking them beautifully apart [...]. Culture stereotypes women to fit the myth by flattening the feminine into beauty-without-intelligence or intelligence without beauty; women are allowed a mind or a body but not both” (43). Such oversimplification is defensible when ground is being broken in important ways. However, this thesis browses amongst medieval texts which disprove Wolf’s strident generalisation. The loathly lady motif is relevant to both displaced male anxiety and internalised female anxiety towards female physicality. Overcoming his mistrust of feminine flesh is the test of the hero. By implication, such acceptance is the moral point which the hag’s transformation endorses. The tales finally demonstrate that all this anxiety is unnecessary.\textsuperscript{34} Her beastliness,

\textsuperscript{33} Susan Bordo, finding the body to be a locus of social control, recognises that the popular feminist critique of female sexuality, beauty and femininity awards authority and authorship back to women. Bordo goes on to cite Andrea Dworkin’s declaration that “Standards of beauty describe in precise terms the relationship that an individual will have with her own body. They prescribe her motility, spontaneity, posture, gait, the uses to which she can put her body. They define precisely the dimensions of her physical freedom” (183-4). Bordo is critical of the pressures towards “normalisation.” In an evaluation of student journals, Catherine G. Valentine finds that “mediated image and standards of female bodily perfection, which fuse the surface of women’s bodies with women’s deepest feelings of self-worth, are a primary means of societal control of women” (121). While her work is arguably anecdotal, Valentine’s empiricism endorses what she calls “earlier feminist concerns” (122), that is, those concerns which Wolf expresses so dramatically.

\textsuperscript{34} The tales seem to make play with traditional use of the female body as a site of fleshly weakness. Ben Lowe performs a hasty summary of classical and medieval constructs of “the politics of beauty,” and finds that “This commodification of women’s bodies, based on distrust and the assumption that women were in dire need of control because of their greater bent for sinning, formed another basis for the soul/body dualism that dominates the early Christian era” (23). The slippage of the destabilised female body snatches something positive from such dualism.
the feral quality which is a metaphor for the savagery of humanity, and a sign of grotesque fleshliness is imprinted in her flesh; this is both menacing and funny, yet it is to be embedded within the royal court in a satisfactory union of opposites.

In most of the tales, the beastliness of the bride is something of a joke. The beast adds natural energy to the loathly lady’s wisdom, but more importantly may be baited to humour the crowd, whose laughter endorses her fertile capacity to survive and transmute, according to Bakhtinian analysis of the heartless-sounding (and bestial-sounding) guffaw. Mikhail Bakhtin argues for a positive, socially cohesive function of coarse laughter at the scatological, at the different, and at the pain and humiliation of some one else. To his thesis I would add that the laughter of others is a powerful deterrent; a kind of testing; a strong definer of identity; and the last laugh is one closure which endorses competitive acumen. Since the comic source here is a site of contestation about gender power politics, laughter releases a tension inherent in the battle of the sexes. The beastly bride insists on an audience to her wedding party in order to better enjoy the discomfort of her groom in the face of laughter at his bride: herself. She savours this laughter because she knows that the final pleasure will be hers. All that her beastliness stands for is funny when packaged as the most inappropriate bride. Marriage to the Other is an assimilation into what one fears and loathes, a psychological dilemma which folklore exploits.

As beastly bride, the loathly lady is a relative of the lamia, the serpentine seductress who also has two forms, and is difficult to scotch, being a snake who
inevitably becomes a wife and mother. Both the loathly lady and the lamia are narrative figures inherently to be married; a dissimilarity between them is the outcome of the marriage. With lamia, marriage is not a triumphant solution, since typically the marriage dissolves once the husband presumes to become too familiar by breaking some prohibition: not to look, not to follow, not to pry. Once identified by her spouse, the lamia slides away for ever, abandoning her human children—a sign of her reptilian coldness—as well as her inquisitive, and now regretful, spouse.

Another similarity between lamia and loathly ladies is that their myth-making resists the Christian myths of conversion. The Garden of Eden myth also exploits fascination and repulsion towards snakes. Furthermore, the rod of Moses which turns into a serpent to witness on God's behalf makes a measuring stick which shows that the feminisation and sexualisation of the snake is especially threatening as a challenge to Christianity. Lamia subsume the phallic sign of the patriarch within the feminine, and slither off with it. Lamia tales endorse suspicion of woman as Other; her unwitting husband is left to mind the children and repent his folly. He is, indeed, feminised by the lamia. In contrast, the loathly lady is beastly, but engaging with her on her own terms results in bliss. Although she challenges Christian myth as an alternative feminine power, unlike the lamia, she redeems her creatureliness.

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36 Albrecht locates the shape-changing ladies in a Cupid and Psyche paradigm and relates them to the lamia Melusina (38), as Beach has briefly done before him. This thesis does not continue beyond Spenser to the Romantics, whose championship of the ballad form, of the miraculous and of the natural, made their work a perfect habitation for the lamia to reappear, as she does briefly in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Christabel, and in John Keats's Lamia.
This redemption of both the feminine and the beastly adumbrates twentieth-century awareness that gender power politics have something to do with the health of the planet and its creatures. Ynestra King, speaking in defence of ecofeminism, notes that "a central reason for woman's oppression is her association with the despised nature [...]. The hatred of women and the hatred of nature are intimately connected and mutually reinforcing" (118). To find in the medieval loathly lady an emblem of successful ecofeminism is a teleological, and overly earnest reading. Nonetheless, in marked contrast with most other canonical representations of women, this motif conflates the bestial and the feminine, and then insists that they be given sovereignty as the route to establishing the true ruler, to wealth and to bliss. The loathly lady's beastly and feminine flesh makes available the reading of her as an ecofeminist adumbration.  

Chaucer is conspicuous by absence in a discussion of the beastly: he does not give any space to description of the hag. She is just an unfortunate

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36 Martin picks up the link between Chaucer's and the Irish sovereignty hags when she terms the "olde wif" at the forest's edge, "the Wise Woman of the Forest" (Chaucer's Women 62). Considering genre, she finds that while the Wife of Bath's Tale is "critical of romance, it is still closer to that genre with its quests, enchanted forests, magical transformations, with its hospitality to the eccentric, the wayward, the magical, the marvellous. The answer comes from the forest and it comes from a woman" (Chaucer's Women 64). Her observation that the solution to the riddle is found in both forest and woman points to an ecofeminist reading without quite stating it in those terms. Knapp discusses the "profound ambivalence towards nature [which] pervades medieval Christian thought" ("Nature" 59), observing that "women represent nature in medieval narrative" ("Nature" 60). Knapp uses Sir Gawain and the Green Knight to trace the "delicate paradox of man's dependence upon and transcendence of nature and women, who represent and press nature's claims" ("Nature" 70); a similar, yet even more explicit mapping might be performed with the Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell. The development, recognition, and championship campaigning of ecofeminism in the twentieth century is a satisfying moment on a vector with the early Christian alignment of the natural with the feminine. For a recent consideration of ecofeminism, see Mary Mellor, Feminism and Ecology.
human: "a fouler wight ther may no man devyse" (WBT 999), and one who readily admits that she is "foul and oold and poore" (WBT 1063), and, later, she includes "filthe" in her self-description (WBT 1215). There are no tusks or talons to Chaucer's hag. Similarly, instead of soliciting humour at her appetite, Chaucer excises the nuptials, declaring abruptly that there was "ne feeste at al" (WBT 1078). This denial extends to textual restraint; no feast of language piles on description of the hag's monstrosity. Her humanisation sidesteps an opportunity for amusement, and simultaneously strengthens the speaking tone of the Wife as author, endorsing her presumed subjectivity. It is psychologically realistic that the middle-aged, wide-hipped Wife does not wish to dwell on details of beastliness, or greed, nor to entertain the mainly male pilgrims at the expense of the feminine grotesque, despite her candour about sexual "thynges." The Wife's authenticity is compellingly articulated in what she does not say about the hag.

Gower too does not portray the loathly lady in animalistic terms, so is not dealt with here. However, he does give a fifteen-line description of ugly old age, which makes Florent's Tale seem more like the Wedding of Sir Gawain, which follows some hundred years after Chaucer and Gower. There are similarities and conspicuous dissimilarities between the Wedding and Florent's Tale. Gower says that the hag has "yhen smale and depe set" and cheeks which "be with teres wet" (l 1679-80), which suggests the rheum of the elderly, with a

37 Fradenburg also notes that Chaucer's hag "is not subjected to the villainous iconography [...] that characterizes unfortunates like Dame Ragnell," but is a "compromise figure" with a "common body, a worn body" (52). This suggests that she is like the Wife, rather than beastly.
similarity to the *Wedding's* charge of "blerid eyen." But where Gower gives her small deep-set eyes, the *Wedding's* hag's eyes are "gretter then a balle." Gower declares "Hire Necke is schort," while the *Wedding* refers to "Her neck long and therto great" (that is, something snaky), so that Gower's description is scaled down, and more conceivably human than the later *Wedding's*, as though, if the source were the same, the hag becomes demonised, and expanded in size, over time. Gower does make the racist ascription of "Sche loketh forth as doth a More" (l 1686), with its challenge to conjure up what he might mean by this; perhaps a defiantly direct return of gaze is the intention; "Loketh forth" certainly seems to indicate attitude. Florent's bride is large, "hire body gret and nothing smal" (l 1689), and formless, "lich unto the wollesak" (l 1693), so is something like the Sovereignty hag, although less amoebic. Nonetheless, there are not talons or tusks in either Chaucer or Gower. Chaucer has virtually no description, and Gower portrays the "lothlieste" (l 1676) "vecke" (l 1675), with "no grace in the visage" (l 1684) and "no lith without a lak" (l 1691), but nonetheless human, despite the extremes of misproportion and old age.

Conversely, Thomas of Erceldoune's lady changes to something almost alien, with piebald legs as the nearest thing to beastliness. Her elaborately described clothing vanishes--"All her clothing then was away" (133)--and instead she has "One leg black, the other grey, / And al her body like to lead" (135-6). The leaden body, and empty eye sockets conjured by "Her eyes seemed out" (132), is almost robot-like, a kind of horror which is neither a
human shortfall nor exactly beastly. Piebald legs do not constitute beastliness when they are leaden rather than furry, but something outlandish.

The poem "Lughaidh Mal" is perhaps the earliest extant text to conjure up the loathly lady in terms other than human—something otherworldly and unnatural is portrayed rather than something beastly. The dimensions of the loathsome sovereignty hag are terrifying: "High she was as any mast, / Larger than a sleeping booth her ear" (73). Her front tooth is not a tusk, but has a human shape to it, being larger than a square of a chess-board. Gower’s hag is shapeless "like a wollesak," but the sovereignty hag is nakedly formless, like a huge amoeba, "one continuous belly, without ribs, without separation" (73). By the end of the ballad it is clear that her huge prehuman amorphousness is the form of the land whose sovereignty she is, with direction towards reading her as a landslide, rather than a vast slug, given in the words "rugged", "hilly" and "furzy mountain" found at the pinnacle of the blazon: "A rugged, hilly, thick, black head / Was upon her like a furzy mountain" (73). The challenge of bedding this woman is the risk of being buried alive, and the reaction to the hag’s demand that one of the seven sons of King Daire lie with her (under threat of her transformation of the whole house to monsters) seems to be fear of death rather

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Bitel follows the evidence of early Irish legal documentation to conclude that medieval Irish women shared in many instances the same status as domestic animals. She notes, "We cannot take the analogy any further than Irish legal theorists themselves did. Women should be ‘feared like beasts,’ according to Tecosca Cormaic, another wisdom from the eighth century, because they were ‘capricious beasts’. Yet the medicolegal literature showed that women were human, if defectively so. Women were only like animals; they were not actually beasts" (24). Bitel reports that "the text [The Instructions of King Cormack Mac Airt] also calls women ‘waves,’ ‘fire,’ ‘weapons,’ ‘leeches,’ ‘serpents’ and ‘darkness’" (241). This list seems to deteriorate: being a wave, or fire, might be seen positively, and weapons are at least effective, but the end of the list is pejorative, particularly in suggesting serpents.
than just repulsion. When Lughaidh Laidhe volunteers, he reasons, with the selflessness of a true hero, that it would be better that he of all of them should be "lost." It is significant that he uses the metaphor for death which is based upon misdirection in a unknown, perhaps hostile, landscape. Amongst the description of a hag so large and shapeless as to be barely recognisable as human, there is the superfluous, so ironic, insertion: "in a woman it was unbecoming." Genuine menace is conjured despite the irony, which has the same grimness that flavours Old English battle humour. The prose version, "Lughaidh Laidhe and the Other Sons," even more minimalistically than Chaucer's version, describes the hag in two words (as huge and hideous), a sketch which suggests that the author wishes to hurry away from the feminine personification of the land, and move back to the male protagonists, the sons competing for rule. Although Lughaidhe's Irish sovereignty hag is evidently not to be mistaken for a mortal woman, she is not so much bestial as mountainous, in accordance with her personification role.

Niall, the other hero who contends with personified sovereignty, has something less frightening and more repulsive to come to terms with. His hag is "black as coal," but has a "gray bristly mane that came through the upper part of her head-crown" "Like the tail of a wild horse" (197), so that her hair is feral and equestrian. Yet her hair is her crowning glory; this hag is especially repellent because she is unhealthy. She is "fibrous, spotted with pustules, diseased"; with "green teeth that lay in her head and reached to her ears"; "dark smoky eyes";
her “shins distorted and awry” (197). If disease is her greatest drawback, she is has shortfalls in proportion, according to the requirement that women be small and dainty: “her ankles were thick, her shoulderblades were broad, her knees were big” (197). Like her teeth, her nails are green. She is not large, nor is kissing her a threat to life; she is simply offputtingly unwholesome.

Similarly, the description of the loathly lady in The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell takes relish in hyperbolic horridness, which serves to emphasise Gawain’s undaunted virility in his willingness to bed such a bride. Huge size is diminished to unfeminine bulkiness, and instead of a terror of landslide proportions and fiendish horror, the details in the Wedding emphasise fleshliness through the mucous that snots up the hag’s nose, and by the bleariness of her eyes and redness of face. Even more than Gower’s hag, she appears like an especially ugly woman at a beauty pageant (given that the formulaic “fairest in the land” description of female protagonists suggests that the Romance genre itself is a beauty contest). As such her incongruous form is laughable.

Her face was red, her nose snotid withalle,
Her mouthe wide, her teeth yallowe overe alle,
With blerid eyen gretter then a balle;
Her mouthe was not to lak;
Her teethe hing overe her lippes;
Her cheekis side as wemens hipses;
A lute she bare upon her back.
Her neck long and therto great;
Her here cloterid on an hepe;
In the sholders she was a yard brode;
Hanging pappis to be an hors lode;
And like a barelle she was made [...] (231-242)
Not predominantly the indignities of old age, but an extreme of misproportion, is embellished with snot, clotted hair, yellow teeth, and flesh which hangs from a large frame. In particular, she is burdened with hanging breasts as a mark of her gender, breasts whose "lode" suggests a fertile fullness rather than the collapse of elderly tissue. Bleariness and snot suggest that the forest is her home, in that she lacks the facilities to be clean. Nonetheless, Ragnell rides a gay palfrey, "With gold beset and many a precious stone" (247). The marks of civilisation and courtliness signal that there is more to this caricature than meets the eye, and highlight the incongruity of her grotesque form. In the denouement scene we find that Dame Ragnell is no wild woman, but her appearance when Arthur meets her in Ingleswood forest signals her danger and independence, as well as caricaturing her femininity in a bit of burlesque. Of all the loathly ladies, the description of the Wedding's Ragnell makes her the closest to the wild woman.

Despite the claim that no tongue might adequately rehearse Ragnell's foulness--"And to reherse the foulnesse of that lady, / Ther is no tung may telle, securly; / Of lothinesse y-nough she had" (243-5)--the story-teller's tongue

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30 Annis Pratt investigates the literary phenomena of the wild woman, noting that "she is 'surpassingly ugly,'" with gross pendant breasts which may be slung over the shoulders. Before passing on to wild women in other folk legends of Germany and Serbia, Pratt declares that "in this medieval archetype we can detect elements of [...] a wild woman who shifts from old to young, hag to beauty, as Artemis alternates with Hecate" (285). The independence from men, accompanied by an active sexuality which involves the casual seduction of straying men, awards the wild women an advantageously reversed role, especially when considered against the romances in which women are placed under mortal threat from the families and societies in which they live. The loathly lady bears some affinity to these wild women.

40 Cf. Jean Addison Roberts for observations about the role that the wilderness, wild men, and wild women, play as a contrast, complement, and threat in Shakespearean text.
continues eagerly, and follows up this anti-blazon with an account of the loathly lady's demeanour. Just as Florent's tale's placement of the description of the hag at the moment when Florent must marry her heightens sympathy for his predicament, at the Wedding's ceremony there is a continuation of the focus on bestiality. Whereas her teeth in the first description were yellow, and overhung her lips, by the time Gawain must marry her, "She had two teethe on every side / As boris tuskes" (548-9) and these are "of lengthe a large handfulle" (550). Furthermore, her dental excess is asymmetrical: "The one tusk went up and the other doun" (551). The beastliness inscribed by "boris tuskes" is emphasised by the declaration that "So foulle a sow saw nevere mann (596): Ragnell is not only like a pig, but is foul amongst sows.

Her table manners are also "fulle foulle and not curteis" (602); "she ete as moche as six," with an effective carnivorous methodology which is offputting: "Her nailles were long inchis three; / Therwithe she breke her mete ungoodly" (605-8). A physical isolation of this bad behaviour foregrounds its social unacceptability: "Therfore she ete alone" (609). Ragnell has defiantly insisted that she will "be weddid alle openly" (575), a seemingly pig-headed response to the queen's request for an early morning (and therefore private) wedding. Now that she has her public wedding feast her guests isolate her, drawing back from her bestial greed. Full nineteen lines are given to her behaviour at the table, where "she ete tille mete was donen" (619). Amongst others, Dale Spender has noted that dainty and selfless eating is a signal of femininity; not only do women allow men the privilege of speech at a dinner date, they also surrender the best
food, and eat less than men while nonetheless listening attentively and sympathetically. In the animal world, as well as in our own, getting the most and best food is the prerogative of dominance, and eating patterns form a semiotics about social ranking in which female concession to male prevalence is a norm. Ragnell ripping into enough food for six with her three inch long talons breaks the codified rules as emphatically as she transgresses the conventions of beauty.\footnote{Chaucer's Prioress is, in contrast, one example of a woman "At mete wel ytaught" (GP 127). The Prioress is remembered as an example of well performed femininity for her fastidious care in avoiding morsels falling from her lips, drops on her breast, or grease rings in her drink (GP 127-136). Diane Bornstein itemises medieval prescription for feminine behavioural codes.}

In boarish form, and using claws and tusks for voracious eating, Ragnell presents and performs an extreme opposite of the traditional courtly appearance and behaviour of women. She invites laughter as the beastly bride, laughter which takes on a more subdued tone in the context of her later shape-shifting. She forces her audience's response to shift with her own shape: once she has been transformed, her marvellous beauty, with the spectacular fall of golden red hair, demands that she be taken seriously. It transpires that as bride, Ragnell plays a serious role in a three fold way: she breaks the spell which binds her body in beastly form, solving her own immediate problem; she transforms Gawain, who is bespelled by bliss, winning him away from the boy's world of jousts to the domestic sphere; and she is a peace-weaver who resolves masculine conflicts, here a competition for land ownership between her brother and Arthur.
Ragnell has been transformed into a beast by the necromancy of a step-
mother, although this explanation leaves a few loose ends uncomfortably
flapping, given that her family appear to work as a team to entrap Sir Gawain,
and that her brother’s grievance over land seizure lies behind the comedy.
Behind a tale of wonder and sexual adventure is the palimpsest of political
conflict of interest. If we accept the wicked step-mother’s spell as the cause of
change (as we need not necessarily, since some degree of suspicion surrounds
the family background), then Ragnell’s voracity of consumption could be seen
as an animal appetite, part of the monstrosity over which Ragnell has no control.
Yet her cunning in her entrapment of Gawain, and her insistence on being
“weddid alle openly,” show that she does have agency, a human intelligence
operating the show she puts on as beast. She may not have been responsible
for her degeneration, but seems to enter into the role with gusto, as though she
had a personal desire to test her hero, to have fun at his expense, and perhaps
to make the most of a bad thing by going the whole hog.

The tusks of this well-equipped carnivore threaten Gawain as groom
(refiguring the goring of Adonis, when he forsakes the sexual attentions of
Venus in order to hunt), as bride and beast become one in Dame Ragnell.
Although courtship is oft-times troped in terms of battle or hunt, the courtly
guests are disturbed at being spectators to this sport: the capture of the knight
by the rapacious brute and would-be lover. “All men” mutter together in alarm
and “Bad the deville her bonis gnawe”(l. 617), a futile curse when the creature
is in front of them eating up every bit of meat she can wrap her claws around,
and no devil scavenger seems interested in so challenging a target. The energy of the boar needs a high protein intake, and as the narrator drifts off to commend the standard of provisions in Arthur's court, the brutish feeding of Dame Ragnell is spotlighted by her contrast within the artifice of a well-provisioned palace. The poet points out that at Arthur's table there was "no wont" of that which "mighte be gotten withe mannis hond," "both of tame and wild" and in both forest and field (624-7). The tusked Ragnell could almost be part of the food on the banquet table instead of greedily partaking of courtly provision; instead, Ragnell's voracity challenges Arthur's court in just the same way that the Green Knight does when he proposes the Christmas head-chopping game; in both cases, other-worldly excess shrivels the Round Table courage, gentillesses, and largesse, and the knights are left muttering or in silence, reduced to being juniors in a rough playground. Expectation that Ragnell's sexual appetite will be as frenzied as her table manners renders her groom live meat, who may not survive the onslaught of so much energetic eating. The tusks and talons which aid Ragnell at table menace Gawain, and are beastly markers of an even more rampant virility than his own.

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42 A comparison between Ragnell and the Green Knight as testers of Gawain might be done at length (to my knowledge no one has done this as a feminist exercise), and would highlight the relationship between the Green Knight and his sexually active lady, who, in her temptation of Gawain, works as agent, with conspicuous lack of success compared to Ragnell. The homoerotic component which Dinshaw identifies in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is dampened down to the loyalty Gawain feels to Arthur, so that he will marry anything to save his king and comrade, a displacement at a greater remove than the kisses between the Green Knight and Gawain.

43 Rooney judicates that the "boar is second favourite" after the hart, as the quarry of Middle English literary hunts (3), and observes that the boar-hunt "was notoriously dangerous" (5). The proposition of a challenge from the boar was an established test of manliness amongst hunting nobility.
Once Gawain has settled into a blissful marriage with Ragnell—"as a coward he lay by her bothe day and night" (808)—she is authorially killed off so that he may be freed from lots of cowardly sex for more masculinist adventures. Since Gawain is the lusty knight, his recommendation that, "In alle his life he lovid none so welle" (806), ranks Dame Ragnell highly. The fair young wife is especially captivating after her turn in another form, an adventure which she makes the most of in her ostentatious performance as repulsive bride. Gawain's inability to leave the bedroom suggests that her appetite may have survived the transformation, and that her sensibility has been affected by her experience. The wife who once lurked in the forest as a beast, and who insisted upon flaunting her beastly manners before a retreating court, is better able to bewitch Gawain than the women who remain trapped within the tower of the romance genre.

The ballad version, "The Marriage of Sir Gawain," departs from the Wedding of Sir Gawain in that the lady is not beast-like, but merely misshapen, with her facial features in the wrong place:

Then there as shold haue stood her mouth
Then there was sett her eye;
The other was in her forhead fast,
The way that she might see. (Child 294)

Something akin to a cyclops is suggested, although an eye in the place of the mouth is unusual (to my knowledge unprecedented). Her strangeness is underscored by the lack of a name for Gawain's lady in the ballad version,

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44 Cf. John Mandeville, Giraldus Cambrensis et al. for odd reports, but not an eye in the place of a mouth.
although the home team—knights Lancelott, Steven, Kay, Banier, Bore, Garrett, and Tristeram—are named to reject her. Sir Kay is typically the one who rudely puts his doubts into words, as Gawain is typical in his willingness to embrace the monstrous Other. Nonetheless, the feasting of the lady, which extends Ragnell’s bestiality to performance as well as appearance in the Wedding, is absent.

Amongst the ballads, “King Henry” is most similar to the Wedding in terms of the lady’s greed, and similarly demonstrates that although there is laughter at the expense of beastly table manners, the voracious glutton is to be given her way ungrudgingly. The first stanza of “King Henry” promisingly advises that a man should not go wooing who lacks a routh (an abundance) of gold, charity and an open heart. The second verse sends Henry off on a jolly hunt seven miles from town. The hag who “steed stappin i the floor” seems more like a dark horror from the underworld than a beast: she is a “griesly ghost” who most looks like “the fiend that wons in hell” (Child 298-9). She is typically out-sized: “her head hat the reef-tree o the house.” Henry’s hag sports a nose “like club or mell,” something akin to the elephant’s trunk. Yet it is her behaviour rather than her appearance which is most obviously beastly. She is an embodiment of carnivorous greed; the poem picks up a boisterous cheeriness as she persists in her demand for “mair meat, mair meat” (Child 299). The repetition is compelling, as she eats up all of Henry’s animals, skin and bone, leaving only hide and hair. The roll of repeats and runs of predictable word
c couplings somehow assures that the ending will be happy or at least good fun. The shadow of threat that sweeps into “Lughaidhe Mal” with the vast formless hag does not menace King Henry to the same extent. The link between the hag and the land is less apparent in this ballad than in the Corca Laidhe texts. Yet there is some similarity in the initial hunt, the entrance of the vast hag, and the royalty of the protagonist. Henry’s generosity as a response to the lady’s excessive appetite awards him a lovely bride who will last until the day he dies, and although we are not told that he gets the kingdom along with it, his royalty at the onset of the ballad aligns it with the sovereignty material.

In the ballad “Kemp Owyne,” the motif of a stepmother’s curse sets up the action, as she drives her step-daughter Isabel out of human society, throwing her into Craigy’s sea, with the imperative “Lie you there, dove Isabel, / And all my sorrows lie with thee” (Child 309). We might imagine what these sorrows heaped upon scapegoat Isabel are—those of a second wife saddled with the remnants of a previous family she does not value—although the ballad does not suggest sympathy for this disposer of her sorrows along with her maidenly step-daughter; instead she is “the warst woman / That ever lived in Christendom” (Child 309). Laden with a freshly acquired burden of sorrows, Isabel is preemptively advised to stay there until Kemp Owyne should “come ower the sea,” and ransom her with three kisses. A metamorphosis into a savage beast upon exile from home is described: “Her breath grew strang, her hair grew lang” (Child 309). Such changes seem plausible given her removal from the comforts
and restraints of civilisation’s hygiene. Isabel’s hair “twisted thrice around the tree” and she is held there, bound by the hair. The image is strikingly resonant; Isabel is like a wild-woman travesty of Daphne, or an Eve who is bound by the hair to the tree of her shame, as the ancient mariner became bound to his albatross. Christ on his cross casts a shadow on Isabel, who, like Christ, is the bearer of someone else’s sorrows, and bound to a tree to suffer. But Isabel is perceived in less than human terms: “all the people, far and near, / Thought that a savage beast was she” (Child 309). Her unglamorous suffering receives curiosity rather than sympathy.

Kemp Owyne gets news of the cursed girl and duly arrives to see for himself—“And on the Savage beast lookd he” (Child 309)—by which stage her beastliness is apish as she swings about the tree towards him, calling “Come to Craigy’s sea, and kiss with me” (Child 309). Despite the long hair and strong breath of something savage or partly simian, Isabel lures Owyne into kissing her by proffering three sophisticated gifts which are archetypal symbols within the courtly romance genre. Here the tree-woman’s gifts are “royal” and magically protective: a belt, a ring and a brand; and yet she says that these powerful wearable artifacts were all “found in yon green sea” (Child 309). The gifts protect Owyne from the virulence of Isabel’s monstrous person, which would otherwise cause him death upon contact. In comparison with the sovereignty

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45 Cf. Wordsworth’s “Lucy” for a romanticised version of the wild maiden, effete in comparison with the savage Isabel. Unlike Isabel, after growing for three years in sun and shower, Wordsworth’s Lucy is merely a “lovelier flower.”
hag’s representation of the land, Isabel reaches into the ocean for the gifts which will purchase her release.

The ballad holds vestiges of an evolutionary past, the phylogenetic gills of a sub-oceanic existence, and at the same time the ocean which yields royal gifts might equally be Jungian and contain murky mysticisms which resist release with the ring, the belt and the brand. The blessings of symbolic artifacts are passed to Kemp Owyne by this maid who might be the missing link, and with her strong and bestial breath she inspires a warning. Her gifts protect, yet are accompanied by a threat, which looks backwards in the reference to “tail or fin,” and perhaps prophetically forward to a future where an excess of artifice will evoke death upon humanity, should we touch the natural world too roughly:

And while on your body it is on,  
Drawn shall your blood never be;  
But if you touch me, tail or fin,  
I vow my belt [ring, brand] your death shall be. (Child 309)

The pre-history foregrounded in Isabel seems to be inherent in the loathly lady archetype, and to carry a charge of warning, as well as an inheritance blessing. The balladic Isabel makes a compelling ecofeminist icon when she warns against touching “tail or fin.” On the third kiss the transformation occurs, and the wild woman who identifies with tailed and finned creatures becomes the ubiquitous fair woman, as fair as fair could be, and smiling her satisfaction:

Her breath was sweet, her hair grew short,  
And twisted nane about the tree,  
And smilingly she came about,  
As fair a woman as fair could be. (Child 309)

This story does not end in marriage, but in Kemp Owyne’s enquiry as to who
had bewitched the maid, and her reply, which places a reciprocal curse upon her “false stepmother.” It is the curse of precognitive bestiality:

O a heavier weird light her upon
Than ever fell on wile woman;
Her hair's grow rough, an her teeth's grow lang
An on her four feet sal she gang. (Child 310)

Isabel is a young maid who is not prepared to be a martyr for another's sorrows, and returns them with interest as she scrambles back into the humanoid form of fair maidenhood. 46

The Hunter Hunted

If the loathly lady represents the natural world, existing on a vector with ecofeminism, her very beastliness is what makes her such a fitting nemesis for the male protagonist who is so often a hunter. For while the Ur-tale begins with a knight out hunting, engrossed in that aristocratic masculine pastime, the action quickly shifts so that it is the hunter himself who is hunted: by an inhuman woman who insists that he satisfy her demands to escape death and win the trophy. 47 Although the loathly lady is a beast she is also a (successful) hunter of her man. The hunt foregrounds the antithesis of court and forest by pitting the courtly male protagonist against the wild. Setting out to hunt and kill, he

46 She is another shape-changer who is like the wild woman identified and analysed by Roberts. The wild woman (and man), naked and without language, lives out, at least fictionally, the possibility of a return to pre-lapsian innocence, but also show the cost of such naivety: discomfort signalled by rough matted hair, a horrid diet grubbed with uncut nails, and a wordless lack of cognition which makes the fruit of knowledge a tempting antidote to beastliness. Although Isabel speaks prophetic words which show the wisdom and pure truth of the wild woman, she is eager to get back to the comfort of civilisation.
becomes the victim of narrative impulse; the tale pivots to make him prey to a woman who is like a boar or a sow. She becomes dear to him once she has changed shape; the challenge of the forest hunt becomes subsumed within the challenge of sexual pursuit and capture.⁴⁷

Like both the forest and the court, the hunt is a topos grounded upon actuality, but with a literary life of its own. Thiebaux likens the hunt to “the familiar narrative framework of the Journey” (21). This observation makes sense of the Bildungsroman quality of many of the loathly lady tales in which the male protagonist makes a journey, through conflict and harrying, to selfrealisation. The hunt shares narrative potential with the pilgrimage of the Canterbury Tales broader organisation (in that the setting out on an objective journey is the same paradigm as literary tale-telling), so that it could have been included in my first chapter as a feature of textual shaping. Thiebaux notes that “The action of the hunt could be seen to follow a pattern that made it conformable to patterns of literary action. Even in its simplest form the hunt meant movement toward conflict” (47). The hunt appropriately signals an adventure which will be fateful: a contestation, and a testing of the hero.

⁴⁶ The opening with a hunt is not confined to this set of tales alone. Bruford notes that “Both the ‘king’ and ‘hunt’ types may be found occasionally in oral tradition” (182), and cites other examples in Gaelic tales.

⁴⁷ At the onset of her pursuit of the stag of love, Thiebaux is a little dismissive when she says that “There is, to be sure, a good deal of medieval literature in which hunting is merely conventional, where its office in intitiating adventures, for instance, seems to be understood without there being any apparent demand felt for its development or its expressed relationship to the rest of the narrative” (19). But both she and Rooney rout out enough evidence concerning the hunt to establish that its literary inclusion is never “merely conventional,” and that a conceptual imbroglio concerning social hierarchy, religion, marriage, and kingship is introduced with a hunt, a nexus which inevitably inheres in the rest of the narrative.
The initiating hunt loops back on itself when the hunter becomes the sexual victim of the hag. Thus the hunter hunted is a narrative which pivots upon a reversal of power, a turning point which is loaded with the implications of gender (particularly with Chaucer, whose story is another sortie in the battle of the sexes). Nor is this a conventional hunt as a metaphor for courtship, given the role reversal and the instability of the female body. The hunter will be snared by feminine sexuality at its beastliest, and, caught in the venery of the bedroom, he will get what he wants by conceding to his bride what she wants (which is merely that he let her have what she wants).

Before considering what role the hunt plays in individual loathly lady texts, and how this is both informed by literary convention and yet differs from it, I will briefly summarise Thiebaux’s and Rooney’s separate investigations of this topos. Focusing particularly on the stag of love, Thiebaux identifies the sacred, the mortal and the instructive hunt (59-88). She moves through classical and Christian use of “plastic and verbal” representations of “the thirsting stag, the serpent-slaying stag, the nobly antlered stag, the harried stag, and the transpierced stag” (40-41). She observes that, from as early as Plato’s *Sophist*, “the hunt provides an overriding metaphor: human affairs become narrow subdivisions of a great pursuit” (89). Rooney continues pursuit of the hunt motif

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49 Thiebaux includes a woodcut (1486) of St. Eustace and the Cruciferous Stag, a grumpy creature whose antlers frame a miniature cross with Christ on it. The cruciferous stag glares at two down-at-the-mouth hounds, who do not know what to do with themselves, while St. Eustace kneels in prayer (60). Thiebaux demonstrates that the stag is regularly awarded a magical aspect, which is transported into the spirituality of the Christian scheme. Although the hunted deer of the loathly lady tales are not so conveniently stamped with icons explicating their extra-worldly significance, they invoke this sense of spiritual force-fields at work in the forest.
through European, classical and biblical sources (21-55), and into medieval
texts. She notes that hunt scenes are likely to be pleasurably filled with natural
imagery, and with details of upper-class leisure. But they are also vehicles for
moral lessons: there are instances in which the devil is the hunter of souls (24),
while Christ is both the hunter of souls, and sometimes the prey of mankind. The
hunt also represents worldly vanities which distract the Christian from spiritual
concerns, presenting the memento mori theme of mutability. Both holy and
hellish hunts are to be found (102-139), hunts which run for eternity. The earth-
bound hunt may be “condemned as a sinful distraction” or presented as “the
laudable courtly occupation of the chivalric hero” (137). While the journey
provides a linear narrative structure, the hunt is more divergent; vagrant fate,
and purposeful good and evil, oversee the hunt. The potential for gain (of food,
reputation and status), and for loss through misadventure, are inherent in
hunting. Such adventure is representative of the core schemata of Christianity,
of colonialist enterprise, and of courtship. This complex ambivalence imbues
the hunt as an organisational feature of the loathly lady tales.

In the “Lughaidhe Mal,” the intrusion of the other world follows a
description of a battle. Fateful destiny explains the Daire household’s everyday
confusion; the seven sons of Daire are all called Lughaidhe “In hopes the
prophecy in them would be fulfilled [...]” (69). Daire’s deer is immediately
introduced as though bound into the prophecy: “Daire had a magical fawn as a
familiar / In the shape of a yearling deer” (69). Four of the sons meet the deer,
who “passed on swiftly, / Until he reached the stream [...]” where “the fawn was
slain / By the four noble and very comely youth" (71). Iteration of the youth's nobility and comeliness counters the possibility that the slaying of a father's familiar is loutish behaviour, and the next verse continues the action of fate: "They cast lots, without sadness [...] / That each of them might know his share / Of the magical fawn without danger" (71). At this point the fawn seems to be an incarnation of fate; by killing it the lads unleash destiny. What they do next results in the name of the sept which will issue from them. Fate in the form of "a share" for each Lughaidhe resides in the flesh of the father's familiar fawn, and is broken out upon the deer's slaughter, with deeds, and names following from deeds, completing the prophecy.

"Lughaid Laidhe" begins with Daire's celebration of the fair of Tailltin, where the Lughaidhes demonstrate their horsemanship. A Druid is the initiator of fate at work. As a circuitous and illogical introduction to the topic he brusquely asks Daire, "what good are thy sons when only one of them will assume the monarchy of Eire?" (77). Ignoring the literal speech act, Daire eagerly asks, "What son shall assume the sovereignty after me?" To this the Druid replies that "A fawn with the bright colour of gold will arrive at the fair [...] and the son who shall overtake the fawn is he who shall assume the sovereignty of Eire after thee" (77). The prose-version fawn does not belong to Daire as a familiar, but appears as a prophetic sign foretold by the Druid. Although in both versions the fawn belongs to the otherworld, the prose version detaches it from the father--or the Name-of-the-Father, since this is a story about patrilineage, and one in
which names are confusing and fateful signifiers—and relocates it with the Druid, the professional seer.

The golden fawn duly arrives at the fair, and a “magical mist” falls over the chase which follows. Lughaidhe Laide overtakes the fawn. Survival of the fittest is literalised in this king-making myth. The explicit magic of the deer in both Corca Laidhe versions suggests that an original source may have made more of the fatefulness of the hunt.

In Niall and the Sons of Eochaid, Niall is not so much the most successful hunter, but the one who negotiates getting water after eating their quarry induces “great drouth” in him and his brothers. The smith/druid’s allotment to Niall of the finest weapon raises expectation of hunterly prowess, which is subsumed in the pronoun “they”: Like his brothers, Niall goes astray while hunting, with the wood closing in against them. “They” stop and kindle a fire, “they” broil and eat their quarry, and then “they” are thirsty. A kindredship is suggested; the hunt, not described in detail, bonds the brothers into one pronoun. Niall too is a hunter when he encounters the hag who will set him the test which awards him kingship.

The Wedding of Sir Gawain, that text which is tangential to so many others, is the version in the English set which places most emphasis on the hunt, seemingly bringing it over from the sovereignty myths. The great hart hunted and killed by King Arthur at the outset of the tale shares a sense of the magic and fateful. Personal pronouns amongst the action which could refer to either the king or the hart have the effect of conflating the two. In the same way
that Beowulf's arm-wrestle with Grendel allows for contention as to whose arm is leant on at the outset, and whose weight is levered against whom, here
linguistic confusion intimates a kind of psychic bonding during the killing:

As the king stode, then was he ware
Where a great hart was and a faire,
And forthe fast did he glide.
The hart was in a braken feme,
And harde the groundes, and stode full derne (22-6).
The verb “glide” seems more applicable to hart than king, but the hart stands still, listening warily in the bracken ferns, and the texture of the language allows an ambiguity: the possibility that the hart simply “was,” and that it is the hunting king, eager to catch, who approaches “forth fast” and gliding. If this ambiguity is easily ignored in a passage covering a moment of confrontation, it is reinforced by the difficult lines which follow:

Anon the king both ferce and felle
Was withe the dere and did him serve welle.
And after the grasse he taste. (46-8)

Sands puzzles over this in a footnote, noting that “the difficulty being the referent of he (either the deer or Arthur), and the exact meaning of “taste,” which he defines as “touch” (327). Sands concludes that it is more likely that the deer dies face down in the grass than that Arthur wipes the deer’s blood from his hands on the ground. ⁵⁰ But immediately, with one intervening line, which emphasises the intimacy of the moment “As the king was withe the dere alone”

⁵⁰ Margaret Reeves explained that when hunting a deer it is necessary to remain perfectly still, so that it could only be the deer who both glided forth, and was there in the bracken. She is also certain that the phrase “did serve him well” means that the king gutted the deer, something which must be done immediately, and that the next line probably also refers to the king wiping the blood he has got on his hands from gutting rather than killing the deer (p. e. May 2000). I am grateful for her expertise as a hunter in explicating what lies behind the textual ambiguity.
(49), Sir Gromer Somer appears, as though the deer's death sets nemesis in motion. This is the pivotal moment when Arthur loses control. The hunter becomes the hunted.

Arthur is immediately bailed up by Sir Gromer Somer, “a knighte fulle strong and of great mighte” (52), but transferal of the forcefields of hubris and nemesis through the functional social network of the court makes Gawain rather than Arthur the quarry of Ragnell. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Gawain is the knight who represents the cohesion of the court, providing them with the green garter as a Round Table emblem. His merging with Arthur as he volunteers to help in any way he can, including marrying a “fend” “as foulle as Belsabub” (344-5), is characteristic.

In the ballad *The Marriage of Sir Gawain*, not only is the hunt lost with missing pages, but what immediately precedes the gap is like the beginning of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* rather than the *Wedding*: “The king kept a royall Christmasse, / Of mirth and great honor, / And when” and the verse peters out. The tale resumes with the riddle. Child simply records that what is extant is “half a ballad” (288). In this fragment there is no hunt, but a strengthening of the link between the two Gawain stories, and between Ragnell and the Green Knight. A difference between the *Wedding* and the *Marriage* is the latter’s lack of the hunt.\(^{51}\)

\(^{51}\) Note too that the two ballads celebrating the kemps (warriors) Owyne and Kay do not have the hunt motif.
However, "King Henry," which shares kingship as a theme with the Corca Laidhe, is similar to the Wedding in terms of the initiating hunt. The opening verse advises generosity in a man who would woo, a prefix which signals that the ballad will be concerned with courtship, despite seeming to set off in another direction entirely: on a jolly hunt. Alone, Henry takes himself to "a jelly hunt's ha, / Was seven miles frae a town" (298), and from this hall to the hunt:

He chas'd the deer now him before,
And the roe down by the den
Till the fattest buck in a' the flock
King Henry he has slain. (298)

Like Arthur in the Wedding, Henry is a solitary royal hunter, risking confrontation alone, and killing a special deer. His fattest buck is more akin to Arthur's great hart than to the Corca Laidhe's magic fawn, suggesting that perhaps the deer has matured as the tale has. Henry returns to his hunting hall "to make him beerly cheer" before being accosted by the supernatural hag who eats up all his animals. This is not quite so instantaneous as Sir Gromer Somer Jour's appearance once Arthur has downed the stag, but similarly implies a sense of causality. In broadest terms the ballads fill the gap between the Corca Laidhe and Chaucer's versions, by repeating aspects of both.

In Chaucer, the hunt per se is virtually absent, although the Riverside applies a footnote "hawking for river fowl" (117) to the moment of entrance when the knight "cam ridynge fro a ryver" (884). This presumption of a hunting pastime is likely speculation. Rooney notes that "The noble hunt in England was especially limited in its scope," and that "hunting manuals paid no attention to the utilitarian trapping of animals [...] for food" (3). Perhaps the hawking of water
fowl is also unworthy of mention, being at a remove from the hunter, as well as
less dramatic than the killing of larger animals, and thus the Riverside’s
assumption is in keeping with literary convention. Although the audience may
be meant to presume that any knight by a river is hunting fowl, the text slips
away from the hunt, with its baggage of fate, magic, and the testing of prowess,
to displace the contestation onto the female person: a maid whom the knight
rapes. More important than the implied (but textually absent) hunt of water fowl,
is the displacement of hunting to sexual predation, that other kind of
venery. The
knight’s hunting of a deer is transposed to the rape of the “mayde walkynge him
befom” (886)—like a stalker he approaches from behind—in keeping with
Chaucer’s more significant relocation: the placing of sovereignty within the
personal power politics of marriage rather than in the kingship which the word
“sovereignty” literally signifies. Elsewhere I observe that narrative
commencement with rape is in keeping with the Wife’s character, endorsing her
speaking subjectivity; it is also in keeping with her agenda: the shift of
sovereignty to the marital arena, where it comes to mean dominance over the
male and female flesh joined in matrimony. Chaucer, by reducing the hunt to a
mere hint in the river location of the rape, applies the hunting of the hunter more
accurately. His knight is a sexual predator rather than an aristocratic sportsman,
so the turning of the power ratio to make him a sexual victim for much of the tale
is acutely appropriate.

Just as Chaucer’s knight is “ridynge fro a ryver” (884), Gower’s Florent
“rod the Marches al aboute” (1417): both tales begin with a waterscape setting
and the protagonist on horse, perhaps to be assumed to be hunting for water fowl, as the *Riverside* edition suggests of the *Wife of Bath’s Tale*. Besides this elusive allusion to the hunt by merit of setting, the hunter hunted is not a straightforward motif in Gower’s scheme for Florent. Indeed, it is Florent himself at the outset who “be strengthe take was” (l. 1422). Although he kills Branchus in “that ilke stounden” (l. 1425), it is because Fortune broke a thread—an accident—and not due to Florent’s intention to kill. Nonetheless a parallel between the killing of a magic fawn, of the fattest buck, a great hart, and a worthy young contemporary can be drawn. Florent is captured like one hunted, but gives “a dedly wunde” (l. 1426) like a hunter. Gower avoids the hunt’s aristocratic drama, but he preserves the themes for which the hunt is a nexus. There is the contestation of the aforementioned capture of Florent and killing of Branchus; and an awareness of social hierarchy, with Florent, who stands “in cousinage / To themperour” (l. 1437-8), and Branchus, who is “worthieste of al his lond” (l. 1432). Florent is introduced as “chivalerous and amorous” (l. 1414), and in search of “strange aventures” (l. 1416), yet he is instantly made a victim of both Fortune and the men who capture him. When he kills it is a mistake. Gower evokes the sense of good and evil in contestation, and yet the virtuous Florent is denied a clear role. He is not so clearly a hunter hunted as Chaucer’s rapist knight because right from the beginning Florent lacks control. Of all the protagonists he is the perhaps the most sympathetic, in part by merit of his

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52 This provides adumbration of Malory’s knight’s bungles; it is Gawain who returns from his first commission with a maiden’s head, having mis-struck. The Dolorous Blow epitomises such masculinist misadventure, and the otherwise sympathetic Florent begins, like Gawain, as a representative of the choppier side of chivalry.
ineffectiveness, a design which seems consciously related to Gower's teaching against Pride.

The hunt, like the battle, has a history of usage as a metaphor for the courtship rituals of love. Thiebaux cites classical sources for this trope, principally Ovid, and moves to medieval usage, proposing that "the stag chase that lures a hero to erotic adventure became common in vernacular lais" (109). This suggests that when a hunt initiates a tale, it signals the possibility of the erotic, as well as the possibility of testing of the hero in a moral conflict between good and evil. The Corca Laidhe hunt and the killing of the magic fawn, and the hunt of the sons of Eochaid, out testing their weapons, do not invite allegories of love; however, the hunt of love informs the more sophisticated tales. Thus, as well as anticipating conflict, the hunt which launches the Wedding of Sir Gawain also anticipates the sexual bliss at the climax of the tale.

Thiebaux demonstrates that in medieval allegories the stag is frequently the lady, hunted by her lover (144-228). She itemises the stages of distress of this harried stag, who allegorically signals the lady, and notes that "The striking down of the stag, its death and breaking, dramatize the woman's relinquishment of her separate alien identity [...]" (153). As with other conflictive metaphors for courtship, the violence is disturbing: the beloved's entrails are thrown to the dogs, who also drink her blood, and she may be eaten by flies, through all of

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53 Thiebaux includes two visual depictions of this theme. One miniature shows the lover, the queen of love, and the white stag. The two humans seemingly gossip together, both with gesturing hands, but also turn, startled by the smiling stag's intrusion from the other side of a fence, like a new neighbour who hopes to be included in the circuit of gossip (162). Another shows the lover with a fly-bitten and severely blotchy stag (165).
which she remains alive. Rooney discusses the classical love-hunt (45-49), and medieval use of the Ovidian hunt, noting that the hunt may be either "the conquest of the beloved by the lover, or the harrying and defeat of the lover by Love" (46). The hunt more usually (but not exclusively) revels in the prolonged agony of the lady (in contrast to the courtly lover's claim to life-threatening pangs), while when the hunted partner is the male, he is hunted by a personification of the abstract emotion Love rather than by his lady. This means that, as with Shakespeare's "Venus and Adonis," the pursuit of the male by the woman, and her harrying of him, makes for a startling role reversal in the topography of the hunt of love. Venus and Adonis, Acteon and Artemis, are not accurate models for the loathly lady tales, given that their outcomes are fatal. The loathly lady as a sexually active wooer harasses the erstwhile hunter, so that the tale twists as a stag might ruse or double, before arriving at a climax which is favourable for the knight: the moment of capture.

\[54\] The stag/lady's dissection has an erotic charge to its pain. Cf. Wittig. 
\[55\] Rooney cites The Romaunt of the Rose (the source from which Chaucer probably drew La Vieille as a model for the Wife of Bath [Benson 864]), which presents the God of Love as hunter, and the male lover as the hunted, in lines 1450-4 (49).
Chapter Three

The Sexual Imperative of Bespelled Maidens and Independent Shape-shifters

What interests me about representations in canonical literature of women and heterosexual relations, if I might be wildly general for one moment, is the traceability of the hook by which women are caught and subdued within marriage: their own sexuality. The urgency of the body, and the “queynte fantasye” which the Wife proposes that all women have, ensures that, both within text and in the world outside text, many women will engage with men in circumstances disadvantageous to themselves. Arguably the societal power balance meant that medieval and Renaissance ladies had little option but to obey first fathers and then husbands; nonetheless, early literature suggests that women are driven by their sexual desire to participate in their own downfall.

1 The Middle English Dictionary give a primary meaning of “fantasie” as “one of the primary wits” or “imagination” (see too E. Ruth Harvey 1-2, 43-4, 59) but also offers “preference or liking as directed by caprice rather than reason; arbitrary inclination[...] liking (for a person)” (400), and, most pertinently here, “Amorous fancy of desire” (401). The Wife is overly inclusive in ascribing “queynte fantasye” to all women (and Jessica Benjamin reminds us that “the slave of love is not always a woman, nor always a heterosexual; the fantasy of erotic domination permeates all sexual imagery in our culture” [281]), but the Wife’s attention to fantasy adds considerable depth to Chaucer’s dissection of heterosexual relations. Summing up “recent psychoanalytic theories of fantasy,” Claire Buck finds that “fantasy [...] is fundamental to subjectivity”, that it is “the term which sidesteps natural accounts of sexuality”, and that “Fantasy [...] is the theatre, or mise-en-scène, in which wishes are staged. It is a “setting for desire” (Buck 130). The Wife seems aware that the superimposition of the theatre of sexual fantasy over the materialistic world can be both problematic and productive for women.

2 For example, Rymenhild waxes wild for the titular Horn and then diminishes in presence as the narrative heads towards their marriage; in Lydgate’s Temple of Glas the lady actively
The male authors who construct ideas of feminine sexuality do so often according to their own fantasies, but they authorise that, within the genre of courtship, when fathers and suitors negotiate marriages to maintain patriarchal stability, they are enabled by a system of hormones and rising sap from within the bride-to-be. Examining literary representations of women involves checking the ingenious snares of heterosexuality. But now and then amongst canonical works one is surprised by subversion of the ritual of capture. The Wife of Bath's Tale is one such moment. The openness of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales text, and its emphasis on the gendered body, affords the Wife of Bath a signifying surplus. She wanders from the way. She plays. Her tale, on the route to salvation, is a sojourn, a tale of wonder indeed. The central motif of her tale—the loathly lady—has an active sexuality which somehow wriggles free from the Christian yoke of heterosexual relations, and from censure. Medieval tales about the loathly lady endorse the value of the active female wooer. Indeed, the word "wooer" is inadequate for the sly, aggressive, and persistent coercion that

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3 Degree is trapped by the narrative of desire, and this becomes the form of her testing. Although the Fair Maid dies, her love unrequited, the happy endings of fulfillment conspicuously diminish and confine the women who are so lucky as to achieve their heart's desire.

3 Despite previously using the term "gender," I have saved Kathleen Biddick's definition until this chapter about sex and gender. Biddick defines gender as "a theory of borders that enables us to talk about the historical construction and maintenance of sexual boundaries, both intra- and intercorporeal [...]," and proposes that "To subject the body and sex to critique does not negate them, rather it opens them up as sites of historical and political debate" (393). I like Biddick's incorporation of "borders" and "boundaries" in her definition, and that she goes on to include "sex, flesh, body, race, nature, discourse, and culture" (393) in her itemisation of the kind of histories that theories of gender involve. To this list, I would add that there is the problem that our own individual sexual experience interprets whatever words are compiled in the verbal negotiation of sexual experience, and ideas thereof. Nancy F. Partner calls for a "reality check" (440) on how liberating it is to separate sex and gender, proposing "Gender is not so easily parted from sex" (439).
she performs. This feminine performance is successful and without textual censure.

This chapter is about the feminine sexual imperative, since although her external ugliness is distracting, sexuality is a core component to the loathly lady. At the heart of my interest in this motif is its focus on female desire at a physical level, in relationship to language, and power. The shape-shifting of the lady from loathliness to loveliness occurs as a result of sexual union, her tale is predicated upon this pivotal act. I want to make a few general observations about sexual intercourse, and about the loathly lady, before opening the books and turning to specific texts in which her coition is a narrative climax.

At the same time as the loathly lady gratifies her own needs, her coercive sexual command works in the interest of the male of her choice. Being chosen by the Irish sovereignty hag, and fulfilling her demands, earns her man a kingdom. Similarly, when the spell which binds the female wooer is broken, her release typically provides benefit and exultation for the male whom she entraps.

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4 Riddy anatomises *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in terms of its similar emphasis on flesh, "the body's materiality" (151); on sex, "sexual feeling" and "male heterosexual desire" (152); and language, the medium by which "humans can separate themselves from beasts" (152). Riddy proposes that "The shift from public language to private, the contraction of society to two people of good breeding, one male and one female, whose discourse is of love, is the product of medieval aristocratic culture and its own self-regarding fantasies" (154). Her use of that promiscuous word "fantasies" is highly apt in locating the function of the narratives of one's society within the narrow limits of one's own performance of gender.

5 Bitel categorises the loathly lady as a party to what she terms "sexual healing": "The well-known female symbols of sovereignty who wandered through the pseudohistorical tales of early Ireland were hideous, barren hags until they copulated with the right royal aspirant. At the moment of consummation the loathly ladies turned into beautiful young women and the men became kings.[...]Whatever the political morals and other symbolic messages of these stories, the vocabulary was sexual healing" (70). Her term is not one that I would use, but I concur with her recognition that this union is restorative.
Male fulfillment is the same happy ending of this narrative as of most others. Yet it is secured at the cost of engagement with a woman who is the antithesis of the courtly lady, and male rites of passage involve negotiation with the internal passages of the grotesque feminine body, beginning with a kiss. Despite her trade with patriarchy, the loathly lady incorporates feminist principles of control in sexually active flesh. She provides a helpful prototype for heterosexual feminists.

The term “carnal knowledge” implies that sex is the somatic equivalent of opening the book; the Wife of Bath’s juxtaposition of experience against authority exploits the same assumption. She weighs the two kinds of knowledge (empirical and academic), against each other. For the Wife, book learning is both masculinist and clerical. Chaucer explores the trade between text and flesh; the Wife’s Tale is one wherein the textual is predicated upon the body, particularly the sexual, to invoke Toril Moi’s title. Yet sexual experience is as difficult to translate into language as spiritual experience is, for which the resort is often the metaphor of sexual union, as in the Song of Songs. When the medium of language fails, we (humans) slip into a circuit of transferred comparisons: sexual consummation is a paradigm for knowledge; erudite knowledge (in medieval times a property of the Church) is a means of transcending flesh; religious faith is a paradigm of heterosexual union. My page-flipping simile evoking the opening of the book at the start of this

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6 This term “carnal knowledge” fascinates me in being the only expression which admits that corporeal experience is “knowledge.”
paragraph is just another trope, and these seem all we have to trade with when discussing sex. Caught within the logic and limitations of language, we take our pick merely from what kind of subordinate discourse we bring to our analogies in the vehicles of our metaphors. (As critics we delight in picking apart the linguistic baggage of authors’ configurations to perform psychoanalysis; as writers we are uncomfortably aware that the peripheral action of the metaphors at our disposal is often disturbing.) So when the act of sex is a pivotal moment in a narrative, as it is in the loathly lady tales, this turning point is concealed as something of a fumble within the drapery of rhetoric. I expect to have some difficulty (like everyone else) when discussing what actually does or does not happen, and what it means. At the same time, it is amongst the rub of slippage that I find some of the pleasure and profit of this thesis topic.

It is impossible to talk plainly about sex because language fails in the face of carnal knowledge. Like birth and death, like religious experience, sex is a mystery. The knight’s repulsion from the imminent sex act, and his subsequent bliss, which is defined so clearly in Chaucer’s Wife of Bath’s Tale, suggests that the loathly lady is a personification of anxiety about maturation, when what is impossibly abhorrent in childhood--like letting someone else put their tongue in your mouth--shifts in aspect as dramatically as the loathly lady does. What seemed loathsome changes to seem lovely as the hormonal workings of flesh radically alter subjectivity. A sense of good humour in the hag’s construction comes in part from her configuration of the puberty transition which is at least mysterious until we passed through it. That she is gendered feminine, unlike the
Beast who partners Beauty, signals male subjectivity; sex with the loathly lady is a test in the male rite of passage. To some extent she is a rite of passage, a dreadful conduit, epiphany incarnate.

Good humour is sharpened by an accompanying feeling of dread and disgust which may be more than an after-image of the pre-pubescent perspective. Penetrative sex involves a breaching of the physical boundaries of the participants. The intimacy includes exposure to the composition and essence of the other; the AIDS epidemic reminds us (even more than the plague of Chaucer's time) that the exchanges made when the borders of the body are broken may cause a permanent change. Thus anxiety about what the Other might be is latent in the experience, arguably in proportion to the degree of difference from oneself. The vulnerability inherent in border crossing may be accompanied by an exhilaration which owes something to the endurance and survival of the risk.

Repulsion and good humour admix around the hag's sexual coercion. Her rampant sexuality, in line with medieval belief that women were more lascivious than men, might also be explained by her fairy nature, the succubus side of her composition. The fairy world is represented in medieval text as an alternative reality which takes the middle way. It lies somewhere between heaven and hell (as the fairy queen explicitly points out in Thomas of Erceldoune), existing alongside a Christian schema, and connecting at points.  

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7Since the fairy folk pay tithes to the devil in Thomas of Erceldoune they seem more closely aligned with evil than good, but their laws are tangential to God's, as the Fairy Queen's familiarity with the path to heaven shows. Considering the nature of the fairy in medieval literature, Albrecht concludes, "By her nature, then, a fairy might have evil auspices, although she could also have
Fairy tales adumbrate science fiction in their provision of an alternate venue in which earthly issues might be creatively examined, if not resolved. The fact that fairyland is a space where the female is no more sexually restrained than the male shows medieval interest in this possibility. Medieval fairy women operate outside of the moral restraint which might impede mere mortals. The fairy princess Tryamour from *Sir Launfal* is perhaps the most memorable model of active wooing, arranging herself prone and half-naked within a luxurious pavilion conveniently located in the forest, from which vantage position she puts her successful proposal of marriage. Otherworldly power permits a forthright approach.

The loathly lady, sometimes fairy or goddess, sometimes under a spell, goes further than Tryamour as an active wooer, reducing the courtship ritual to coercive demand, usually with threat of death or grievous bodily injury as her means of persuasion. She turns inside out the courtly lover's emblematic entreat, "have mercy, lady, or I die," so that it becomes, "give sexual service, laddie, or you die." Those who feel that problems are insidiously imposed by the lover who kneels at the foot of the pedestal upon which he has placed his lady, might take disproportionate satisfaction in the hag's play with (pre-)Petrarchan virility. The courtly lady upon the pedestal must be inspirationally selfless, without needs of her own. Her extreme beauty will provide the light by which the lover may find the spiritual jouissance of endless deferral; her own needs are

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the best intentions of living them down" (33). Thomas's lady's parting gift to him suggests that, however hard a time she gave him in her service, she would like him to remember her kindly.
absorbed within her one-dimensionality, and the flattening of feminine physicality becomes encoded culturally, plastered with the sign of pulchritude. No such thinness of texture hinders the hag, whose pleasure-seeking bulkiness kicks down any pedestal that stands in the way of womanly enjoyment.

Although a menacingly active sexuality is inherent in the mutable flesh of the generic loathly lady, with an accompanying admixture of humour and repulsion, her sexual component is the means by which two subcategories can be identified: bespelled maidens (who are virgins) and independent shape-changers (who, by implication, have previous sexual experience). Given the difference of the categories of virgin and sexual practitioner in both real life and in text (at least, in most canonical texts), it is surprising that the seduction performance of these two types is so similar. Narrative compulsion over-rides psychological realism. In these tales which make so much of female physicality, there is little explicit reference to the hymen, that membrane which authenticates virginity, and which would signal the difference between these two quite disparate kinds of mutable women. In what follows I do not keep them in separate categories because of the similarities of their control of language, and of sexuality. They all perform sexual entrapment. I will begin specific textual

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8 These are not the pure virgins of hagiography, wherein, it might be argued, the only good virgin is a dead one. Howard R. Bloch concludes just this: that "a certain inescapable logic of virginity, most evident in medieval hagiography, leads syllogistically to the conclusion that the only real virgin—that is, the only true virgin—is a dead virgin" (108). In apposition to this, the virginity of loathly ladies who are bespelled maidens is that of any maiden destined for marriage: designed to be broken.

9 The nearest we find is in the "Knight and the Shepherd's Daughter," where her rape initiates her quest to marry her rapist, so that a reft maidenhead is the starting point. The shepherd's daughter specifically accuses the knight of stealing her maidenhead. This is the only explicit reference to the hymen.
in an investigation of the loathly lady with an examination of Chaucer’s version, in which an independent shape-changer is framed by the Wife of Bath’s marital profession, in both senses of that word.

Chaucer’s Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale.

The characterisation of the narrator whose voice constructs the hag osmotically merges with her; Chaucer’s loathly lady is inspired by the Wife of Bath. I have chosen to deal with the influence of the Wife of Bath’s Prologue under the rubric of sexuality because the two texts are connected as a diptych mainly through the theme of active female sexuality. This section thus considers both the Prologue and Tale of the Wife of Bath.

When it comes to sex, the Wife is a player. She is also a garrulous gossip, a theorist, a woman of words. Amongst her misquoting of scripture in her Prologue, the Wife diverges to ask why Jesus declared that the fifth man who now “has” the woman-by-the-well is not her husband. Her desire for intimate detail demonstrates that she is an engaging analyst of text. The Wife persists in asking how many husbands this well-situated woman might have in marriage, a

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10 Weisl proposes that Chaucer chose the lai form “because the lai is an expandable genre,” one which provides “room” for the Wife’s ideology (92). My explication both endorses her observation, and departs from her, since she also finds that in the end, everyone is put “in his or her proper place” (92). I argue that the complexity of the loathly lady motif destabilises these proper places.

11 Martin observes this dichotomy: “The Wife of the Prologue and the wife of the Tale present an idea of fractured femininity which the transformation attempts to restore to a wholeness of person” (Chaucer’s Women 61).
rhetorical question pushily serving serious Wifely interest in serial marriage.\textsuperscript{12} Mainstream debate on marriage, including this century’s, asks the question “how?,” especially “how best?,” rather than the quantitative “how many?” The Wife’s own example, the experience she cites as over-riding clerical authority, suggests that it takes quantity to get the hang of it, and that a bulk buy into “good old husbands” provides an adequate apprenticeship for any woman whose true vocation is marriage. The Wife is foremost a theorist on marriage who is willing to talk about sex in the context of personal power.

Although she gives multiplication as a theoretical reason for marriage, no mention of children is made in her own matrimonial history. Her motivations towards marriage seem to be first material profit and secondly pleasure; she is prepared to indulge her own preference only once her financial position is secure. But she shows a keen interest in sex, and no personal evidence of maternal inclination. The Wife’s apparent childlessness is one factor which allows her the freedom for her leisurely excursions on pilgrimage, a fairly critical factor in wandering by the way, one might think. But Margery Kempe, a vociferous authority on woman as pilgrim, provides evidence that, amongst the wealthy, children need not be a restraint. Margery, a middle-aged pilgrim in the early fifteenth century, also travelled extensively, and also stands upon experience (visionary) as her authority. I want to sit her beside the man-made Wife because Margery was an actual woman, despite the facts that she is

\textsuperscript{12} Palomo includes this as evidence that the Wife of Bath has murdered her fourth husband, or rather, got Jankin to murder him (313-4). Palomo’s argument is lively if tenuous.
selective in her representation of herself, and that her redaction is also filtered through a male scribe writing from her dictation. Margery chose to edit her fourteen children out of the auto-hagiographical Book which tells of her spiritual life. Margery records her shifting attitude to her husband John as an adjunct to her own spiritual growth. She had “ful many delectably thoughtys, fleshly lustys, & inordinat louys to hys persone” (181) in her youth. Fourteen children later, she desires celibacy so that her relationship with God might be enhanced. Finally, she takes compassionate care of her husband when he is senile and incontinent, recognising this demanding task as a suitable penance for her earlier enjoyment of his flesh. Margery has just one husband, and goes to considerable lengths to renegotiate so that she might be free of her marriage debt, so over her adult life she works towards less rather than the Wife's stated interest in more: "Welcome the sixte, when that evere he shall" (WBP 45). In the redaction of both Margery's and the Wife's accounts of marriage, sex gets more consideration in terms of personal pleasure and personal inconvenience than as an adjunct to maternity.

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She discusses only her adult eldest son's conversion to godliness, marriage, and his death in the "Secundus liber" (221-5); Kempe's daughter-in-law gets as much attention. Margery's first birth is reported for its role in precipitating her relationship with Christ (6-8), but her almost continual pregnancy, and the series of births which follow the first, are not part of her autobiography.

Despite the dissimilarities of their particular explicitly-expressed sexual ambitions, the autohagiographical Margery and the fictitious Wife of Bath have much in common: attention to clothing and an ostentatious use of the semiotics of dress; a knack of glossing to their own advantage, demonstration of clerical knowledge, the gift of the gab including the ability to outwit and persuade; control over their own lives, a detachment from husbands they regard as useful and sometimes attractive, but generally beneath them; and they both have an active rather than passive interest in sex.
The Wife is direct in speaking about pleasure. When she continues in her Prologue to discuss male and female genitals as “members,” and to conclude that they were made by so perfectly wise a maker not merely for passing urine or determining who is male and who is female, but for “ese of engendrure,” she is justifying the delectable thoughts, physical lust and inordinate love which Kempe identifies. Having reached a state of financial security, the Wife chooses her favourite fifth husband for his great legs. She is an unrepentant empirical authority on sexual matters.\textsuperscript{15}

As such, she regards both male and female genitals as “our bothe thynges smale,” as they are in relationship to the total body mass. The use of the adjective “bothe” is more inclusive and less separatist than Freud’s influential theorising; in the twentieth century sexuality as an identity factor is arguably more phallocentric than in Chaucer’s time.\textsuperscript{16} The Wife, a fun lover who persuasively twists scripture to argue for the right to enjoy sex, is no pacifist in the battle of the sexes, but an advocate for feminist rights which might be negotiated amongst the pleasures of heterosexuality. As self-named “barley-bread” in comparison to the refined wheat-bread that the virgin is, the Wife offers her worldliness as appetisingly wholesome. That she is so vigorous and

\textsuperscript{15} Palomo observes that “Alisoun wants it both ways—the lusty rapist by night and the meek husband by day. She changes the ‘or’s’ to ‘ands’” (315). Perhaps the Wife is likable partly because she itemises her desires so precisely.

\textsuperscript{16} Such a statement is provocative. I am grateful to Ruth Harvey for providing me with material from Henry Daniel’s \textit{Liber Uricrisiarum} (1376-8), which offers a medieval perspective on men and women’s genitals. Daniel ascribes rapacious activity to the female: he finds a matrix which “taketh the mannes zerdes ende in here mouth and drawth it in and soketh ihthe ende of the zerde rizt as the water leche soketh the blode of a man [...]” (3). This member drives a woman “woode” until it is “fedde” (7); conception is the answer to her needs.
wily in defending her free use of her “instrument” softens the immediately following description of her manipulation of husbands.

Her awareness of marriage as an arena of power exchange almost flows from her positive sexuality, even though we are left in no doubt about the pragmatic use she makes of her “thing” to her own material advantage. Her bartering of sexual service for material goods and privileges makes the Eden of heterosexual union a territory which is up for grabs. The Wife waxes warm on her sexual rights over her husband(s), sounding the sexual sadist as she gloats:

An housbande I wol have - I wol nat lette -
Which shal be bothe my dettour and my thral,
And have his tribulacion withal
Upon his flessh, whil that I am his wyf.
I have the power durynge al my lyf
Upon his propre body, and noght he. (WBP 154-159)

The Wife's distortion of scripture denies Freud's interpretation of the role of the penis and the clitoris, “our bothe thynges smale,” in socialising men and women as gendered subjects. In Kaja Silverman's summation, "Freud uses the penis/clitoris opposition as the basis for other oppositions as well. He associates the male subject with aggressivity, voyeurism and sadism, and the female subject with the antithetical but complimentary qualities of passivity, exhibitionism, and masochism" (138). Both Margery Kempe and the Wife are impressive exhibitionists; their performances lack passivity, and both are aggressive in the face of opposition, with the Wife revealing sadistic satisfaction in her own power over her husband as “thrall.”
Encouraged by the Pardoner's imperative "spareth for no man," the Wife is off into the account of her matrimonial profession, demonstrating her unkind disdain for the "things" of her three good, rich, old husbands:

I laughe whan I thynke
How pitously a-nyght I made hem swynke!
And, by my fey, I tolde of it no stoor. (WBP 201-3)

She declares to this group of sundry, yet mainly male, pilgrims that she had her husbands "hooly in myn hand." This particular metaphor of control will resonate with her loathly lady's later imperative to the knight: "Plight me thy trouthe heere in myn hand" (WBT 1009). In these dual texts, power is brokered by hand and they may be taken as a manual of how wives might accomplish this.

The Wife dismisses as out of reach "the bacon in Essex at Dunmowe" WBP 218), which the Riverside glosses as a "side of bacon awarded to spouses who lived a year and a day without quarrelling" (108). The coincidence that this is the time period allotted the knight to find the answer to the riddle of what women want is due more to formulaic conventions of describing time than to seasonal implications. Yet in both cases the annual cycle of seasons provides a sense of continuum to the heterosexual relationships. For the Wife, this means a time of war (the battle of the sexes); she will not get the Essex bacon because quarrelling is one of the weapons in her arsenal.

Later the smell of bacon wafts rancidly into the bedroom in another of those metaphors linking sex and food. Having returned to the subject of the sexual performance of her old husbands, she admits to having "a feyned appetit" (WBP 417) for them because she had never really delighted in bacon:
"And yet in bacon hadde I nevere delit" (WBP 418). This appears to be the first acknowledgment in the English language of sexual fakery. Chaucer's January of the Merchant's Tale explores this epicurean commodification of marriage partner, stating a preference for "tender veel" over "old boef" (MerT 1420), although he oddly prefers "oold fish" (MerT 1418) as a pungent side dish.

January's repulsiveness as an elderly fiance increases because he is blind to his own shortcomings. In contrast, the Wife, although deafened during her battle against misogynist text, recognises full well her own diminishing appeal. The Wife is not blind to herself, although she is deaf as a result of domestic violence, and perhaps deaf to common-sense on this count as well. With honest self-appraisal, and without wasting time in self-pity, she reconsiders marketing strategies for the "bran" of her sexuality now that the "flour" is gone.

The Wife's elaborately expounded sexual history, and her attitudes, flow into the loathly lady of her Tale, who in the end takes a spin at marriage with a young man of her choice. The interest in such a future can only be explained by an obsession for sex and marriage equal to the Wife's, for the rapist knight is not commended anywhere for his intelligence. The Wife declares that it tickles

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17 Martin proposes that the Wife is "also partly deaf—not absolutely—to the voice of authority" (Chaucer's Women 38). Laskaya hones this view, pointing out that deafness here is a matrimonial "war wound"—Jankin's responsibility and not the Wife's—and proposing that it is also a "weapon or shield" against the "discourse of a patriarchal culture [...] potentially, a sign of her resistance, then, to anti-feminist discourse" (181-2). Laskaya's proposal makes the Wife's deafness similar to Britomart's inability to read the art depicting the legend of heterosexuality in the House of Busirane.

18 Frese also observes a similarity based upon active sexuality between the Wife and Medb (who is akin to the Irish hag). Frese declares: "Alys of Bath, pursuing her relentless marital agenda of sovereignty, resembles no one so much as Queen Medb, the feminine personification of national sovereignty in Irish tradition, who boasts of her own unbroken succession of Irish kings [...]" ("Names of Women" 163).
her heart-root and does her heart good to remember the fun she has had in her youth. But she seems to bury this warmly remembered youth with her fourth husband, and perhaps as she gets to the age at which Margery Kempe found chastity a desirable state, the Wife, like her hag, is ready to settle down with just the one fresh young husband, and her warm thoughts of the past.

The Wife's description of her fifth husband, who proves to be a problem despite the great legs, complicates her version of heterosexuality, a version with which her loathly lady seems to accord. He is the most violent, and yet the most adored of her husbands. It is not that the Wife is a masochist, merely that she found him "so fresshe and gay" in bed (WBP 508) that she had to forgive him. Furthermore, she says that he is well able to "glose" her "whan that he wolde han my bele chose" (WBP 509-10). The Riverside provides a footnote gloss on "glose" as "flatter," but there is a textual/sexual poetic. The Wife finds that her young husband renders her body, within the metaphor of sexual fantasy, into a translation to her liking. She also identifies his aloofness as part of his attraction, proposing that,

We wommen han, if that I shal nat lye,
In this matere a queynte fantasye:
Wayte what thyng we may nat lightly have,
Thereafter wol we crie al day and crave.
Forbede us thyng, and that desiren we[...] (WBP 515-19).

The use of the ambiguous word "queynte" points to the kind of fantasy that this is--erotic--and following fast on from her bedroom reminiscences, suggests the tease of a physical withholding. Chaucer's feminine impersonation is
convincing at its most intimate; the Wife's appreciation of how “queynte fantasye” works seems firmly based upon her own sexual experience.\(^{19}\)

Nonetheless her relationship with this violent young spouse is problematic, and her claim that she hit back, got even and got a control which he surrendered out of guilt, does not entirely compensate for her deafness. The Wife's life history could have been told as a series of tragedies of that ridiculous kind that marriage so often makes of women's lives.\(^{20}\) Furthermore, the Wife's obeisance to the forcefield of women's “queynte fantasye,” in favouring the “daungerous” Jankyn, complicates the riddle-and-answer which is to follow in her Tale. Since such fantasy is based on the tension of denial, and means that women only want what they cannot have, they can never attach their desire to what is available. They cannot achieve desire, which in this case is the serious issue of personal power: sovereignty. We might accept a reminder that “queynte fantasye” is fine in the bedroom, but that women are vulnerable if such fantasy

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\(^{19}\) Another point of comparison between the Wife and January from the Merchant's Tale—Chaucer's two elderly wooers—is provided by the repeat of “hyghe fantasy” as January's attitude to marriage. January's lofty ideals are shown to be hypocritical as he lecherously chooses a young bride, and are subsequently debased. In being motivated by a “queynte” fantasy rather than a high one, the Wife is again more self-aware than January. She is deafened—every old fool must pay some cost—but her fifth marriage approaches more closely her own ideals than January's marriage does his. Chaucer's use of the word “fantasy” shows his awareness of the word's range of meanings: it is an inner wit with a propensity for sexual inclination.

\(^{20}\) H. Marshall Leicester Jr. gestures towards the Wife's positive redaction of her history, when he says the lines “As help me God, I laughe whan I thynke / How piteously a-nyght I made them swynke!” (WBT 201-02) “catch the way that something that was unpleasant or uncomfortable to live through may not be so to recall” (Leicester 84). While I agree with his comment, I would add that there is a real sense, in Chaucer's construction, of the Wife constructing an autobiography, and turning her experience into entertainment.
invades other areas of their lives. The diptych of the Wife's Prologue and Tale
provides the imbroglio of ambiguities with which heterosexual feminists
contend.

The Wife recounts her trick with a fictitious "dream," described to Jankyn
in order to disclose her inner desires to him. Dreams are important in the
Canterbury Tales. Chaucer writes in response to medieval dream theory, which
does not invoke the subconscious, but modern psychology might accept a
nudge in the ribs from the Wife's consciously manipulative use of the dream
medium to get herself an attractive man rather than interrogate her own inner
mind. The Wife is a player; learning the rules of all the games is her interest,
and the onanism of self-discovery, like dry old bacon, is not especially for her.
However, her alleged dream, that Jankyn slew her so that her bed was full of
blood, makes her codification of sexual possession by him luridly harmful,
despite her own reading that "blood bitoketh gold." 22

For the Wife, the body is potentially marketable, and the blood which
might be spilt on sheets will be balanced in terms of cash. She is an adept at

21 In a bizarre moment, Sands likens the Wife of Bath to the twentieth-century's "nice killer,"
Charles Manson, whom he cites as also promoting "more love-making" as an ideal ("Non-comic"
173). Sands goes on to propose an "abysm of evil" to the Wife's makeup.

22 Martin uses the content of the dream to contrast the money and sex equation ubiquitous in the
Wife's dialogue: "But the Wife of Bath's most gruesome proverb, 'Blood bitokeneth gold, as me
was taught' (581) suggests the true price payable for such transactions. Experience, her other
teacher, proves that she needs money of her own" (Chaucer's Women 92). But she also finds it
more benign than I do. Martin says: "Blood bitokeneth gold" is [...] a consoling proverb (compare
"Where there's muck, there's brass), emphasising the price paid to rather than by a woman for her
sexuality" (Chaucer's Women 101). I do not agree with Martin; being squeamish about blood, I find
instead a curdling and compact statement about the association of life-force vitality with prosperity.
The price of gold, especially for the powerless, is bodily, involving risk of spillage. "Blood money"
is the next contraction of this proverb.
playing this fluctuating stock exchange, even though in her fifth marriage the balance will be in Jankyn's favour, a payment for his twenty years of youthful vigour when he weds the forty-year-old Wife, and a gift which she will sorely repent. Her enlivening with dramatic visuals of a death in bed is a controlled representation, another production, like her part-acting. The fact that the dream is invented, and is the Wife's method of giving Jankyn a subliminal message, puts her on a parallel with her own loathly lady, who methodically coaxes the young knight into her control, and then continues to manipulate the terms of their relationship, with an inner amusement conveyed in her smile. The hag gives the pillow sermon rather than a dream; both oral performances are designed to motivate the young partner towards sexual participation, and the hag's sermon is contrived, like the Wife's dream. The hag's profession of Christian principles is coercive. Although Chaucer seems to hold gentilesse in high regard, and the pillow sermon speaks eloquently for it, at the same time here is a dissection of the way that language and somatic semiotics work. Chaucer tells one thing, but enables a cynical deconstruction of it to be available: that true speech works as a marital aid.

The Wife then moves from theorising her methodology of control to a eulogy on heterosexuality, claiming that as a sensate "Venerien" she has always followed her own inclination, and her own appetite. (As a "Marcien" she does this somewhat violently.) She boasts "Al were he short, or long, or blak, or whit; / I took no kep, so that he liked me, / How poore he was, ne eek of what
degree” (WBP 624-6). It is difficult to take the Wife at face value here; we have been told of her prioritisation of social status in the General Prologue, and it seems unlikely that she would toss her ideas of degree aside for sexual dalliance. Despite the Wife’s energy, classical misogyny lurks behind this unstable passage.

An account of the Wife’s marriage to Jankyn, the violence, and her citation of husband-murdering wives quickly follows; evidently the reality of marriage to this young sex-object is more painful than the fantasy admitted. As much as the Wife likes Jankyn’s bedroom glossing of herself, she detests his recreational enjoyment of a misogynist book, a compilation “that gladly, nyght and day, / For his desport he wolde rede alway” (WBP 669-70). Her discomfort enables her to identify an inherent dichotomy between clerks and wives, one which is in alignment with that between the authors of the misogynist tradition and women. Like lions, women are always objectified, and things would be different if “wommen hadde writen stories” (693). The Wife’s querulous question “Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?” (692), signals to Chaucer’s conscious attempt at feminine impersonation. The Wife’s rage against the misogynist book causes flesh and text to collide again, and she reports the battle of the book in the tone of a gossip, relating the blows with some relish. Explicit identification of the misogyny inherent in masculinist text suggests that the didactic intent of her own tale is corrective, and the loathly lady is deliberately imported so that her quasi-goddess authority might add weight to a proto-feminist agenda.

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23 This section appears in the Ellesmere but not the Hengwrt.
The difficulty of marital co-existence is evident when the dust settles and, "But atte laste, with muchel care and wo, / We fille acorded by us selven two" \textit{(WBP 81-82)}. The Wife continues to explain that this negotiation addresses control over house and land, with text and body represented by speech and action. Totalitarian censorship of the book is part of the package; the book is burned. The Wife believes that sovereignty has been accorded to her, and she is satisfied with this state, finishing her life story with a genuine-sounding prayer for Jankyn's soul. Her final warmth for the dead Jankyn, and description of their concord, is evidence that her "queynte fantasy," the desire for what is out of reach, is carnal play, whereas the sovereignty within marriage (that women want in her \textit{Tale}) applies to the more earnest areas of the heterosexual cohabitation: the chest with the money, and decision-making rights.

Gaining licence from the Friar, whose laughter ends her \textit{Proloque}, the Wife proceeds to her \textit{Tale}. The Wife as author is garrulous, raunchy, flirtatious, and yet bookishly in control of literary allusion. She hijacks scripture with her audacious glossing of it.\textsuperscript{24} The hag, manipulative through control of the flexibilities of language--both in ensnaring the knight in an oath and in her pillow sermon---steps forth from the \textit{Wife's Tale} as an alter-ego.\textsuperscript{25} The hag is

\textsuperscript{24} Noting that the Wife "does not 'disregard' him [St Paul]; she 'disagrees' with him," Laskaya points out that the Wife's "text shares some similar themes and concerns with the Pauline text. Both are concerned with the body: how to be made young again, how to become the chosen vessel, how to be made full; but the Wife’s perspective also clearly differs from Paul's" (179).

\textsuperscript{25} Carruthers identifies the hag as the Wife's lion. She goes on to observe that "The hag's intelligence is limited in ways that Alisoun's is not. Her magic serves as a blind for her, relieving her of the need to test her propositions in 'experience'. She argues positions that Alisoun has long rejected, especially when she denies any importance to 'possessioun'. The obtuseness bred by her insulation from experience parallels the knight's moral stupidity" (38). Carruthers continues, declaring that, "The Wife does not identify herself with the lion she paints, the old hag" (38).
fairy, a magical translation of aspects of the Wife into someone resistant to mortal limitations. Yet when the hag lies smiling to herself in bed with her young groom the smirk seems to belong to the Wife, and perhaps even to "us wyves" (WBP 144).

The Wife’s Tale is predicated upon personal power politics across the boundaries of gender. Once her time frame is constructed, the action begins with the rape of a maiden by a knight who is riding from the river. The rape is not described in any detail, which is curious since the Wife has demonstrated her vicarious delight in intimate detail in her Prologue. Yet her woman’s perspective is evident because both limitours and knights, men from two estates of social responsibility in the community, are shown as a menace; the lack of drama in the presentation of the rape makes it behaviour expected of men.

The whimsical nature of the machinations of courtly power are apparent when the knight, who is condemned by “cours of lawe” (WBT 892) to lose his head, is given to the Queen, who may choose whether she will save or spill him. In this mortal by-gone world it is male law which would kill the knight for his sexual assault, and a self-appointed feminine court which intervenes to offer him a reprieve. Their motive is unclear: is it cat and mouse sadism, the satisfaction of drawing out his agony by setting an impossible task which will extend his abjection? Is it educative? Is it a demonstration of the ladies’s grace? I find a mix of all of these, which accumulate to a desire to play a courtly game

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appreciate the distinction which Carruthers makes, but in the end I find the similarities between Wife and hag more conspicuous than the dissimilarities.
with a young man who has put himself in their power through his sexual misconduct.

The knight's virile body is the object which the loathly lady pursues: here the Queen, in her warning "keep thye nekke-boon from iren," reaches into the body of the knight with a quick twinge of sadistic eroticism. Later, when the knight returns with his answer, he delivers it forthwith "anon" in "a manly voys, that al the court it herde" (WBT 1034-35) to the women who will be his judges, and the acceptance of every wife, maid, and widow of them (all three categories of women), of a finite answer to a treacherously large question, may be due to the firm-speaking manliness of this miscreant within their jurisdiction. The hag is emphatic that no amount of gold will dissuade her from her first option, which she asserts to the knight is "But if thy wyf I were, and eek thy love." The use of the familial "thy" nuzzles into the demand for love as well as matrimony, making explicit the sexual factor which is part of the contract, and incidentally yoking love and marriage. The hag's demand is at once an outrageous assault upon the young knight's elevated idea of himself, and a coercive bid for a heterosexual contract in terms of love. Chaucer, through the Wife, objectifies the knight as the plaything of a group of courtly women. The remission the knight gains from them hastens his further decline to the humiliating role of sex

36 Martin notes the feminisation of the knight at this point, as well as his place in a schema which shows Chaucer's cynicism towards the bliss of marital consummation: "The knight joins a particular category of Chaucerian heroine, the reluctant bride. The wedding is the conventional happy ending to a story, particularly a romance. But Chaucer's presentation of weddings and wedding nights is almost consistently negative or ironic. He uses the conventions of the epithalamium primarily for satiric purposes" (1990 58).
object, obliged to fulfil the “queynte fantasye” of a wise and powerful old fairy-woman.

The hubris of the knight’s act of rape invokes the nemesis by which his own flesh is surrendered to the hag. He is baffled by her speech acts as he is repulsed by her body. Just as he was entrapped by words whose true meaning he did not understand (the loathly lady’s forest-side imperative that he plight his trouth in her hand), so too when she tells him in bed that she will fulfil his “worldly appetit” (WBT 1218) he seems to not understand what she is saying; her verbal promise does not get much of a response from him. Only her actual transformation a little later awakens his joy and his enthusiasm. Although the medium of the Tale is language, the narrative is driven by the semiotics of the body: repulsion from what is loathly; admiration of the manly; attraction and celebration of the lovely. The effective irony of the preceding pillow sermon is that its logic and morality are sound, but the hag’s fleshly incongruity in the nuptial bed is highly disruptive of the somatic syntax of sex, to extend the Wife’s sexual/textual “glose” metaphor. The dual discourses-- the verbal and the semiotic--approach a simultaneous climax in the consummation of the marriage.

Yet this is discreetly curtained within the weft of fabrication. The loathly bride offers the knight a choice, “oon of thysyr thynges tweye” (WBT 1219), of two possible limitations of her performance as wife. She might be foul and old, but humble, true and never displeasing, or young and fair and menacingly independent: she advises him that he would “take youre adventure of the repair
/ That shall be to your house by cause of me" (WBT 1224-45).Ignoring its
glimmerings of hope, and showing no surprise over her ability to make such an
extraordinary offer, he agonises over his decision. It seems as though the need
to make a difficult choice is what brings him to accept her demand to be both
wife and love.\(^7\) He "sore siketh" for a solution to no avail, then finally
surrenders: "My lady and my love and wyf so deere, / I put me in your wise
governance" (WBT 1230-1). The reins are in her hand.

Before the sexual act, the terms of perfect joy are set as husbandly
acquiescence to wifely decision-making. Confirming her own sovereignty, the
hag demands "kys me" (WBT 1239), but she seemingly continues speaking
right through until "to-mom" (WBT 1245), so that the kiss, and the sexual act
(which we might presume occurs, although we are not told this) are muffled by
the chatter of language. This is powerful language, performing the promise to
be both fair and good and true, even as it acts as a distracting screen. When
the closure of the speech act that begins with the command to kiss is another
command, to "cast up the curtyne, looke how that it is" (WBT 1249), there is the
revelation that something physical has occurred without the voyeuristic reader
seeing how. Evasion from explicit description is a concession to the limitation of
language, to the restriction of genre, and confirms the difficulties I identified in
my opening to this chapter.

\(^7\) Mann finds that "The 'anti-feminist' elements in the tale [...] constitute the force behind the
tale's challenge to male domination. When the knight surrenders to female 'maistrye', he
surrenders not to the romanticised woman projected by male desire, but to the woman conceived
in the pessimistic terms of anti-feminism" (Geoffrey 92). I endorse Mann's recognition of the play
Chaucer makes with textual gender construction, adding to it recognition of the pagan piquancy
he imports with the hag.
The knight is left at the end of the tale more like the protagonist; having surrendered to female power after being in its grip for the tale, he has control graciously restored to him, although it is not ultimate control, but dependent upon his wife’s m/patronisation. He finds redemption through submission, surrendering his stable manly body, and his wavering mind, to his wife’s unstable body and wise mind. We might presume that the bride’s reciprocal surrender of control—"she obeyed hym in every thyng" (*WBT* 1255)—is a buttering up of her chosen beloved for the nuptial occasion. These considerations destabilise the traditionally happy ending even before the Wife intrudes as narrator to pray to “Jhesu Crist” to send husbands, meek, young, and fresh in bed. Death to all husbands who will not be governed by their

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28 Bernard S. Levy finds that the knight, at the climax of the tale, “thus perceives the ugly old Hag as a beautiful young woman when he perverts the marriage relationship by submitting to the wife and agrees with her that the ultimate purpose of marriage is merely indulgence in the pleasures of the flesh” (121). In finding that “there is no miracle, no transformation,” only “a change in his vision,” Levy articulates one reading of the beast fable motif: that they are about the softening of judgment towards a partner which sex might cause. This seems an unfruitful literalisation. Levy also proposes that the knight is “really yielding to the illusion of sin, symbolized by the ugly old Hag,” a reading which places Chaucer’s loathly lady in a similar category to Spenser’s Duessa. I do not agree with Levy.

29 The model of Chaucer’s Arveragus, who promises in the *Franklin’s Tale* to serve his wife Dorigen, but evidently retains in fact control of her, makes a comparison. Mann, however, aptly locates the physicality of the moment when she proposes that “‘Obedience’ here is [...] an expression of the instinctive desire to give pleasure [...]” (*Geoffrey* 93); “maistrye” is based upon consensual sex. Mann’s reading generally acknowledges the hormonal logic of the tale’s happy ending, linking the medieval concept of mutuality to the “Simultaneous Kiss (bowdlerised correlative to the Simultaneous Orgasm)” of the twentieth-century screen (*Geoffrey* 94).

30 Weisl finds that, in this tale, “The Knight is the romance’s authoritative, masculine side, the side which finally determines the poem’s closure, turning the lady into a stereotypical figure of the Knight’s desires. The Loathly Lady, as the dangerous feminine, challenges this structure at every turn, but is finally defeated by it” (93). While appreciative of Weisl’s frame of reference, and terminology, I disagree with her emphasis. I disagree that the loathly lady “replaces her body-as-text with the sermon, replaces the authority of feminine justice [...] with the authority of masculine, literary exegesis” (Weisl 94), since this denies the frictive action of the two discourses, the tacit
wives and pestilence upon niggards is the final invective. The manly young knight does win all—and it is conspicuous that we are told that the joy of the marriage bed is his rather than his bride's—but only because he learns to become a good boy.

**Gower's Tale of Florent**

In the *Prologue* Gower promises "This bok schal afterward ben ended / Of love, which doth many a wonder / And many a wys man hath put under" (P 74-76). This wonder-working principle, love, bespelling even the wise amongst men, inclusively covers the lust and lore of romance, the social love which might unite the state, and the charity which ought to inhere within the church. Gower makes love his unifying theme, and in *Liber Primus*, in dream vision mode, he introduces Venus as the governing authority in his larger schema. Thus the *Tale of Florent* is told under the auspices of a goddess whose sphere is profane love, so that we might expect that the issue of kingship will be subordinated and the personal promoted, as with Chaucer. Yet Gower's *Prologue* assumes that the public is affected by the personal; both are governed by the same moral code. He approaches recognition that the personal is political. Government is a serious concern. So although the two beginnings which shape Chaucer's and Gower's collections of tales apparently point in opposite directions (Chaucer's to religious and Gower's to profane love), the merging of religious and profane in both compendia leaves Gower on higher ground. Gower emphasises one of the flesh, and the verbal speech. The complexities of the tale deny a final defeat of all the
individual accountability; “the man is overal / His oghne cause of wel and wo” (P 546-7). At the same time, love is the foundation of all goodness which leads to the correction of social decline. The tenet of Christianity—that love is the greatest of all virtues—competes successfully with Venus’s classical, feminine influence. The influence of the sovereignty goddess in terms of feminine power seems stronger in Chaucer’s version than Venus does in Gower’s. The life-force juices which, from the opening sentence, engorge the Canterbury Tales’ quest for religious salvation with physical vitality, feed the feminine principle of the Wife and her tale. Although Gower professes to be in the commission of Venus and love, the ethic of love explained in his Prologue imbues his redaction with a didactic Christian (and thus patristic) morality. Nonetheless, Gower’s trenchant interrogation of human behaviour locates the inequities and exploitations which have troubled women since time began, and his exemplum version of the loathly lady tale also fits within a feminist discourse. “Moral” Gower has concern regarding human intercourse, which is refreshing to any reader exasperated by the predation inherent in most white, upper-class, masculine, authorship. He is sensitive to the exploitation of women, and critical of it.

Like Spenser, Gower organises his poem under books which have moral qualities as themes (Gower’s are sins to be confessed; Spenser’s are positive virtues). The Liber Primus, in which the Tale of Florent is placed, cautions

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loathly lady represents.

31 This might be epitomised by the Cavalier carpe diem theme, a particularly grabby genre. Celebration of the seizure of any given moment endorses that snatch which constitutes sexual assault. Gower is alert to the power inequity which fosters plucking. He exemplifies a medieval non ultra conservatism which, from a twentieth-century perspective, seems less ruinous than the plus ultra celebrated during the Renaissance.
against Pride. Gower heralds an essentialism at the start of the *Liber Primus*, stating that since he is unable to rectify the unevenness of the world at a macrocosmic level, he will deal with something concerning “every kinde,” “and that is love.” A longing to “setten al in evene,” and “in balance” are the lexical signallers in the opening sentence of the *Liber Primus* to Gower’s concerns about fairness. The *Liber Primus*’s first words are: “I may noght strecche up to the hevene / Min hand, ne setten al in evene / This world, which evere is in balance [...].” Gower endorses hierarchy, and does not challenge set order by promoting a topsy-turvy, woman-on-top model, as recommended by Chaucer’s Wife of Bath. But he is alert to abuse within the patriarchal model of society, and cautions against power abuse within personal politics. If a male lover cannot control his service to Venus, he should abandon his suit.

Although secular love is the avowed theme of his framing, as pilgrimage is in Chaucer’s, Gower’s love requires confession, a confession that has a final rejection of lust. This proves to be because this poet/lover is too old, so that here it is the consideration of age, and the turning of the lover towards death and the care of his soul, that deflates the power of the sexual impulse. In contrast, Chaucer’s companionable unification of religious and profane love, and his ease with physicality as the incarnation of religious impetus, serves to align sex with a will-to-live, to forgive frailty (including foolishness) and to enfold fleshliness within a divine scheme. Gower, with a more suspicious approach to lust, and even to the sophistication of courtly love, reproves exploitation and
self-deception. He warns that love governs by a law which is chaotically excessive or sparse, "For loves lawe is out of reule, / That of tomoche or of tolite [...]." Positing love's law as "out of reule" intensifies the dictatorial bind of a quantitatively unbalanced emotion. Gower cautions would-be courtly lovers to introspection, and to a need to cleanse themselves. He considers that things would be better "setten al in evene," and implies that this is the task of love. The courtly lover must interrogate his motivation, acknowledging a need for purity of intent. Such advice arguably serves feminist interests. Although Gower is not promoting a feminist agenda, his consistent and steady sense of social responsibility puts him on a vector with first wave feminists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. First wave feminists campaigned to de-sexualise a society whose male-oriented obsessions disadvantaged women. Moral Gower's identification of the downside of erotic love--distraction from what is more important--is made in the name of generic man but is particularly applicable to women. Chaucer and Gower signal from the fourteenth century an awareness of feminine perspective, and an interest, even a sympathy, with this potential extension of ways of seeing.

Perhaps it is Gower's mistrust of the courtly lover's motivation which ensures that the horror of the sexually active grotesque is fully and almost

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32 An example is New Zealand suffragist Edith Searle Grossmann, who, in her novelistic diptich In Revolt (1893) and Hermione: A Knight of the Holy Ghost (1907), has heroine Hermione Carlisle leave her sadistic husband, to join the women's movement and campaign for sexual purity (amongst other feminist ideals), preaching to young men, but with a message most clearly in the interest of women. Her project is curiously similar to Gower's. See Lillian Faderman for the suggestion that women have been gulled into merely being more accessible as accessories to male self-indulgence, losing the possibility of intimate female friendship in the process.
tragically developed in the Tale of Florent. In Chaucer, the Wife as author of the hag osmotically merges with her, and personal power politics within marriage thus become foregrounded; in Gower’s telling the lack of this marital context, and the innocence of Florent, makes the repulsion of the enforced sex act a more central feature. The nexus of the tale is the testing of the virtuous male protagonist by the degradation of sexual objectification.

Of all the versions, Gower’s most accurately captures the disgust of an unwanted sexual partner, by establishing Florent’s reasonableness and courtesy, and by placing details of the hag’s loathsomeness at the moment when the two are alone, the drama is over, and the price of his life must be paid by Florent with his flesh. The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell in contrast has a lengthy description as soon as Ragnell first appears in the text, so when she meets Arthur. This is more fitting according to the logic of storytelling, in which description accompanies introduction. But in Florent’s Tale she is first presented, seen by Florent, as

    a creature,
    A lothly wommannysch figure,
    That forto speke of fleisch and bon
    So foul yit syh he nevere non (l 1529-32).

This conjures something subhuman in the first noun “creature,” and in the figure who is “womanish” rather than “a woman.” Her degree of foulness is also related to Florent--it is worse than anything he had ever seen--rather than to the author by the formulaic “foul beyond the power of words to describe.” But it is not a long description detailing all her defects. Sensitive dramatic timing
provides a detailed anti-blazon equivalent to the *Wedding*’s when the “wofull” Florent returns to the loathly lady to take her as wife. This does not occur when she first enters, and her entrapment has not yet begun, but at a point when the audience know that Florent’s enforced sex act is immanent. The timing enhances the sense that Florent is a polite young man who pays little attention to the hag’s unfortunate form until his engagement approaches the sexual consummation. Her ugliness is revealed as his destiny.

After an eighteen-line portrait of “the lothlieste what / That evere man caste on his yhe” (l. 1676-77) Florent’s horrid moment of truth immediately arrives: “Sche proferth hire unto this knyht” (l. 1693). Awareness of the dilemma of this moment gives another parallel with Chaucer, when Gower speculates “Bot godd wot how that sche him pleseth / Of suche wordes as she spekth” (l. 1698-99). In the *Merchant’s Tale*, Chaucer similarly intervenes as author after the graphic description of the aging January upon his wedding night to exclaim “But God woot what that May thoughte in hir herte” (*MerT* 1851). Both allot God the responsibility of being the only witness of the despair of the individual heart during the reluctant payment of an unfortunate sexual debt. Chaucer’s sympathy for May is more convincing than Gower’s for Florent by a few “thikke brustles” (a little more than a whisker), but Gower’s timing, and his invocation of God as the only witness, comparably solicits sympathy for Florent at the brink of sexual abuse.

The hag’s next move escalates her sexual predation as she grabs Florent’s bridle, a metaphysical seizure of control (and an action which fore-
images the Venus of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, and Titian's painting).\(^3\)
The horrid power of the Irish sovereignty hag is also implicated in this control interception. Gower gives a quick God's-eye look into Florent's heart: "Him thenkth welnyh his herte brekth / For sorwe that he may noght fle" (l. 1700-01). The vulnerability of Florent's mortal flesh motivates the analogy of a sick man seeking "his hele" (l. 1703) by accepting bitter medicine, which is parallel to taking sorrow with "ii kyne," in order to live. Age is a consideration; Florent's youth shall be cast away on one who "is old and lothly overal" (l. 1713). Once the hag has seized his bridle, Florent "for pure gentilnesse" (l. 1721) places her in front of him on his horse, and sets off sighing often. He does have control of the procedure to the extent that he is the rider and the hag is a passenger, but because he is performing her will, his masculine skills are subjected to her direction. As he loses agency, Florent withdraws into despair in reverse proportion to the hag's eagerness at her own ascendancy. Taking whatever compromise is available, and it is small, he travels by night, hiding away each day, until he reaches his castle.

The hag's accomplishment of sexual entrapment has an inherent irony in the gender of the hag and her groom: in any patriarchal system in which wealth and power is in the control of men, it is more usually a young woman who is subjected to reluctant intercourse with an older male under some form of social

\(^3\) Olsen proposes that there is an intended pun on bridle and bridal, which "alludes to the theme of 'forced marriage' [...] and calls attention to the fact that the woman 'tries to reverse the positions of the sexes' [...]" (44). This reversal is true too for Shakespeare's Venus and Adonis relationship, which places his erotic titillation in some kind of alignment with the loathly lady tales.
or financial compulsion.\textsuperscript{34} The\textit{ Canterbury Tales} recurrently presents the dilemma of the young wife: May with her groom January, the dull-witted carpenter John and his lively Alison, and the Wife herself with her three good old husbands who convinced her that, once she had gained financial independence, a diet of bacon was not to her taste. As Chaucer does in the\textit{ Canterbury Tales}, in the\textit{ Confessio Amantis} Gower shows awareness of the more usual gendering of age discrepancy, and is critical of exploitation of an unbalanced power ratio.\textsuperscript{35} In the\textit{ Tale of Florent}, Gower observes that a man will take bitter medicine if his life depends on it. The asserted resignation, “bot nede he mot that need schal,” has a ring of proverbial authenticity which springs from a non-fictional world where those who must accept sexual coercion are usually not young knights, but rather women of lower status.

Within his own castle Florent is explicit about his situation, and the women there prepare his bride with a craft which only makes her shortcomings more conspicuous. The loathly lady has a bath and a rest, is arrayed “to the best,” but her hoar locks resist any comb, and she refuses to “be shore”; fully arrayed, she looks even “foulere on to se” (l. 1759). The narrative inches tantalisingly towards the wedding’s consummation; again Gower’s timing shows his control of the drama of the tale. The bride “began to pleie and rage” (l. 1764);

\textsuperscript{34} This continues to be true in the real world. See\textit{ Sexually Aggressive Women} for an analysis of coercive sex: cases of women transgressors are rare.

\textsuperscript{35} Perhaps the best example of this is that Gower condemns incest when a father forces his unwilling daughter in\textit{ Apollonius of Tyre}, but is surprisingly sympathetic when it occurs more innocently between brother and sister in the\textit{ Story of Canace}. The pathos of Gower’s Canace, the sister left to bear the burdens of a son and lethal paternal wrath, is emphasised to censure her father’s anger, and not the act of incest.
Florent finds nothing to laugh about. When she proffers him a kiss as a "lusti lady," Florent's response to the impending union is a catatonic withdrawal: "His body myhte wel be there, / But as of thoght and of memoire / His herte was in purgatoire" (l 1774-76). The slow progression of the tale at this point draws attention to Florent's mental agony. It is a purgatory which will lead him to heaven, although he expects hell.

Gower is explicit in getting the ill-matched couple into bed naked, with the light on, and with Florent at first turning the other way to avoid the sight of the hag. She embraces him, and prays that he turn back to her, reminding him "on that he seide / Whan that he tok hire be the hond" (l 1796-97). Florent has not been entrapped by a rash promise, but has knowingly chosen to live, yet his dilemma is protracted as he is called upon to honour his oath. At the centre of his torture "he lay stille as eny ston" (l 1794); his inaction shows his reluctance, and then her wheedling words insist that he keep his oath.

A textual ambiguity surrounds the moment of consummation. Florent "was set to his penance" (l 1879), while the loathly lady's words as she tells him to turn back demand marital relations: 'For now" sche seith, "we ben bothe on' (l1793). Florent, virtuous although unfortunate, constructed by a writer who is sympathetic towards victims of coercion, is drawn to the brink of surrender and rescued at the last moment. The narrative turns. Physical action matches the text: like a man in a trance Florent turns and finds his reward, the eighteen-year-old, lovely in his own terms as at first she was foul: "the faireste of visage / That
evere in al this world he syh” (l 1805-06). Opaque language effectively screens the climax.\footnote{Linda Barney Burke draws attention to the laughter which occurs at the happy moment of union, when “Echon with other pleide and lowh” (l.1854). She identifies this playful laughter as an instance when Gower shows that “natural laughter arises from the rightful happiness of an earthly society which conducts itself in accordance with God’s plan for mankind (50). I am grateful for her for amplifying the sound of bedroom laughter in Gower’s climax.}

So the step-daughter freed from a spell steps out of loathly form to play and laugh with her groom, and Florent finds himself wedded to a beautiful Sicilian princess, whose otherness is more acceptably Italianate rather than bestial. The rest of us must content ourselves with the final moral; the story is written as an exemplum,

To teche how that obedience
Mai wel fortune a man to love
And sette him in his lust above
As it befell unto this knyht. (l 1858 –60)

Objections that the knight is actually left with “plesance and joye ynowh” in terms of sexual fulfilment (as well as living long and faring well), are brushed aside in this closing reiteration of obedience and control over lust. The setting of oneself above lust is more than simply reining in any lust one might feel, it is the harsher requirement of subjecting the animal instincts of the body to exterior demands of honour. Something worldly works within the otherworldly framework of confession; Gower has foregrounded the shame and repulsion of sex with an undesired partner and now advises that it is appropriate for the mind to over-rule the body. Gower’s sympathy for those entrapped within a specifically sexual subordination to the will of another is an example of his understanding of morality.
The Irish Sovereignty Tales.

Since these tales's focus is on sovereignty and not heterosexual power politics, the sexually obedient hero wins the kingdom rather than a satisfying marriage." This alters the relationship between test and reward. In both Chaucer's and Gower's redactions, the reward for accepting grotesque female sexuality is marital bliss, so that the narrative sequence suggests the dramatisation of anxiety towards sexual maturation, the happy ending relates to sexual consummation, and the tale is more accessible psychologically as Everyman's. But in the Irish tales the reward lies in a different sphere from the test, one which isolates the protagonist as the one who will be king. At a stretch, the winning of a kingdom may be read as a metaphor for the achievement of adult control upon maturation, but even then the hero is initiated into individual adulthood, and not into a gratifying sexual function. In "Lughaidh Laidhe," when Laidhe awakes in the morning after his one-night stand with the transmuted goddess, "they" are alone on the hillside with their dogs. The plural pronoun tells that the other brothers are also present, but we have no other clues as to what they think happened, what they witnessed; they are reduced to

37 Having made a distinction between the Irish texts' sovereignty issue and the other medieval ones which focus more directly on marital power balances, I now acknowledge the overlap of the two conjured by the motto "the personal is the political." Examining evidence of how gender power politics in early Ireland might have actually worked, Bitel concludes: "The literati described an endemic war between the sexes, but the profound political symbolism with which they charged sexual conflict--and, vice versa, the way they read politics as sexual, erotic, even pornographic--makes clear the literati's most precious assumption about the society around them. They believed that men and women, working amiably together, created not only a couple, a family, and a community, but a kin group, a kingdom, and an entire cosmos. As a result, neither man nor woman was less responsible for, valuable, or dangerous to the working of the world" (227-28). The personal and political inevitably interrelate in the loathly lady tales.
contendants who were unsuccessful so are no longer relevant to the story. Yet this moment of awakening has the feel of a shamanistic initiation ritual—the reality shift is akin to those of psychosis or hallucinogenic drug use—and what is most evident is the isolation of the king-to-be as he undergoes his exchange with the hag. Whatever did or did not happen, the experience was his alone. In the same way, Niall’s response to the hag at the well is more apt than his half-brothers’, seemingly because of the harshness of his birth beside the well of the royal household, where his mother is compelled to draw water through her pregnancy and labour. This previous trial of his abandonment at the well controlled by a jealous stepmother seems to temper Niall so that he is the one who knows how to handle the hag who will deny water unless given a kiss; his brothers’s more secure childhood as legitimate princely sons sets them as less capable in contrast. Thus although Niall wins the kingdom and dominance, his isolation as hero is emphasised; his superiority is predicated upon his former abjection. The Irish tales contrast Chaucer’s and Gower’s by telling the story as a personal Bildungsroman rather than a romance. This effectively distances Laidhe and Niall from their sexual acts, which are tests but which will not be either king’s ongoing destiny.

In both tales the sex act is separated from social mores. A one-off performance on a hill-side rather than marriage is demanded by the Corca Laidhe hag, who is menacing in her huge size as well as in her verbal threat to the group of brothers. She seems non-human in her monstrosity, rather than
being of a problematically low social cast, or an extreme of mortal unattractiveness. In contrast to the sympathy solicited for Florent, an equally innocent hero, who expects to endure a future of contracted marriage to an ugly hag, the Corca Laidhe invokes the peril of immediate danger, rather than the depressing prospect of a ridiculous future. Humour is sardonic, with supernatural eeriness as the main tone. Niall's hag is diseased rather than vast like Lughaidhe's; there is no humour. Instead the recurring well/water motif promotes the dual discourses of syncretism. Niall's willingness to engage with the hag, whom he leaps upon immediately, awards the well-spring of the pagan goddess a greater upsurge. Since Niall is trading for the immediate relief of water, there is no ongoing relationship with his pustular hag. Both tales are about one night stands of significance in a non-sexual arena: kingship.

In the “Lughaidh Mal,” sex is postponed, perhaps through a sense of modesty in the composer, so that Laidhe's spoken willingness to engage rather than his actual physical connection with the huge hag wins the kingdom for one of his sons, unborn at the time of the tale. Because the hag states adamantly in her “evil speech,” “One of you will lie with me tonight” (73), the deferral is something of a let-down. The sex act will occur not “tonight,” but a generation on from the textual present; as readers, we are fobbed off.

The poem does provide a haggish spectacle, the pitiful deed and ugly exhibition which she makes, maddening the senses and reason of the sons of Daire. In Chaucer, this is replaced by the pillow sermon, that is, by reasonable, even sanctimonious, speech, while in Florent the hag insists on what is owed to
her by oath, so that a quasi-legal claim is her medium of proposal. But in “Lughaidh Mal,” the loathly lady exposes herself, showing rather than telling. The fairy Trymour’s erotic display of herself is a parallel; both are unsolicited strip shows instigated by the female to compel the man she wants. The difference is that Triamour’s physical exposure is attractive, while the hag not only puts on a show, shameless as to how pitiful and ugly this is, she puts it on to impress her immediate audience with the extent of her menace. Ignominious death is suggested, in Lughaine’s offer to be the only one of them who is to be “lost.”

Sexual deferral also means that the the ruddy cheeks, round breasts and radiant eyes of the transformed figure are not posited as a redemption, in the way that Chaucer presents the recuperative moment of change in an ecstatic frenzy, with the knight’s “herte bathed in a bath of blisse” (WBT 1253). Because there is no sexual consummation, the female figure is held back at a distance. Again she makes a display of total nudity, which parallels the earlier haggish “ugly exhibition” made to excite. At this point she is curiously both the old woman, and the fair damsel whose skin is so radiant as to be a source of light: “The purple beautiful covering was removed / From her breasts down, by the old woman, / So that a flesh-worm could be taken out / In the house by the light of her fair skin” (75). Here the scintillating superimposition of two images—“old woman” and “fair skin”—bears resemblance to the technique in The Dream of the Rood, when glittering jewels on the cross are also glittering drops of blood. Both texts convey a sense of hallucination at the moment of revelation. The
powerful double vision is symptomatic of a miraculous spiritual transaction: of
divine revelation betokening eternal salvation with the Dream of the Rood; and
a quasi-divine revelation of future kingship in the Corca Laidhe. The
simultaneous sightings of flesh in weakness (gouts of Christ's blood, and the
female grotesque) and treasure (jewels, and the classical female beauty)
seems to be the textual representation of epiphany.

Appropriate reaction to this second display of nudity is not guided by
authorial assessment, as in the "pitiful" and "ugly" of the earlier showing. Instead
the transmutation involves the closing down of the titillation potential of the
naked maiden, by the fire, in the house, with the men. Focus shifts away from
the corporeality of this figure to her symbolic role. But before we leave the
semiotic system of the female body, the grotesquery of haggish display, and the
beamy eyes which prefigure those of the Renaissance beloved lady, we are
reminded of how nasty the body can be. The use of "the removal of a flesh-
worm," as the task requiring light which shows how lustrously the fair skin
glows, adds to the sense of strangeness of this moment. The transformation
from hag to fair damsel is tainted with the unpleasant physicality which the poet
chooses, even though it is irrelevant to either the narrative or to description. I
speculate that the flesh-worm that could be taken out by the light of the
maiden's fair skin makes an allegory of desire rendered excisable, a paradigm
of Gower's precautioning against lust. Gower's concern about the morality of
personal power relationships motivates his warning, while the Irish tale
subordinates the hero's personal gratification to his business of kingship.
When the sex act does occur in “Lughaidh Laidhe,” it happens decisively and with little authorial intervention to build suspense, or to convey the emotions of the hero. The Corca Laidhe account of sex is thus simpler in redaction than in either Chaucer or Gower: Lughaidh “went with her into the house for food and drink” and “after this she lay down” in her silver bed and he “lay down after her in the bed” (79). Sex occurs only after the lady's transformation, a pattern in the tales. As soon as Lughaidhe lies in the bed, “it appeared to him that the light of her countenance was as the sun rising in the month of May, and the fragrance of her was as the smell of a flower garden,” and “After this he cohabitated with her” (79). The clarity of this is such that if it were desirable to see an Ur-tale, it would be one in which transformation occurs once the male has conceded to female demands, but before actual sexual consummation. He is pulled back from the brink.

**Thomas of Erceldoune.**

This story is not entirely in line with the others in that the sexual act is contracted mutually; Thomas’s coition occurs before the change rather than afterwards; and the transition of the female body at the moment of intercourse is from lovely to loathly. The lady warns Thomas first that this will be the effect of his way-side dalliance, but his enthusiasm for play entices him to partake of folly. Thomas is the one who pushes for sex, the lady merely consents, dismounting from her palfrey. Yet similarities between this tale and the others makes their differences a point of leverage: Thomas’s sexual relationship with
the fairy queen is both the direct cause of her transition, and what puts him in her jurisdiction. His fall into the control of the fairy queen due to his insistence upon having carnal knowledge of her proves to be a fortunate one. Having endured a period of testing, he remains the protégé of his lady, and she saves him from becoming a fee for the foul fiend by returning him to earth. Thomas and his lady survive the folly of cross-species casual sex: the fairy queen appears to successfully dupe her king, who does not discover her duplicity, and Thomas goes back to his own people able to prophesy the outcome of future battles, having been given a new skill which is significant in the arena of international politics. As with the Irish sovereignty hag, the sexual interlude marks the endorsement of future sovereignty by an other-worldly female.

The exchange is based upon mortal expectation of gender relations nonetheless. In his account, Thomas is explicit in first judging his lady according to the Mary or Eve dichotomy of women. Ignoring the arrows and hounds which signal that she is a hunter, a depiction associated with the virgin goddess Diana rather than the Virgin Mary, Thomas believes that the lustrous lady is “Mary of might, / That bore the childe that died for me” (75-6). He is anticipating that his dream vision will be a Christian miracle. Meeting her, he kneels, and begs her pity as the “Queen of Heaven” (88). Her first word is his name, evidence of her omniscience, but she immediately disavows his apostrophe:

Thomas, let such words be,
For Queen of Heaven am I not,
I never took such high degree.
I am of another country,
That I be pearled most of price,
I ride over this livelong leye,
My rachets run at my device. (90-6)
Since fairy ladies do hunt and the Virgin does not, Thomas is showing a naivete
perhaps akin to Chaucer's narrator, Chaucer the pilgrim.

The poem's Thomas is a conspicuously rural example of human kind
inhabiting "this livelong leye." Having shown that he was not adept at reading
the semiotics of splendid dress by missing the hunting accessories, he
volunteers the presumption that a wealthy woman wandering loose must be
seeking sexual dalliance:38 "If you be […] / And ridden here in rove folly / Of
love, Lady, you bin nice" (97-9). Thomas wastes no time in taking advantage of
this situation, asking "Give me leave to lie you by" (100). There is a sense of a
man telling the tale to other men, strutting to set forth his direct approach to this
roving prize.

The lady cautions Thomas that "that were folly" (101), mirroring back to
him his own assessment of her behaviour in riding forth. Both prove to be right;
both indulge in folly. Although the lady cautions Thomas specifically that he "wil
fordo al my beauty" (104), telling him "thou wilt me mar" (117) and "al my beauty
thou wilt spil" (120), he presses his case, plighting his troth. Thomas thus
pursues what she has called folly against her warning; she endorses his
assessment that she rides "in rove folly" by alighting to grant him all his will. The
poem is a confirmation of folly.

The narrative voice moves further from the first person, giving the story
itself the authority at the point when coition takes place not just once, but seven
times: “As the story tells full right, Seven times by her he lay” (123-4). The lady reprovingly prays “let me be,” blaming Thomas for marring her, and he is dismayed to find that she has changed for the worst. Her apparel is gone, her eyes seem out and her body like lead, with one leg black, the other grey. At the same time she collects on his promise to always dwell with her, grimly advising him to take leave of middle earth. Thomas prays to Mary, who seems unable or unwilling to save him from his fate, and, commending his soul to Jesus, he is led in underneath the hill, where it “was murk and way ful ill” (171). The folly of dalliance with this shining woman who is not Mary puts Thomas under the influence of the fairy queen, and it seems that heaven loses interest in him as he kneels to lament that “All my games away be gone” (164). In this version sex is not instantly redemptive but damning.

Only by proving himself obedient to his lady does Thomas redeem the situation; he survives a test which is like an initiation trial: a three-day trip wading through water with the “sweyings of the flood” in his ears, to an extraterrestrial garden where he is warned not to eat the fruit despite his hunger, and, with his head on the lady’s lap, he is shown the ways to paradise, to hell, to the states in between, and to fairy land. The conclusion of this visionary showing is, however, grubbily prosaic: Thomas is to keep his mouth shut when he is taken to fairy land so that the fairy lady’s husband, the king, will not know about their sexual exchange. With Thomas having passed the tests she has set
him in this chthonic journey, she regains her beautiful shape, becoming “again also faire and good, / And also fresh on her palfray” (235-6), and blowing her horn “with main and mood” as she enters the hall of the castle. Her clamour as she returns to her own world suggests that she is bold there as queen, and that the escapade with Thomas has not affected her confidence adversely in confronting her court and her king, with his thirty-three barons in attendance. Her brazen approach is combined with continued patronage of Thomas, and the king is left in the background. The compromised position is not enlivened by the drama of revenge, and proves to be to Thomas’s advantage. Since Launfal’s fairy princess is also more constant to her lover than he is to her, forgiving him for breaching her prohibition and boasting of her in court, one might conclude that, despite the reputation for fickleness, fairy women are kind and steady towards their mortal consorts.

The lady returns Thomas to earth to avoid his ending up as the fee paid to “a foule fiend” (289), and he thus survives his chthonic experience. The trip began with the lady alighting “Underneath the green wood spray” (122) to give Thomas his way, and he returns a wiser man to “the green wood spray” (298). The tree of Adam and Eve’s fall seems a seriously liminal root stock to this foliage bower, yet use of the light-hearted word “spray” is a flourish which insists that the pleasures of middle earth, including casual sex in the bushes, ought to have a place in the larger scheme.

The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell.
Here Gawain is fully characterised as loyal to Arthur, chivalrous, and virile when he is called upon to marry the monstrous Ragnell.39 Gawain’s vow to “do more / Then for to kisse” (638-9) as a response to Ragnell’s demand “Shewe me your cortesy in bed” (630) is enough to break Ragnell’s spell. When he turns towards her to make good his promise, she is already “the fairest creature / That evere he sawe” (641-2). In this instance the missing leaf of the manuscript precedes this section. It seems likely that when there are missing sections at a probably titillating moment they have been removed because they contained explicit material. Nonetheless, here it would seem that at most the missing leaf contained a description of the haggish Ragnell being suggestive as an unseemly bride. Sands’s observation that the missing section “probably noted how the wedded couple left Arthur’s hall and retired to the bridal chamber” (Sands 341) is plausible. What immediately follows the gap tells us that Gawain did not kiss or have sex with Ragnell before she became fair.

But this version elaborates more than any other version on the pleasures of sex which follow the transformation. After explaining about her enchantment--“For I was shapen by nigramancy, / Withe my stepdame” (691-2)—Ragnell, who

39 Although the Wedding is not as intricate and descriptive as Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, the hero is recognisably the same Gawain of green girdle fame. The green girdle is an emblem with an instability of signification. It is firstly a love token, then a talisman protecting from harm, then Gawain declares it a sign of his shame in dishonouring his contract with the Green Knight (although he honours his promise to the Green Knight’s lady as he breaks male honour), and finally it is taken up by the Round Table as a sign of their respect for Gawain and of their own unity. (See Ross Arthur for explication of the medieval sign theory behind the girdle.) The tale of Gawain’s wedding to Ragnell is concerned with all of the chivalric indictments which the girdle emblems: with the need for good grace around unrequited love, with male conflict of interest (seen in Sir Gromer’s land claim), with the imperatives of male loyalty between Arthur and Gawain, with the conflict of loyalty between male and female bonding found in Gawain’s adoration of Ragnell, and with the knitting together of the court’s community.
has pursued Gawain to break her spell, also initiates their love, inviting “Kiss me, Sir Knighte, evin now here, / I pray thee, be glad and make good chere” (703-4). It is significant that she gives her own well-being (implicitly due to her securment of Gawain) as her reason: “For welle is me begon” (705). With Ragnell’s good fortune as a basis, the couple immediately set about making what Ragnell calls “good chere”; that “they made joye oute of minde” (706) suggests the transcendental.

The poet declares that their joy is “reason and cours of kinde,” a claim for propriety and naturalness which might be tainted with hegemonic prescription were it not protesting in the face of Ragnell’s special “kinde,” that is, recently monstrous. In contrast to the Corca Laidhe, where the duality of form at the moment of transformation signals an epiphany, here it is tainted with the Christian apprehension of evil. Gawain’s initial reaction to Ragnell’s fair form is an exclamation registering his alarm by invoking Jesus: “A, Jhesu! [...] whate are ye?” (644). The question reaches into the part of the imagination where devils lurk. The grotesque was not a problem for Gawain, but having earlier boasted that he would wed Ragnell “Thoughhe she were a fend, / Thoughhe she were as foule as Belsabub” (344-5), as she offers him anything, with “What is your wille?” (643), he seems startled by the possibility that he might have bitten off more than he can chew. Her content rather than her appearance alarms him; her mutability immediately suggests to Gawain that she may be quite literally a fiend. Thus fright is his response to her first solicitation in her fair shape.

Ragnell’s seductive offering--an open mind towards sexual preferences--is
countered by his alarm. We might allow that the poet's assurance that their joy is in line with the "cours of kinde" is prompted by a degree of insecurity in this context, rather than being a formulaic endorsement of essentialism.

Amongst this mind-blowing experience of joy, Ragnell thanks God and Mary, and Gawain overtops her by thanking the Saviour especially: "of alle oure Savioure" (713). Gawain seems to take control by reinscribing the masculine, with a reassertion of the Son of the Trinity over a less specific God, and over Mary, who represents the feminine principle of the set. This bedroom tableau adumbrates John Donne's mix of sexual epiphany and sanctification, and we have no doubts that Gawain and Ragnell have a good pattern of love, for, "With joye and mirthe they wakid tille daye" (715). When Ragnell would rise Gawain forbids her, and she agrees that they should lie in and sleep.

They are disturbed by Arthur and the "sirs" he addresses when he expresses his concern for Gawain's safety in the bedroom with Ragnell:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{let us go and assaye} \\
\text{If Sir Gawaine be on live} \\
\text{I am fulle ferd of Sir Gawen} \\
\text{Nowe lest the fende have him slain.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(722-25)

Thus the court brotherhood of "alle" come to the chamber to confront the blissful couple. When Gawain shouts at this crowd of knights who come to inspect "Abide, ye shalle see the door undone," the moment is recognisable as one when young lovers reluctantly acknowledge their enclosure within a community with the immediate need to get out of bed. Gawain's statement is also ambiguous; he might be inviting them to inspect the sheets to see evidence of "the door undone." (The Squire of Low Degree exploits this euphemism with
repeats of "undo your door!") Thus Gawain's wedding, and his joy, are placed in social context. We see that the court is entitled to know about the consummation, to share vicariously in the lover's joy, and to celebrate Gawain's unlocking of Ragnell's door.

Gawain, introducing his beautiful wife with her knee-length hair as red as gold wire to Arthur, reminds him that he is indebted to her: "Sir, this is my wife, Dame Ragnelle, / That savid onis your life" (746-67). Amongst the "game, revelle and play" (757) as the court shares Gawain's jubilation, the story is told again within the tale. Arthur tells them all that Ragnell saved him from death, and tells the queen about Sir Gromer, and Gawain tells them all about Ragnell's transformation. She tells how Gawain saved her, and the two make vows before the court which are equivalent to a genuine marriage rather than the farce of the enforced marriage. The marriage bed joy stimulates a climax of story-telling.

The tale does not end with the closure of a socially endorsed wedding. There is the continuity of a son, "a good knighte of strengthe and kin / And of the Table Round" (800-1), and ongoing marital bliss: "Gawen lovid that lady Dame Ragnelle; / In alle his life he lovid none so welle" (805-6). His conversion to the pleasure of heterosexuality dislodges his homosocial affinities, and he no longer hangs out with the boys at jousts, to Arthur's amazement ("Therat

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There is a parallel to the taking up of green-garter wearing at the end of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight; Gawain's sexual experiences are enclosed within the homosocial framework of the court. Matthews champions Gawain as the knight of the Goddess, proposing that "he becomes so through winning the Beheading Game" (91). He continues, "He has but one more test to undergo, before beginning his greatest adventure— that of his marriage to the earthly representative of the Goddess" (91). While there are certainly comparisons to be drawn between Ragnell and the Green knight as testers of Gawain, the similarities extend to the relationship of test and tester to the courtly society: both are integrated.
mervailed Arthoure the king" [810]). The limitation of Ragnell’s life-span to only five more years sets Gawain free for knightly adventure, and for more marriages, for “Gawen was weddid oft in his days” (832). Ragnell is sacrificed to the narratorial demands of a sequence; Gawain, virile, courteous, and willing to change his way of life because he appreciates the value of a good woman, is too valuable a hero to give up to domesticity.

The Ballads.

Like other narrative epiphanies—treachery, death, ghostly visitation—sex is dealt with briskly in ballads, although in some it is represented by the lacuna of erasure, presumably marking an interest in good taste. I will deal with the ballads separately, here just considering what pertains to sexual content. The kiss which transforms is a ubiquitous folkloric motif.

Child identifies “Kemp Owyne,” and relates it to other similar ballads, by the hero's transformative kiss which releases a spell-bound maiden (306-13). Child cites others of this type: an Icelandic saga in which the maid under a “heavy weird” is a “nondescript monster” possessing a sword which the hero wants, and will risk a kiss to get; a Danish ballad about a lamia, in which kissing the little grass snake releases the maiden within; and a ballad in Grundtvig's Icelandic collection in which the maid is first a linden tree, then a worm when the tree is cut down, and finally, upon the hero kissing the worm, a marriageable
maid. Isabel, despite bribing her designated spell-breaker to give her the three kisses she needs, does not marry him, nor does she seem to have sex with him. The detail that her breath grows strong when she is in her bestial form emphasises the physicality of her dilemma, but once she is smilingly in her true fair form the action stops. An exchange between the natural world and the cultural one takes place symbolically, and although arguably the kiss is euphemistic for sexual intercourse, a lack of innuendo makes this irrelevant in Kempe Owyne.

In contrast to this discretion, “Kempy Kay” (Child 33) revels in irreverent detail of a kiss which does seem to represent sex, performed by an equally grotesque couple, in an unusually equitable union."

> So aye they kissed, and aye they clapped,
> I wat they kissed weel;
> The slaver that hang between their mouths
> Wad hae tethered a twa year auld bill. (Child 303)

Sticky physical detail foregrounds Bakhtin’s "grotesque body" in a state of sexual arousal. The bull to be tethered by such drool makes a suitable sacrifice at the temple of Venus, for “Kemp Owyne” detaches profane love from classical beauty, as it perhaps should be detached, since the classical ideal has closed orifices, as Bakhtin reminds us. We are meant to be amused and repulsed, but there is a positive energy to Kempy Kaye’s reciprocal enjoyment of his large

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41 Child notes that the description of the lady “resembles that of the enchanted damsel who appeared to the courteous King Henrie” and speculates that “It is among possibilities that the ballad was an outgrowth from some form of the story of ‘The Marriage of Sir Gawain’” (Child 301). Kempy Kaye is “A clever and tall young man” who finds satisfaction in his bride, the “Fusome Fug” (302).
filthy bride, the Fusome Fug, which claims a textual space for uncomely good times.

Ugliness and a spectacular lack of personal hygiene marks Kempy Kaye's bride, but bad table manners are not a part of her portrait; she does not threaten by devouring the household pets as the loathly lady does in "King Henry" (Child 32). King Henry's royalty and the killing of a deer at the onset foster expectation that his partner will be related to the Irish sovereignty hag. Yet this ballad has erased the sexual act, instead foregrounding gluttony. King Henry's hospitality is tested, and his unstinting generosity wins him a lady who will "last wi" him until the day he dies, but instead of anything like the slathery sex of Kempy Kaye and his bride, vigorous repeats draw attention to the loathly lady's demand for food, making her appetite oral. There is a row of asterisks showing Child's identification of something missing between the lady's demand that Henry lie down by her side, and the dawn which reveals her fairness. In the last line of the ballad the lady commends Henry for giving her all her will, perhaps an expression of her sexual satisfaction amongst others.

There is a ballad version of the Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell: "The Marriage of Sir Gawain" (Child 31). As with King Henry, the sex act in this "Marriage" falls into the gaps of a manuscript with missing verses. Two differences from The Wedding seem significant, however. Firstly, Arthur immediately offers Gawain as groom, before the misshapen hag has even mentioned her need for payment. Arthur, king of the Round Table, seems unchivalrously eager to relocate the test from himself to Gawain. Secondly,
Gawain does make the choice between having his bride fair by day or by night: he chooses by night, when he will be able to play with her: "Yet I had rather, if I might, / Have thee fowle in the day." The presumption is that night is the time for private dalliance. This is the only version in which such a choice is decisively made by the male protagonist. But since the bride immediately bemoans that this will mean that she must hide herself during the day, missing fairs, and ale and wine, he relents and offers her "all thy will." Thus he gives her the choice not, as elsewhere, because of his own indecision (a mere inadequacy), but because he recognises her dilemma and concedes to her preference. This is both a courteous subjugation of his needs to hers, and evidence that sex is more important to Gawain than public appearances. He would prefer to personally enjoy his wife's fairness at night, for "play," than parade it publicly during the day to the knights (who are named earlier in the ballad when they recoil from the hag). The Gawain of this ballad knows what he wants, but more than that, he recognises Ragnell's needs for a pleasurable life beyond his bed. The version is fragmented and the bedroom scene denied, but a fullness is added to the generic story. Gawain is the hero who is sexually keen, but willing to allow his wife a better time at his own inconvenience. This is a promising chivalric moment.

42 Matthews defends Gawain as "the knight of the Goddess", and he declares valiantly, "In the majority of romances Gawain is shown as a lover of women—not as profligate, as some writers would have us believe, but as someone who genuinely respects the wisdom of the feminine" (98).
“The Knight and the Shepherd’s Daughter” (Child 110), has a heroine who effectively incorporates into one female protagonist the raped maiden at the start of the Wife of Bath’s Tale and the loathly lady who entraps the knight in marriage, providing the narrative satisfaction of seeing the victim herself take control of the rapist knight. The lady is the central character, and her maidenhead is central to her function as such. This ballad expands Chaucer’s tale with a more explicit rape at the beginning.

The knight declares to a shepherd’s daughter who “came triping on the way” (Child 459) that he will die that day if he does not have his will of her. The tripping maid, who in some versions is out minding sheep on a hill, is not quite skipping, but she is clearly innocent, girlish, and minding her own business. The knight’s declaration of fatal attraction puts the courtly convention of the male lover’s suffering into the parenthesis of snigger brackets; his base self-interest is transparent. She refuses, saying “The Lord forbid,” a prayer which proves ineffectual, since:

He took her by the middle so small,
And laid her down on the plain,
And after he had had his will,
He took her up again. (Child 459)

Although the maid has no agency during her rape, from this point she keeps her wits about her and takes control of the narrative. The Wife of Bath is pragmatic about the rape which launches her Tale: here the victim herself, back up on her feet, begins at once to redeem her situation, by finding out who the knight is, and setting about marrying him. Her tone is ambivalent when she asks: “Even as you are a courteous knight / Tel me what is your name” (Child 459); cynicism
in the guise of good manners is a paradigm for her astute manipulation of the
situation from this point on. The knight rides away, having avoided an early
death by heart-break caused by not getting his will. From the innocence of
“triping” the maid steps up her pace and runs after him, with sensible
methodology for handling the trappings of femininity: “She tuckt her kirtle about
her middle, / And run close by his side” (Child 459). Her “middle,” which is “so
small” when the knight seizes her by it, becomes useful as she gains back
control. When the “fair maid” comes to the “king’s fair court” (with repeats on
“fair” working sometimes ironically, sometimes to give social context throughout
this ballad), she tells the king that he has a knight who “This day hath robbed
me.” To the king’s enquiry about what has been stolen, she explains:

    He hath not robbed me, my liege,
    Of purple nor of pall;
    But he hath got my maidenhead,
    Which grieves me worst of all. (Child 460)

In this single explicit reference to maidenhead, to my knowledge, in these tales
predicated upon the shape-changing female body, the maid is clear about her
property rights to her flesh. The king seemingly agrees, declaring that if the
rapist “be a batchelor, / His body I’le give to thee” (Child 460). The king
redresses the theft of a significant piece of maidenly flesh with the whole body
of the thief: a masculine body, of noble rank, and described by the lady as “fair.”
While this “fair” is tinged with irony, it simultaneously suggests that she is
interested in him physically, and that her marital intention is not based entirely
on her need for the social status as wife once her maidenhead is taken.
When the knight bemoans that he must marry beneath him, blaming his misdeed on wine and ale, she insists that the fault is his, pointing out that:

A shepheard's daughter as I was,
You might have let me be;
I'd never come to the king's fair court
To have craved any love of thee. (Child 460)

In several versions this directness in reminding the knight that it was he who instigated the liaison is followed by the shepherd's daughter's insistence that the knight's house be refurbished to what she has "been used wi": with linsey clouts instead of holland sheets, and ram's horn spoons instead of silver. Her instruction makes it clear that she will actively resist the subsumption of her own low birth status into his higher one. To remind him of his new family connections she describes how her mother would boil and butter nettles, and then "Lay her head upon her dish-doup / And sleep like onie sow" (Child 463). He is increasingly agitated by the description of her low class reality; she repeatedly reminds him that he is in this situation because he violated her:

"O hold your tongue, ye beggar's brat,
My heart will brak in three;"
"And sae did mine on yon bonny hill-side,
Whan ye wad na let me be." (Child 463)

The bride's use of her low estate to reprove her husband makes an antidote to Chaucer's Griselda's patient submission, suggesting that even in an unequal marriage, a woman might retain her own identity, and establish her own presence as a balance to her husband's. This balladic bride consistently upholds low class values, and her own perspective, to reprimand his egocentric self-pity.
In a parallel to the loathly lady's marriage bed transformation, this shepherd's daughter turns out to be a princess--in some versions she is the King of Scotland's daughter--and at the end of the tale the knight is jubilant to find "both purse and person too" in his command. Closure at the point of masculine pleasure is mitigated by the control of this maiden, who has run and swum to keep up with the knight, and has verbally outwitted him, as well as reiterating her moral superiority. Despite the dissimilarities--this princess is in lowly disguise rather than in loathly flesh--she has inherited some of the Irish sovereignty hag's agency.

But she is clearly mortal, for the narrative is structured around her maidenhead. The king judges this to be equal to the knight's whole body, where both are metonymic (the maidenhead signifies the first time of penetrative sex and thus the prize of virginity, the knight's body his role as husband). The shepherd's daughter recuperates from her rape by successfully claiming recompense for the theft of her maidenhead; her shape-changing is at the level of social status. The maidenhead, token of virginity when whole, becomes the token of her abuse when broken. Marriage as recompense lodges the personal and somatic sexual violation within a social context. All of this is in keeping with the real world outside of the text, in which the interior body-part of the young woman is often frighteningly critical to her community status. Because a shape-changing lady is an emblem of escape from social definition of women according to shape, the discretion surrounding her hymen in all other versions is appropriate to her potential to elude.
Although there is no textual invitation to consider this curious body part in the other texts in which the loathly lady is found, it can be seen as the key (or should that be lock?) to her shape-changing body. The extremities of loathliness and loveliness which this one entity embodies are matched by, and are signs of, her correlative traits of aberrance and compliance. The intact or broken hymen is the intimate, internal evidence of carnal knowledge or ignorance. Although in many instances (both textually and in real life) the intact hymen of virginity is a sign of female independence from men, in terms of discourse which has the comic ending of marriage, virginity is an ideal in a bride. The dichotomy of maidens and experienced women falls within the paradigms of loveliness and loathliness, complicity and aberrance: maidens are lovely, virginal, and complicit; women with previous experience are loathly, independent, and aberrant. The hymen signals which kind of bride is bedded. The loathly lady changes her external form, but within holds a truth about her identity which is not revealed as part of her story. It is not revealed usually because it is not finally important: whether the loathly lady is a bespelled maiden or an independent shape-changer, by claiming sovereignty—that is, control within her personal relationship—she over-rides the signification of the troublesome membrane.

As goddess, the Irish sovereignty hag is above the restraints of a maidenhead. On the other hand, Dame Ragnell is presumably a virgin maiden who is under a spell, so has an intact hymen, and the same is true of Florent’s bride. But Chaucer’s Wife’s hag seems closer to the Irish sovereignty hag than
to Ragnell, in being in control of her own form. Although at the end of the *Wife’s Tale* the bride is compliant, “good and trewe” (*WBT* 1243), her personal amusement at the commencement of the bedroom scene, when she “lay smylynge evermo” (*WBT* 1086), leads me to presume that if she did provide herself with a hymen upon adapting the form her knight would prefer, it was only to humour him. She is the figure who represents women in manipulation of their heterosexual exchange, both as active wooer and as a successful faker of virginity.

When the loathly lady as an active wooer is a beautiful young woman under an evil spell--so essentially lovely--her motivation is to break the spell which imprisons her in monstrous form. Antiochus from *Apollonius of Tyre* teaches suspicion towards the potential of riddles to encode the unspeakable, and this is a riddle tale in which the successful suitor breaks the spell of loathsomeness which originates in the parental home: arguably it is a submerged incest tale. But rather than bringing forth the incest theme, I observe the more evident employment of the metaphor of heterosexual love as a kind of redemption, and while this is a cultural prescription which I suspect is not always helpful, it is encouraging to see that here the young woman takes up the sexual initiative to free herself from a bad spell.\(^4\) Furthermore, in the *Wedding of Sir Gawain* and in some ballad versions, the hag's willful insistence on public

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\(^4\) Christian use of the metaphor of marriage to describe Christ's relationship with his church, and with the individual, affects marital relations by offering a paradigm in which the husband is infinitely superior to the wife, and saves her through his acceptance of her. The erotic meditation in Book Seven of the *Ancrene Wisse* of Christ as the lover knight is one example of the complex two-way traffic between ideas of religious and profane love.
display at the wedding, and the repeated teasing of the knight in his torment as
unwilling groom, ensures that even when the hag really is a damsel unmaking
the magic which imprisons her, she has enough confidence in her own control
to indulge in some fun at her groom’s expense while she rescues herself. These
bespelled maidens avoid behaving like the desperate seekers one might
expect them to be. Self-restoration involves matrimony, so is predicated upon
successful relationship with a man, but the degree of control which the
bespelled maiden demonstrates subordinates her virginity to her mastery, and
to her desire for fun.

Pleasure is important to hags. When the loathly lady is not a young
woman under a curse--so is not essentially a beautiful young lady--she seems
to be motivated entirely by the desire to play. That the outcome of the Irish
sovereignty hag’s sexual dalliance is the determination of mortal sovereignty
makes her play serious, but there is still a promotion of a feminine pleasure
principle in her method of choosing. If man makes God in his own image, this
goddess is evidence of a healthy model of woman. Although the bespelled
maidens have a more immediate agenda of escaping their own monstrosity,
there is no ambivalence about their desire for marriage. The implication that
women enjoy sex is inherent in the figure of the loathly lady.

Given that they represent different-aged women, it is promising that there
exists so much similarity between the bespelled maidens (who are virgins
escaping family difficulties), and the independent shape-changers (who are not
virgins and who have command over their form). The hymen is not important
because female control is what is important, and this is ensured through active sexuality. This motif of the loathly lady, helpfully manipulated by Chaucer commands that not only active sexuality, but subjectivity, are options for the estate of women.

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"Bitel comments: "The war goddesses, along with other supernaturally powerful females in early Irish narratives, [...] were not incidentally female; their power derived from their sexuality. And just as femaleness on the battlefield drove men to kill each other, a dose of virility could cure an amazon of her viciousness or transform a wandering sovereignty figure from hag to trophy wife. Sex in the arsenal of women brought men down, but men could use sex as a weapon to tame war goddesses, beautify and domesticate hags, and reduce women warriors to docile concubines" (210-11). Elsewhere Bitel reports of medieval Irish thought, that, although the coupling of excessive lust was dangerous, "the only real cure for desire was also its symptom. A little sex, like a modern inoculation, could revive a patient consumed by the the heat of love" (69). This is in line with Henry Daniel's belief that once her womb is "fedde and fild" a woman is "noght so woode in herselfe [...] as sche was biform." Daniel offers the model of a hungry womb, which greedily sucks (7). Finally, Bitel finds the sovereignty myth to be about "sexual healing," which frames the coition in positive terms aligned to my own interpretation of the loathly lady."
Chapter Four

Spenser's Loathly Lady: Duessa.

Spenser's Duessa is included in this thesis because she is a shape-changer, a hybrid with a range of sources and precedents to match her fluidity of form.\(^1\) Her name signals duplicity and suggests a duality, but she is in fact multi-faceted.\(^2\) As well, she spreads through a range of other female characters, similarly to the way that the figure of Elizabeth (a primary audience written into the text) is situated through Gloriana, Una, Britomart and others. An element of Duessa's composition

\(^{1}\) Anthea Hume advises that Duessa "combines several literary traditions," including: "The classical enchantress Circe (Odyssey 10 Metamorphoses 14) [...] the Italian Renaissance versions of Circe, especially Alcina in Orlando Furioso [...]" and "the biblical Whore of Babylon described in Revelations 17 and 18," and feels that the exposure episode owes something to Isaiah 3.17,24 and 47.1-3 (229). D. Douglas Waters argues that Duessa is Mistress Misa, specifically the Catholic Mass. I agree with Hume that Waters's account needlessly narrows Duessa's signifying function. Hume does not include Chaucer's Wife of Bath's hag as a source, and I posit this essay into that gap. James Nohmberg gives an excellent analysis of Duessa as the Whore of Babylon and other biblical metaphors for spiritual adultery (225), observing that "It would be hard to improve upon 'a certain confusion of unities' as a definition of Duessa" (228). To this sense of multiplicity, if not confusion, I add the loathly lady motif. In Book V, Mary Queen of Scots is the historical figure for whom Duessa stands, which links Duessa to Acrasia and Radigund (see below). I am indebted to Kerby Neill for pointing out that Acrasia is another candidate for Mary (192). Roland M. Smith strengthens Duessa's Irish connection by claiming that "the name Duessa is more incontrovertibly Irish than the name Una" (917). (Smith cites Dubheassa, Dubesa, Dubeasa, and Dubesba as names, concluding that "dub" = "black" is added to Esa, a woman's name, and that the English spelling of this would be Duessa, when the "bh" of Dubheasa losing the b to the aspirant.) He notes, and I reiterate, that Spenser's classical training is more in evidence than his use of Irish or popular motifs, but I see evidence through out the Faerie Queene that Spenser takes pleasure in etymological and tropic amalgamations.

\(^{2}\) Alastair Fowler cites Duessa's name as evidence of names which "openly announce their Pythagorean import" (4). However, I find her to have more than two faces.
neglected by critics to date is that she is an archetype of the same ilk as the Wife of Bath's loathly lady, whose coerced groom laments from his discomfort in the marriage bed, "thou are so loothly and so old also" (WBT 1100), and akin to the Irish sovereignty hag, who, in the Corca Laidhe, is “uncouth and loathsome to behold” (O'Donovan 71).³ Chaucer’s hag embodies the Wife’s protofeminist principles towards marriage, telling and then demonstrating that women most want sovereignty in marriage and should be given it; once he concedes to the hag’s will, her knight ends up with “His herte bathed in a bath of blisse” (WBT 1253). The Irish hag is a personification of the land, conferring kingship upon a sexual partner of her choice, in a sovereignty myth which confirms that male subordination to female desire wins a kingdom. The loathly lady of the medieval tradition thus incarnates an alternative model to conventional constructions of gender, proving that the world is a better place when women are given what they want. Furthermore, the instability of the female body scrambles the semiotics of female flesh, in which beauty is at one end of a spectrum, and means the opposite of

³ Although Duessa is visibly modelled upon Alcina from Ariosto's Orlando Furioso, I explicate her similarity to the folkloric loathly lady. Spenser's knowledge of Chaucer's hag, and the Grail loathly lady of Arthurian legend (the British antiquity upon which his epic is founded), ensures that he is familiar with the motif; his use of popular cultural material elsewhere, and his superimposition of several sources, encourages this reading. Laurie A. Finke investigates Spenser's use of the Arthurain history as “cultural capital (211), noting that “the Tudor monarchs had exploited their links with Britain's Celtic pre-history” (212), that the Arthurian material “had the distinct advantage of enabling Elizabeth to forge a myth of legitimacy” (213), while observing Spenser's “plea for patronage” (215) in presenting Arthur as an “ideal patron” (214). Elizabeth's desire for legitimacy is another link to the Irish sovereignty myths, as are Elizabeth's two bodies—personal and politic—to the hag’s.
ugly old age. If, like Spenser's Lust (IV vii 4-32), the beauty myth has teeth destructive to the flesh of maidens, these teeth are drawn, or blunted, by the cheerfully aberrant loathly lady, and by the authorial endorsement awarded her in medieval representations.5

Spenser presents the shape-changing Duessa quite differently from his medieval precedents; this chapter considers Spenser's refigured inflection of the loathly lady motif. Spenser certainly knew the Wife of Bath's Tale; indeed, he introduces an illusion to it which I consider below. He makes use of folkloric motifs, such as the Bluebeard motto "Be Bold" in the House of Busirane; he may have known that the shape-shifting hag of balladry is associated with Irish nationality. Duessa is an embodiment of ideas about sovereignty, yet Spenser freights her with the allegorical cargo of things that he dislikes, and emphatically condemns her. Although she is tried in a court as Mary Queen of Scots on the allegorical level, this trial section is embedded between two Irish-based incidents in the Faerie Queene. Duessa's demise--the unusual twist which Spenser gives his loathly lady narrative--is partially directed towards English colonisation difficulties in Ireland. The Irish sovereignty dimension of the loathly lady is taken full circle; Irish self-determination is firmly rebutted as

4 All quotations are from Hamilton's The Faerie Queene.

5 See Wolf's The Beauty Myth.
Duessa is condemned. At the same time, Mary's alleged sexual activity is placed within flesh at its most grotesque, and executed. Spenser effectively knots the vectors of race and gender which intersect in this motif.

The loathly lady is a highly appropriate motif to disempower, given Spenser's underlying drive towards English sovereignty in the Elizabethan era. A. B. Gough introduces Book V of the Faerie Queene with the observation that it emerged at a time when "the rising national spirit awakened [...] a growing consciousness that the English language was capable of noble achievements" (vii). Helgerson begins his account of Spenser's quest for the form of English nationhood by setting out from a sentence in a letter Spenser wrote to Gabriel Harvey expressing desire for the English--"we"--to have "the kingdom of our own language" (1). Admiring and emulating Chaucer, Spenser changes the rules of earnest game so that he might work towards such a goal: the English kingdom which Elizabeth somehow inspired. Spenser uses the loathly lady to represent that which threatens that kingdom.

Elsewhere, in the medieval versions which precede the Faerie Queene, the loathly lady has a signifying excess to match her physical excess; here there is a similar kind of superfluity. Indeed, not only does

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6 Writing of the divine hag of the pagan Celts, Ross calls "Deviousness [...] one of the most typical and enduring characteristics of the Celtic temperament; and duality one of the most fundamental aspects of their religion" (140). The Irish sovereignty aspect of the loathly lady is embedded in Duessa, and vilified according to Spenser's concerns.
the shape of Spenser's Duessa shift, but her meaning shifts too. Writing
on Duessa, Hume concludes that "Spenser's whole treatment of Duessa
exhibits imaginative energy and flexibility, in that she functions
simultaneously as a vital character, a powerful personification, and on
occasion an historical individual" (230). Duessa is one of the more
complex figures of the *Faerie Queene*, performing gender stereotypes as
she slides through her allegorical repertoire. Spenser's busy poetical
allegory celebrates excessive signification; Duessa is an
exemplum of
his “darke conceit” ("Letter" *FQ* 737) as a glass which reflects a distorted
image. She is, paradoxically, a model of Spenser's poetic method. Although my interest in the loathly lady lies in the ways that she
dismantles gender role play rather than in her representation of
sovereignty, I am impressed by the way that Spenser, with the relentless
zeal of Talus, makes such a counter knotting of race and gender in
Duessa.

Duessa's performance fits within a wide-ranging, energetic
scheme of gender representation and heterosexual relations. Camille

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7 Waters devotes a book to showing the theological satire embodied in Duessa. A. B.
Gough, Jonathan Goldberg, and others investigate the historical dimension of the Book V
trial. I am not focussing upon the history of Mary Stuart, but on Duessa as the vehicle for
satirical, theological and historical representation, which I contextualise as utilising the
loathly lady motif.

8 James Nohrnberg declares: "Truth in poetry is veiled, and both Duessa, at work under
Night's 'cole-black curtein' (l. lv. 44), and Morpheus, the figure-maker under Night's
'mantle black (l. i. 39), parody the allegorical faculty that operates 'under couert and darke
Paglia declares “There is a sex war for dominance continually going on in *The Faerie Queene*, a pattern of love debased into the will-to-power” (639). Despite Paglia’s energetic, and nonetheless convincing itemisation of “a catalogue of perversions” (640), and despite the overt rebuttal of female dominance in Book V’s dismantling of Radigund’s humiliating sweatshop for seamstress knights, I find that the *Faerie Queene* is less directly concerned with the battle of the sexes at the literal, marital level than the *Wife of Bath’s Tale*. However, Spenser addresses the poem to Elizabeth, the monarch whose feminine person incorporates sovereignty, and she is inscribed in his work. In a way which is more complex than most previous uses of this motif, Spenser displaces ideas of nationality onto gendered constructions and vice versa. Duessa is a paradigm of this displacement, and yet her differences from previous shape-changers are the result of Spenser’s adaptation as he attempts to termes” (109). Spenser’s didactic intentions make Duessa particularly apt as his representative.

9 Paglia points out that “Even allowing for the exigencies of allegory, such combinations in Spenser of beauty, laughter, sex, torture, mutilation and death are emotionally startling and ethically problematic” (640). She is right: Spenser’s dream-like configurations vigorously employ the psychological apparatus of the shared subconscious of male subjectivity. I find that the House of Busirane represents male subjectivity, or “male auctoritee” as resisted by the Wife of Bath, and that the sadism of Busirane and the masque of Cupid shows Spenser’s awareness of the danger of classical authority in constructing the codes of love. The Busirane episode seems self-referential, a moment when Spenser endearingly confronts his own dark magic as the one who has ‘cruelly pend’ (III xi 11) Amoret (and the other maidens in his work who are subjected to such codes of love). Just as Chaucer acknowledges that authorial perspective affects the process of writing (including writing as a man), so does Spenser in the Busirane episode. Despite the similarity of self-recognition, however, Spenser does not broach the domestic power struggle with the same relentless realism as Chaucer in his production of the *Wife of Bath*, and her performance of female subjectivity.
please and influence his queen, Elizabeth I; the primary audience for
Duessa is Elizabeth.

Spenser adopts a reverential posture towards Elizabeth which is
simultaneously that of courtly lover (a male poet addressing the beloved),
and a loyal subject. Elizabeth is like Petrarch's Laura in being the
unattainable lady, yet she wields real power over Spenser beyond the
courtly lady's passive inspiration. She is both the object of desire and the
Name of the Father, and functions as a Lacanian Lack, promoting desire,
prompting speech.\(^{10}\) Spenser's poetic performance, addressing both her
power and her femaleness, constructs her as a personification of endless
deferral: in the Faerie Queene, as Gloriana, she is an absence. Such a
representation conforms to Petrarchian convention.\(^{11}\) Spenser exploits
the convention's feminine absenteeism to its full; excluding Gloriana from
the text, he uses this model of displacement as a general narrative
technique. Duessa is one example of such semiotic instability.

Nonetheless, despite her absence, a lack of presence which is
essentially gendered female, Elizabeth as sovereign is the focal point of
Spenser's ambitions, and his lines of verse. Career ambition is

\(^{10}\) Michael F. N. Dixon proposes that "Estrangement [between the sexes, between social
classes, and between different orders of being] creates a mystery that motivates desire"
(10). I merge social class and order of being together in the instance of Elizabeth,
Spenser's queen; it is the sexual difference which marks Spenser's desirous
estrangement through the female characters in the Faerie Queene.

\(^{11}\) Walter Raleigh, in "A Vision Upon the Fairy Queen," places previous great poets and
their ladies in a competition which falls away from Spenser and his fairy queen.
predicated upon the courtly homage paid to Elizabeth in her substantiation as virgin paragon.

Spenser signals his entrance as a serious poet—a candidate for laureate-ship perhaps—with the rippling notes from Colin Clout's renovated pipe, an oaten pipe broken in a fit of pique in the first eclogue of the *Shepheardes Calender*, and seemingly whole again at the end of the seasonal cycle. A fall made fortunate is inherent in the lilting tune from Colin's once-broken pipe, and the pastoral setting, that place where courtly matters are displaced in an affectation of simplicity, is an ideal setting-out point for Spenser's subsequent epic poetic venture, the *Faerie Queene*. The *Shepheardes Calender* is about the task of the poet in the world of real men. It is allegorical, uniting Christian and classical schematics. Most significant to my purpose, it displaces the beloved, one Rosalind, to a remove beyond the poetic stage. She is ostensibly the beginning and the end of the poem—both a motivating source and a goal for Colin—but her absence is emblematic of her abstracted role as muse rather than as character. Furthermore, the Spring song to Elizabeth in the April eclogue is framed within the homoerotic desire of the shepherd Hobbinol for Colin. Hobbinol relates of this exquisitely metred song that Colin "tuned it unto the Water's fall" (36), but it is Hobbinol who sings it, and it is Hobbinol's tears, shed on account of his unrequited love of

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12 This phenomenon of an absent beloved often occurs in sonnet series (although conspicuously not Spenser's) as a register of the phallocentricity of courtly love.
Colin, and “quenching the gasping furrowes thirst with rayne” (5), which moisten the page with the bodily fluids which betoken physical presence. Despite the April eclogue’s tribute to the queen—“purposely intended to the honor and prayse of our most gracious sovereign, Queene Elizabeth”—the pastoral world of the Calendar is devoid of any real women. The Faerie Queene follows on from Colin’s clarion call, proceeding from the pastoral as a site of displacement. The motivating fairy queen is kept at a remove, and percolates as a principle through the other female characters. Allegory in the Faerie Queene often functions by proxy.

If the Shepheardes Calendar is the poetic precedent, Spenser’s letter to Raleigh declares the Faerie Queene’s “general intention & meaning” (“Letter” FQ 737). Spenser proposes that the Faerie Queene, while being “a continued Allegory,” has a “generall end” to “fashion a gentleman or a noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline” (“Letter” FQ 737), that is, it is a conduct book. He will deliver “good discipline” not plainly, but “clowdily enwrapped in Allegorical deuises” (“Letter” FQ 737). He itemises classical and Italian epic while signalling his intention to deal with “an historicaall fiction” of King Arthur; the Faerie Queene is to be conduct book, epic and a romance concerning the matter of Britain. That

13 Since Colin Clout is the poet (perhaps an Ur-poet of whom Spenser is the most immediate example, rather than specifically Spenser), and Hobbinol is a common
an epic should be a guide to conduct is not unusual; there is a long tradition in which post-classical hermeneutics found Christian morals in works which, at their literal level, are pleasingly pagan, as in Virgil’s *Aeneid*, and Ovid’s often amoral *Metamorphoses*. What is unusual is the role of the female principle in the *Faerie Queene*. By including non-classical Romance, Spenser was promoting English nationhood in this mix of epic and conduct book; Elizabeth as ruler was the site of the body politic, and so the focus of his enterprise. Her feminine body represents England just as the Irish sovereignty hag’s personifies Ireland; if she is the primary audience for whom this conduct book is intended, the rest of England was intended to read over her shoulder. This incident of a female prince means that the threefold projection set forth in the letter to Raleigh--conduct book, epic and romance--must also have gender as an

shepherd, the eroticism intensifies Everyman’s longing towards the bard who sings the world into being; nonetheless, the sexualisation of this desire is distracting.

14 Helgerson discusses the politics behind Spenser’s penchant for chivalric romance, a genre which is medieval rather than antique, and thus stubbornly Gothic: a diet of acorns instead of refined white bread in Ascham’s terms; unfashionable, indeed, hobgoblinish, in a period of neo-classical values (21-62). The quest motivation of romance directs Spenser’s epic towards the grace of his feminine ruler. Considering the inclusion/exclusion factor of nationhood, Helgerson summarises his discovery that “Inclusion emerges as an inverse function of power. The more intensely a discursive form concentrates on the centralized power of the state the more exclusionist it is likely to be with regard to class and gender” (297), but continues by asserting that Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* is “one large and obvious exception to this pattern” (298). Indeed, Spenser’s tribute to Elizabeth affirms Helgerson’s other observation of Elizabethan poets, that the fact “that the English monarch was a woman both shaped and enabled much of what they wrote” (298). Helgerson finds Elizabeth’s gender to be a solution rather than a problem, declaring that “Elizabeth’s presence on the throne kept categories from closing, allowed for an open exchange between a still dynastic state and a discursively subdivided nation” (298). Helgerson demonstrates that the form of the *Faerie Queene* as well as its content speaks of the dialogics of its time.
underlying aspect. Gender is a critical dynamic, despite Gloriana's absence, and is intrinsically bound into the *Faerie Queene*’s nationalistic and religious agenda. The immediacy of gender gives agency to ideas about race and religion; since this is how the loathly lady functions elsewhere, it is unsurprising that she should have a place in this work.

The female characters in the *Faerie Queene* tend to run together on a continuum, and to stand in relationship to Elizabeth: both spectrum and speculum produce a complex portrait of royal femininity. The letter to Raleigh signals that such a reading is intended, and states that there are two Elizabeths, “the one a most royall Queene or Empresse, the other a most vertuous and beautiful lady, […] Belphoebe,” and that Elizabeth is to be found elsewhere too: “And yet in some places els, I doe otherwise shadow her” (“Letter” *FQ* 737). Thus Elizabeths abound, in the positive female characters, from the first instance of Una, the virginal and virtuous Whole Oneness, and, by a process of gradation, through less positive characters. For example, Mercilla, intended to be a model of Elizabeth, particularly in relationship to Mary Queen of Scot’s trial, bears some resemblance to Lucifera, who represents courtly pride as a sin rather than a splendour; and the feminist warrior Radigund is like the heroic warrior Britomart, even in her taste in men.15

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15 Hamilton observes that the interlacing of separate stories, or “method of polyphonic narrative” means that the characters may develop through each other’s adventures (*FQ* 300). He shows that Britomart’s full characterisation is worked out in the parallel stories of
Spenser problematises his dichotomies by using similar imagery and language for both virtuous and evil characters. Good and bad mirror each other; the *mise-en-abîme* effect is an architectonic metaphor for the complexities of this mirroring of Elizabeth and the various aspects she represents, including the sense of absence at the centre. Duessa is not one of the types who resemble Elizabeth, but a contrasting travesty; nonetheless she merges with other characters in the same way that the Elizabeth set do. She is a little like Lucifera (both have similarly luxurious Persian accessories [I ii 13; I iv 7]), and Lucifera shares some of the courtly ostentation of Mercilla, who is intended to be Elizabeth in her capacity as judge. Duessa, like Radigund, is a fully characterised evil female amongst those who perform within Spenser’s epic, romance and allegorical project. Her multiplicity makes her an emblem of the organisational principle Spenser employs as he reduplicates his characters within each other.

Duessa, created with Elizabeth in mind, is also thus contextualised as part of the active play between the female characters. Stevie Davies identifies the *Faerie Queene* as a tribute to the idea of woman, to feminine forces which are universally dominant, predating Christianity, Book III. While I see a danger in over-reading, I agree that the moral world of the *Faerie Queene* is holistic and invites a running together of the characters.

\(^{16}\) Michael O’Connell’s recognition of Mary in Radigund as well as Duessa alerts me to question why it is Duessa who stands for Mary in the trial scene rather than Radigund, and to conclude that the choice rests upon Duessa’s function as an archetypal loathly lady (“Mary” 458).
and which Davies finds to be revived in the Renaissance. She declares that

since in the Renaissance period Love was at the centre, and since the days of idealistic pederasty had gone with the Greeks, so it followed that the female principle was at the centre, invested with a new sanctity which came not so much from the Cult of the Blessed Virgin as from the mystery religions of the ancient world, supposed to have been founded by Orpheus. (4)

Yet I am unable to share Davies's celebration of the universal feminine force field of the Faerie Queene. Instead I find that the dislocation of the feminine in the Shepheardes Calender (with Rosalind absent and Elizabeth's elegant tribute bracketed within Hobbinol's lovesick homage to Colin the poet) is also one of the tensions which articulates the Faerie
Queene.

Duessa is an example of the negative side of Spenser's ambivalence toward the feminine. She is, in her multiplicity, a model of the archetype who more closely embodies the kind of feminine principle which might belong to "mystery religions of the ancient world," an archetype which in all previous usage transgresses traditional gender role play to achieve the bliss and benefit of a regained heterosexual paradise. Elsewhere the loathly lady teaches that what is frightening and
repulsive about female sexuality is beneficent, and that feminine sovereignty frees the male from his entrapment in the role of patriarch. However, in Spenser's remodelling of this archetype, Duessa shows that paranoia towards the feminine should be maintained. She is an emblem of the duplicity and treachery of women, teaching that the performance of femininity is a monstrous deception. The grotesque sexuality which proves redemptive in the earlier loathly lady models is adamantly damnable in Duessa. Yet as a representative of duplicity and shape-changing, Duessa makes a metaphor for some of the problems in this poem--for example, Elizabeth's two bodies, and Spenser's need to address both—and for his solution to these problems through the strategies of displacement and osmosis.

Duessa first appears in Book I, the "Legende of Holiness," as the duplicitous contrast to Una, who represents the one true faith, and is an aspect of Elizabeth as the head of the Church of England.¹⁷ Duessa

¹⁷ Waters makes a thorough anatomy of the religious satire which Duessa embodies in Book I, proposing that she is a Mistress-Missa, whom the Protestants polemicists made "not only a character in a 'dramatic' dialogue but also a defendant in a case of treason, deception, theft, soul murder, seductive disguise, or lechery (and sometimes many of these at once); upon conviction this fair damsel is disrobed, displayed as a foul ugly hag, and, thus exposed, banished from England to her father the Pope of Rome" (5). He notes that "Duessa's symbolic and structural role provides the key not only to the poet's theology but also to his artistic handling of the formal, logical, and psychological aspects of the degeneration and regeneration of the Knight of Holiness" (20). Waters concern with the theological implications of Duessa, which he claims relate more specifically to the mass, expands upon the traditional reading of her in Book I as the Catholic church. I remain unconvinced by some of his analyses—that trees signify whoredom for example, and that drinking in the Faerie Queene is always a religious partaking—although I am grateful to his scholarship in showing Protestant raillery of the time, which adds another source of influence to Duessa's construction. Duessa is the figure who has survived the
follows on in type (although not in sequence) from the dragon of Erroure, who begins the configuration of the error of Catholic doctrine, and who is found within a den in a "wandring wood" (I i 7-28). Duessa compounds the Erroure dragon's loathsome duality, and later, as though to underscore the connection, rides a dragon provided for her by one of her lovers as personal transport which might inspire "awfull terrour" (I vii 16). (This steed is not the latest model, but the seven-headed Revelations version, so that it also links Duessa to the deadly sins and Rome.) Duessa develops the themes which this beast introduces, and is linked to the dragon through a shared bestial horridness.

The forest of error is written into existence in the medieval style of an inclusive itinerary of trees described in terms of their usefulness to human, specifically masculine, enterprise; but the dragon at its heart is feminine, and lurks within a womb-like cave. Redcrosse, "full of fire and greedy hardiment," goes forth into the "darksome hole" of her home (I i 14), a tumescent masculine penetration of another bloody literary landscape cavity. Once "his glistring armor made / A little glooming light," he sees an "ugly monster plaine," with a thousand ill-favoured "yong ones" "sucking upon her poisonous dugs" (I i 14-15). What is particular about this lamia (besides the fact that she is not called a lamia, occasionality of Protestant usage, and Spenser is likely to have been aware that the satirical use runs counter to Chaucer's in his Wife of Bath's Tale.

18 Cf. the pit in Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus.
but a dragon, although she is described as half snake and half woman),
is that she lacks the attraction with which such creatures usually ensnare
mortal husbands.

Like Duessa, the dragon of Erroure is of a dual nature: part
monster--"Halfe like a serpent"--and part woman. Spenser's syntax
insists that it is the womanly aspect of the dragon which is most
disgusting: “But th”other halfe did womans shape retain, / Most lothsom,
filthie, foule, and full of vile disdaine” (I i 14). Although these lines
indicate that woman's shape is more repulsive to Spenser than the
serpent's, and it is tempting to crow over a Freudian slip revealing
Spenser's antipathy towards women, presumably it is the presence of
something human in a monster so essentially non-human that causes
him to spit forth pejoratives prefixed by the superlative “most.” When she
first appears, in contrast to the Erroure dragon, Duessa is more human
than beastly, fair in her womanly form, in the way that lamia usually are.
Duessa is not anything so straightforward as a lamia. Half beast and half
woman, she is thoroughly nasty.

The beastly side of Duessa's composition is demonised, although
her womanly attraction is also a problem, since it enables her to ensnare
not only the evil support characters, the Saracen Sansloy and giant
Orgoglio, but even the Redcrosse knight, who is found with her in his
arms at the end of Book I, Canto II, kissing her “oft.” The dragon of Erroure is immediately recognisable as something to be exterminated; Duessa’s dualism admixes the bestial and the womanly in a proportion which makes it harder to distinguish her as an evil. The effect of Duessa’s fair introduction, insofar as The Faerie Queene is a conduct book, is a precaution against trusting acceptance of the feminine. The fair damsel may prove to have a dragon in her stable, or to be serpentine under her skirts.

If Redcrosse knows at once that he must kill the dragon of Erroure, his expectations are more than confirmed when, cheered on by Una as the dragon winds around him, he attempts to strangle it. He endures an oral assault, not from the biting teeth, not by the fire that scorches, but by a spewed up “floud of poyson horrible and blacke, / Full of great lumpes of flesh and gobbets raw, / Which stunck so wildly that it forst him slacke / His grasping hold […]” (I i 20): the unusual test-by-being-vomited-over causes the deflation of the knight, just as it confirms the evil-through-horridness of the dragon.\(^{19}\) Spenser continues the symbolic use of the

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\(^{19}\) Lewis categorises types of evil, identifying five types, one of which is “the disgusting” (Spenser’s Images 69). I do not find a need for his distinction, although it helped me to realise that Spenser, unlike Milton and Shakespeare, does not allow his evil figures to be attractive. Evil is always finally unwholesome and unappealing, consistent with Spenser’s awareness that this is the most effective way to authorise rejection of it. This firm definition is perhaps undercut by the fact that some of his virtuous characters are also unattractive, most conspicuously Talus, but also Mercilla, and Charissa, who is akin to the dragon of Erroure in that “A multitude of babes about her hong” (I x31). Charissa is the virtuous model of which the dragon is a parody; nonetheless, there is a kick-back to this structure, as happens frequently throughout the Faerie Queene. An unpleasant sense of \textit{déjà vu} hangs about Charissa along with those babes.
landscape by evoking the “fertile slime” of the Nile for a reproductivity which is repulsive(I i 21). This simile is used more favourably when Chrysogenee is impregnated with her twins Belphoebe and Amoret “after Nilus invndation” (III vi 8). However, around Erroure, the Nile’s “fattie waues” on “Huge heapes of mudd” merely produce “vgly monstrous shapes” (I i 21), “th”vnkindly Impes of heaven accurst,” who “Deououre their dam,” and, with “bellies swolne,” burst (I 26). A Bakhtinian polarisation of grotesque and classical bodies is established at the outset, in which the dragon, her offspring, and subsequently Duessa, are horrid in appetite as well as form, in contrast to the chaste Una of closed orifices. Duessa does not have bad table manners, except by proxy in the Dragon of Erroure to the extent that they are overlapping. She is sexually rapacious, a solecism which departs from the decorum of courtly love, by being an excess of what Lewis calls “polite adulteryn” (1967 33). She obviously departs even further from the chaste love which Spenser advises in his third book. Duessa is linked to the dragon of Erroure through the references to the heterodox church found in both, and, by the portrayal of her active sexuality, through a fleshly bestiality.

Although the dragon precedes Duessa, and reflexively is linked to her, when we meet Duessa she is behaving not as a beast, but as a lady.

20 In Shakespeare’s Anthony and Cleopatra the Nile attractively represents the fluidity and infinite variety of femininity against the contrast of Roman rigidity.
She might be any Romance heroine. When she first enters as the “faire companion” to Sansfoy, the “faithlesse Sarazin” who is “full large of limbe and every ioint” (I ii 12-3), Duessa is labelled a “goodly Lady.” Her blazon links her to the Catholic church through the whore of Babylon, cladding her in “scarlot red, / Purfled with gold and pearle of rich assay” (I ii 13), but from the onset she is detailed in her performance of femininity, as companion to Sansfoy (whose name shows him to be faithless, i.e. atheist), whom she entertains “all the way” (I ii 14). Duessa and Sansfoy exemplify the courtly tradition as Lewis finds it: fuelled by lust, and as lax in morals as it is mannered in love. In the same stanza Duessa entertains her knight “With faire disport and courting dalliaunce” (I ii 14) and then leaves “her mirth and wanton play” to urge him to address the Redcrosse knight in fray, so that the motivation of violence in the lady’s desire for it is explicit. Sansfoy responds with a virile energy: “prickt with pride” and in hope of winning his lady’s heart, he spurs forth so hard that his courser’s sides are stained with trickling blood (I ii 14). The compulsion of romance drives the couple in their dual performance; they are too fast, in both “courtly dalliaunce” of “faire disport” and in addressing the fray. Duessa is indeed a “goodly Lady” according to Lewis’s cynical reading of courtly love; clad in jewels, with a splendour which mirrors her knight’s prowess to him, she is an epitome of the lady of loose grace, who urges that
masculine blood be shed in her honour, almost as a pagan goddess might require human sacrifice.

Redcrosse, who encounters the pair at the point that Sansfoy is charging him down in "dispiteous" rage, fails to observe that the two are courtly lovers, or a travesty thereof, so is willing to believe that, as a damsel, Duessa is in distress rather than disport in her relationship to the Saracen knight. Redcrosse demolishes Sansfoy, "Like the old ruines of a broken towre" (I ii 20), an architectural metaphor with phallic resonance. Duessa immediately rearranges her performance to match what the new male expects, and turns back "with ruefull countenaunce" to cry for mercy (I ii 21). Unwittingly Redcrosse steps into Sansfoy's role as the knight who champions Duessa and the beastliness she represents, a significant turn not only away from Una, but toward the false Duessa. When his "stout heroicke heart" is first moved to address her as "Deare dame" (I i 21), Redcrosse is ensnared by the conventions of

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21 Daryl J. Gless notes "Duessa's suitability as prize of such contention" (82), although at this stage of the poem her suitability is not fully established. His statement holds true reflexively.

22 Nohrmbeg finds that Duessa "first appears as a kind of Doppelganger for truth" (116). Her distorted reduplication of Una is a traditional reading. Harry Berger, Jr. proposes that Duessa in her "Double-being" is a manifestation of the division of Redcrosse and Una: "Archimago rejoiced to see his guests 'divided into double parts'" (ii 9). The phrase should be taken literally; not only Redcrosse divided from Una, but Redcrosse divided from himself and consequently Una divided into two—the real Una exiled from the hero's consciousness and the false image of Una which has replaced her there. This image will shortly materialize as Duessa, Double-being" (64). This is a succinct presentation of the mirroring which occurs between Duessa and Una, although it leaves out the additional distortion of the fact that Duessa is introduced as Fidessa, and is linked to the dragon of Erroure, Acrasia, Lucifer et al.
courtly behaviour, and reacts to her expert performance of femininity by stepping into the countering masculine role. The allegorical exemplum concerning the one true faith of Protestantism and the duplicity of the Catholic church is based upon true and false ladies, where Duessa as the false lady is also the most adept at the genre of romance. The compulsion of romance is complicit in Duessa’s capture of Redcrosse.

She melts into tears and concocts a story of abduction, beginning by saying that she is the sole daughter of the emperor of the West, a mirroring of Una, another “onely daughter” (I xii 21), yet one which also links Duessa to the Roman empire (I i 22). She moves on to describe her espousal to a “Prince so faithfull and so faire [...] so meeke and debonaire” (I ii 23), then to his death, her quest “throughout the world” for his “corse,” and her capture by the “proud Sarazin” (I ii 23-25) who, she advises, is one of three brothers. An itemisation of her attacker’s siblings is a somewhat odd detail for an abducted maiden to include, but it is Spenser’s authorial instruction priming us to be ready for the brothers,
and to make sense of them as a set. Duessa also gives herself the name of Fidessa, and at this stage the reader does not know that her name, faith, with a feminine diminutive, is false. We know Duessa only as Fidessa for seventeen stanzas, in which Fradubio describes what seems to be another person, Duessa, as “a false sorceresse” (I ii 34), a “wicked witch” (I ii 38), and “A filthy foule old woman” (I ii 40), before it is revealed that they are one and the same character. Thus the introduction is patterned to match Duessa’s shape-changing, and likewise, Duessa’s duplicity matches Spenser’s multi-perspectival presentation of most of his main characters. Elsewhere I agree with other critics who find that the Wife of Bath embodies many of Chaucer’s authorial characteristics: a love of earnest game, and skill at glossing text, for example. In a similar exemplification of authorial strategies, Duessa embodies the principle of reduplication, of distorted mirroring, which is a part of Spenser’s allegorical system.

Redcrosse has faith in Fidessa’s fictional construction of her curriculum vitae, which includes high birth (even though suspiciously in

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26 Traditional readings treat this passage of Duessa’s autobiography as true, although it need not be, given that she lies about her abduction, gives a false name, and is later identified as the daughter of Deceit and Shame. Truth is irrelevant to Duessa.

27 Spenser regularly employs the sophisticated tease of introducing his characters from the misleading perspective of those who see them. For example, the evil magician Archimago first appears as an “aged Sire” (I i 29), a self-confessed “silly old man” (I i 30), and a “Hermite” living in a “little lowly Hermitage,” “wont to say / His holy things each mom and euentyle” (I i 34), while Britomart the virtuous warrior maiden appears as “a knight” (III i 4), to whom the masculine personal pronoun is applied until she takes off her helmet and reveals herself.
the “wide West [...] where Tiberis doth pas” [I ii 22]); betrothal to a Prince
who is her “dearest Lord”; his death, which frees her from betrothal; a
wandering forth which is perhaps inappropriate for a woman, yet is
justified by the need to find her beloved’s corse; and an abduction which
places her fetchingly in the position of needing to beg for “pitty” (I ii 26).
Duessa’s narrative most excellently promotes her as the worthy damsel
in distress, but her appearance more than her authorial expertise is what
convinces the Redcrosse Knight that she is indeed a “Faire lady” (I ii 26):
“He in great passion all this while did dwell, / More busying his quicke
eyes, her face to view, / Than his dull eares, to heare what she did tell” (I
ii 26). Seeing, rather than listening, is believing, and Redcrosse is taken
in by Duessa’s false show of fidelity. Spenser regularly identifies sight as
a treacherous sense, perhaps with the Protestant homily “Faith cometh
by hearing” still in his mind’s ear; ocular proof is frequently the cause of
set-back in the Faerie Queene. Just as her autobiographical account is
flawless, Duessa is adept at the control of dramatic production.\(^{28}\)

Taken in by and into Duessa’s story by reading her face,
Redcrosse is quickly tainted by the artifice of romance convention. He too
becomes duplicitous in performance. In a newly formulated couple, both

\(^{28}\) Yet her authority is evil, and is disempowered according to the semiotics of the female
body: she is believed only when she is fair, and because she is fair, and once she is seen
to be foul she is an empty cipher. While elsewhere loathly lady tales deconstruct the
codes of beauty, by endorsing as true the heroine who combines the full scale of female
flesh from grotesque to radiant, here Spenser dismantles his loathly lady’s authorial
credibility according to her fleshly mutation.
dissemble in their courtly behaviour: “he feining seemely merth, / And she coy lookes” (I ii 27). Having convinced him with a tale which follows romance genre requirements, Duessa hauls Redcrosse into her orbit and into the false flirtation of romance. Elsewhere I argue that Busirane represents masculine authority, but Duessa makes a counterpart, not as a representative of feminine authority, but as one who plays the self-scripted part of the “goodly Lady” (I i 13).

Yet Duessa’s particular degree of malignancy is enigmatically encoded before being fully revealed. Book I’s Fradubio and Fraelissa, his lady, have both been imprisoned in the shape of “goodly trees” (I ii 28), yet with human sensitivity which makes this painful. He tells their tale, and thus it is a victim who first testifies that Duessa is a “cruell witch” who has wreaked “her cursed will” upon them (I ii 33).29 This tree-couple are emblematic of what can go wrong for heterosexual couples, and although Fraelissa is not offered as a Griseld of patience, I suspect that she is silent while he tells their tale not according to the logic that she is a tree, but because she is a seemly lady behaving appropriately. Dramatic irony allows us to recognise by the end of the Canto that Fradubio is also describing Redcrosse’s own position to him, although neither party to the

29 Fradubio tells the horrified Redcrosse—“Astond he stood and vp his hair did hove, / And with that suddein horror could no member moven” (I ii 31)—the hair-raising and immobilising account: that he was seduced by Duessa, leaving his own true lady for her, until he saw Duessa, bathing, as she truly was: “a filthy foule old woman” (I ii 40). Aware of his change of heart, she transformed him magically into a tree, and set him beside his lady, who is also “turned to treen mould” (I ii 39).
conversation knows this. Fradubio’s testimony establishes the severity of Duessa’s seduction, and his metamorphosis into a tree is presented as graphically although not quite as dramatically as Acrasia’s victims’ in the episode with Mordant. The talking tree’s condemnation of Duessa links her to Acrasia, and I will briefly consider the affinity of these two seductresses.

Perhaps Fradubio comes off worse under Duessa’s influence than Mordant, who is killed by Acrasia’s enchantment, but dies smiling: “His ruddie lips did smile, and rosy red / Did paint his chearefull cheeks, yet being ded” (II i 41). It is Mordant’s wife who suffers more than he does; Fradubio’s chaste and silent Fraelissa is imprisoned in tree form like him, and in both cases it is unfair yet realistic that the lady should suffer more than her knight as a result of his infidelity. Mordant’s lady stabs herself, with their infant playing in her blood as she dies, so that the “little hands” of Rudimane are “embrewd in bleeding brest” (II i 37). The unnaturalness of this mother and child is perhaps even more horrifying than the nightmarish tree-trapped couple. Nonetheless, Fradubio’s evidence bears witness to Duessa’s power; she is, like Acrasia, a ruination to men who fall for her ploys, and worse to their wives. Although Duessa is like the disgusting dragon of Erroure in duality and beastliness, she is also like Acrasia in the deadly success of her active sexuality.
Not only her fatality, but her promiscuity provides another link with Acrasia, the arch-seductress who keeps her ex-lovers in a beastly herd. As smoothly as Duessa draws the Redcrosse knight into her tale once he has killed Sansfoy, she ushers in other lovers who willingly partake of her performed femininity. She moves from one male to the next seamlessly, so that her tale of her life as a virgin widow is particularly untrue in the context of her systematically active sexuality. Sandwiched between Sansfoy and the giant Orgoglio in Duessa’s sequence of lovers, Redcrosse is a boy playing the man’s part, a novice wearing someone else’s armour.30 Orgoglio’s gift to Duessa of the seven-headed dragon, monstrously laden with allegorical pejoration as it is, shows that Orgoglio has largesse as a lover, as well as presumably also being, as a giant, “full large of limbe” (I ii 12) like Sansloy.31 The point of Redcrosse’s encounter with Duessa is not that he failed to give her an impressive vehicle, or quite measure up, but that she is evil, the false faith of Catholicism, and as a Christian, he should have avoided her. Arthur will

30 Donald Cheney notes that Redcrosse’s flirtation with Duessa “is in keeping with the picture of him as a naïve knight, too preoccupied with the details of chivalric behaviour to meditate on his own abandoned quest” (36). To this I would add that he is not only distracted by the show of chivalry, but is not convincing in his own show as courtly lover either. He abandons his lady in the House of Pride, for example, an example intended to show that ineptitude is appropriate where courtly love is adulterous and evil. However, Redcrosse will end up betrothed to the lady Una; so Spenser’s representation of courtly love makes it both evil as a genre of codified performance, and magically true when purity can be ascribed to the performers.

31 Gless suggests that Duessa on her dragon represents the wrong belief that mortals can control sin through confession (125). She seems at her most Catholic aboard the dragon, however specific Spenser did, or did not, intend this densely apocalyptic image to be.
end up with the task of killing Duessa's Revelations-model of dragon and all it signifies. However, her dalliance with Redcrosse is framed by two parodies of courtly love, with the Orgoglio affair being more grotesque, since more successful.

In the active sexuality of the Corca Laidhe Irish sovereignty hag, there is a sense of fun as the motive for the testing of the king-to-be through sampling his sexual performance. He must pass this test. Likewise, in Chaucer's Wife's Tale, the answer to the most puzzling riddle—why the powerful and wise old hag might want this particular rapist knight as husband—seems only to be her sexual interest. The same gratuitous desire for fun is channelled through the courtly convention and demonised in Duessa, and if Redcrosse looks inept and schoolboyish in his relationship with her, this is because she is sexually over-active, and over-experienced. Duessa is a little more experienced, and thus more sinister, than Phaedria, the maiden of "immodest Merth" (II vi introductory stanza), who flirtatiously ferries the good Guyon (amongst others) upon the Idle Lake (II vi 2-28), and arguably a little less experienced and less sinister than Acrasia in her Bower of Bliss (II xii 42-87).

Duessa parts company from Acrasia in being demonised at a literal level. When Duessa seeks to cure Sansioy, so that he may form

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32 Acrasia is chained up in "chaines of adamante" (II xii 82), her groves felled, her gardens defaced, her arbours spoiled, houses burned and buildings erased, but she is not made physically grotesque as Duessa is. Indeed, the Bower of Bliss's destruction is a stressful moment because Spenser has constructed the garden so perfectly. The text itself is
part of her continuum of lovers, she reveals her dark connections as she identifies herself in her chthonic trip. The episode begins with her weeping over him like “a cruel craftie Crocodile” from the “seven-mouthed Nile” (I v 18), so showing her dangerous duplicity, with a locative link to Erroure’s brood. However, since she weeps alone in chagrin at her current favourite’s demise, the simile might seem excessive: she is not weeping to trick anyone into coming close enough to be eaten. It serves to remind us that in pitying and healing Sansioy, that is, in acting as the lady of grace who heals her chosen knight, Duessa is still treacherous. As her mission continues, her family background is murkier than her previous autobiography. At “the easterne coast of heaven” (I v 19), she introduces herself to Night as “I that do seeme not I, Duessa am [...] Duessa I, daughter of Deceit and Shame” (I v 26), and Night responds with recognition: “I the mother bee / Of falshood, and root of Duessaes race. / O welcome child [...]” (I v 27). As much as Duessa’s tears and pity are vile, so too is her reunion with her ancestor Night sinister. Together Duessa and Night take Sansioy back to a Virgilian hell to heal; Duessa’s familiarity with hell ensures that, even before her semblance is stripped away, she is revealed as monstrous. Her “sunny bright” (I v 21) appearance is false; her ancestry demonic.

strained, looking critically at the impulse towards beauty at the point when it is celebrating a display of beauty: Spenser’s poem.
Nonetheless, given her smooth seduction of the Redcrosse knight, when stripped—"robd of royall robes and purple pall" (I viii 46)—Duessa is a surprisingly repulsive figure, marked firstly by physical decay. Spenser points to his employment of all that is horrible about aging, stating that Duessa's condition is "as in hate of honorable eld" (I viii 47), that is, that she is all that is hateful about old age. As such, she is

ouergrowne with scurfe and filthy scald;
Her teeth out of her rotten gummes were feld,
And her sowre breath abhominably smeld;
Her dried dugs, like bladders lacking wind,
Hong downe, and filthy matter from them weld;
Her wrizled skin as rough, as maple rind,
So scabby was, that would haue loathd all womankind" (I viii 47).

To some extent, all womankind is implicated in this portrait, since we do all grow old, losing youth and beauty, and perhaps reaching this level of disintegration in the final stages of life. It is not an attractive prospect, and the hyperbole of Duessa's portrait is savage, underscoring a moment of misogynist indulgence with the word "hate" (I viii 47) and the stanzaic terminal of "all womankind." The double-exposure of the

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33 Lauren Silberman observes that "The potential gynophobia of the reference highlights the extent to which moral allegory may be destabilized when it derives its tropes from female anatomy" (58). I agree, and add that this is usually true in each instance of gender-based allegory.

34 This misogynist spasm brings to mind the description of Erroure, which I have discussed previously, in which, with half of the monster being a serpent, "th'other halfe did womans shape retaine, / Most lothsom, filthie, foule, and full of vile disdaine" (I I 14). I do not class Spenser as anything so straightforward as a misogynist, but note that he works the full range of attitudes towards women, including one of repulsion.
allegory exploits an intense loathing of the mutability of flesh which is specifically feminine. Syntactical ambiguity around the word “loathd” acknowledges the objections which all women might have to this description. Previous loathly lady tales, even those which have fun with description, hold an amused tolerance for the sexually aberrant hag, but Spenser reminds us of how revolting somatic decay can be, and links this to the active sexuality of courtly tradition.35

Human “eld” shifts to the bestiality of “a foxes taile, with dong all fowly dight” (I viii 48), an image which combines the tail-end of craftiness with an unwholesome lack of cleanliness. Hamilton finds, in the emphasis on the fox’s tail, evidence that “she is a whore” (FQ 117); whether Spenser intended whoredom so specifically or not, the dung-encrusted tail besmirches emblematic cunning.36 A folkloric imbalance of animal parts makes an emblematic representation of the eagle’s predation and the bear’s brute force:

her feet most monstrous were in sight;
For one of them was like an Eagles claw,
With griping talaunts armd to greedy fight,
The other like a Beares vneuen paw [...]. (I viii 48)

35 None of the medieval loathly ladies at their most horrid are quite as repulsive as Spenser’s; for instance, all deal with the appearance of the hag, none mention smell.
36 Nohrnberg shows the biblical references to a fox's tail, which, he suggests, make foxes represent “a type of heresy” (247). I find the popular use of the fox to represent craft to be the primary significance here.
Asymmetry of legs is a feature of Thomas of Erceldoune's fairy queen when she becomes hideous: along with more alarming changes, "One leg was black, the other grey" (135). Asymmetry suggests an unnatural and perhaps ungodly imbalance, which, in Duessa's case, is coupled with animal association. As well as being putrid in "eld," Duessa's revealed body is marked with the bestial qualities of cunning, "greedy" carnivorous plundering, and clumsy force. She is horrid through both human degeneration and beastliness; both kinds of degradation are evidence of how unacceptable, how repulsive, her active sexuality is, when exposed incarnate.

Although Duessa has reached her nadir when she is stripped, this is not the end of her. She is next represented from a distance, making an epistolary bid for the Redcrosse knight, which interrupts the celebration of his betrothal to Una. The knight's assurance of his lady's grace rests upon the celebration of his heroic defeat of the dragon: Duessa's intrusion into this romantic climax is conspicuously incongruous. To emphasise the contrast between the betrothed maiden and the rejected witch, her challenge by letter is made immediately after a revelation of Una which parallels Duessa's shameful stripping. Una, hiding her white skin under a black veil upon her entrance, now "layd her mournefull stole aside" (I xii 22), showing her "heauenly beautie (I xii 22). In a radiance of

37 Nohrnberg provides references of the ungodly: Leviticus 11:26 ff; Deuteronomy 22:10. (183).
light, “the blazing brightnesse of her beauties beame, / And glorious light of her sunshyny face” provides a “celestiall sight” which causes much wonder in “her owne deare loued knight” (I xii 23). At this point when the unveiled Una is an absolute opposite of the stripped Duessa, a messenger interrupts what would have been the reading of bans, to bring Duessa’s false letter.

She does not do as well on the page as she did when her fair face was available for Redcrosse’s reading, although she represents a similar persona as she did in her personally narrated history as a “wofull daughter, and forsaken heire” (I xii 26) and also a “sad mayd, or rather widow sad” (I xii 27). She claims that Redcrosse is already hers, “affiaunced long time before” (I xii 27). Una’s father, to whom the letter appeals, turns “doubtfull eyes” to Redcrosse, whom he addresses punningly as “Redoubted knight” (I xii 29), demanding the truth, but already predisposed against the paper in his hand. He asks, “What meane these bloudy vowes, and idle threats, / Throwne out from womanish impatient mind” (I xii 30), reading against the grain, with masculine prejudice, even before Redcrosse begins explaining his relationship with Duessa.

Redcrosse gives a reconstruction which is biased in his own favour, beginning with a suspiciously oblique appeal for sympathy as
quester: "It was in my mishaps, as hitherward / I lately traueild, that vnawares I strayd / Out of my way, through perils straunge and hard [...]" (I xii 31). He corrects himself to draw emphasis to Duessa’s agency in their meeting—"There did I find, or rather I was found / Of this false woman [...]" (I xii 32)—and grows more certain that the relationship is entirely her responsibility: "Who by her wicked arts, and wylie skill, / Too false and strong for earthly skill or might, / Vnawares me wrought vnto her wicked will [...]" (I xii 32). Just as Una’s unveiling is a virtuous mirroring of Duessa’s stripping, so Redcrosse’s reconstruction is a mirror of Duessa’s self-narration: it is a subjective account which presents the speaker pleasingly rather than strictly honestly. He forgets what it felt like when his “stout heroike heart” was greatly moved by her “seeming glorious show” (I ii 21), or when, with “great passion,” he busied his quick eyes to view her face, ignoring her words (I ii 26), or that, under a tree which enclosed the suffering Fradubio, when Duessa was “seeming dead” in a “careless swowne,” “He vp her tooke, too simple and too trew, / And oft her kist” (I ii 45).

Back in Canto I, it seemed appropriate to note that on the allegorical level, Redcrosse, as Christian, was in error. He sinned in his acceptance of Archimago’s phantasms, was wrong to leave Una, the one true faith, was even more deluded in joining Duessa, the false whore of Babylon. A commonplace reading of Book I is that Redcrosse provides a cautionary exemplum of how not to behave. Now, in the interruption to
Canto XII’s nuptial celebration, Redcrosse is less simple and true; he takes charge of the narrative, which was Duessa’s fiction at their meeting, and is now telling the story. Endorsed by Una he is believed.38

Stripped and revealed as grotesque, with her distorted written claim on Redcrosse quickly discounted by his less (but still a little) twisted denial of agency, Duessa drops from the narrative at the end of Book I. When she returns to the Faerie Queene, she changes in allegorical significance, playing two subordinate roles. She appears in Book II working in league with Archimago to set the good knights Guyon and Redcrosse against each other. In a duplication of the previous charade of sprites conjured up by Archimago, Duessa enacts what the evil magician says, as he “gan to weaue a web of wicked guile” (II i 8) by telling Guyon that Redcrosse has raped a maiden “of chastitie and honour virginall” (II i 10). Just as we were introduced to Duessa under the name of Fidessa, here again on first appearance we do not know that the “gentle Lady” who sits all alone, “With garments rent, and haire discheueled, / Wringing her hands, and making piteous monen” (II i 13) is Duessa, until her performance of wronged virginity is successful in setting Guyon against the Redcrosse knight. Her act is more dramatic than her previous

38 Gless also observes of this episode that “The excuse sounds lame, and Red Cross needs the help Una instantly supplies [...] Truth here departs from truth [...]” (174). He absolves this discrepancy with a reading that the moment refers to “the marriage song of the Lamb and the Church (Revelation 19.6-7)” (174), which does not entirely blunt an irony in the representation of gender—Redcrosse is once again bailed out by Una—rather than religious allegory.
versions of courtly femininity; here “Her golden lockes most cruelly she rent / And scratcht her face with ghastly drement” (II i 15), yet when Guyon later explains to Redcrosse why he attacked him, he gives Archimago—"A false infamous faitour" (II i 30)—all the credit for his motivation, and does not mention that he saw a lady in the throes of self-mutilation over her loss of virginity. Duessa seems to have been reduced to something little more than one of Archimago's sprites in this episode, merely an enthusiastic and convincing actor of his evil design, showing her willingness to play the lady in varying roles. Considering Duessa's allegorical function, Hum e finds that “In books II and IV, there are few references to false religion; and with his usual flexibility, Spenser makes plain that what is now at issue is the general principle of falsehood” (229). I would add that, in their co-operation, at this point Duessa and Archimago are complicit in false-dealing, while Duessa's task, one she enters with gusto, is to provide misdirection through the performance of a gendered role. To her false distress as a raped maiden is added a real subordination to Archimago, who is the designer of her show of guile. This is a moment when Duessa is genuinely playing opposite a male lead (a feminine position which Spenser sees as appropriate), even as she engages in duplicity.

When she is back again in another supporting role in Book IV, she arrives as part of a foursome, with the knights Paridell and Blandamour, and with Ate, the “mother of debate, And all dissention” (IV i 19), another
shape-changing hag who is like Duessa, although more restricted to being a personified abstraction. At first sighting—which is often deceptive in the *Faerie Queene*—Ate and Duessa are treated as one entity, companions to “Two armed knights,” and seeming to be ladies specifically from a distance: “in so farre a space” (IV i 17). The same sentence which introduces them warns: “But Ladies none they were [...].” These ladies outwardly show “fair semblance,” but “vnder maske of beautie and good grace, / Vile treason and fowle falshood hidden were, / That mote to none but to the warie wise appeare”(IV i 17); a warning which might almost be just another conventional diatribe against the vanity of women. Spenser’s intention, as stated in the letter to Raleigh, “to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline” suggests a place for such a standard set piece. Duessa can be seen as the natural conclusion of misogynist tracts, and reciprocally, she might seem natural in a world where such tracts exist.

Yet another description of Duessa suggests that she is like Proteus in her repertoire: “she could d’on so manie shapes in sight, / As euer could Cameleon colours new; / So could she forge all colours, saue the trew” (IV i 18). Since what we see is not “manie shapes” but only the mask of beauty and good grace, that is, the presentation of herself as a romance lady, willing companion, and distressed maiden, the description seems based on resentment of the forgery of feminine performance. By attaching tropes which belong to complaints against women to his loathly
lady, Spenser brings her back, from her allegorical representation as the Catholic church, into the realm of domestic affairs, the battle of the sexes. Her appearance with Ate seems the point where Duessa shifts to being human, and Ate takes over the "monstrous shape" (IV i 26) and misproportion (IV i 28-9) which belongs to the stripped Duessa of Book I. As she accompanies a knight and seems to be a fair lady, Ate is, like Duessa, a loathly lady, although elsewhere she is an abstraction, a character like Despayre, or the Blatant Beast. It is as though she takes on Duessa's qualities so that they can interlock and share some of the same work, and Duessa leaves Ate with the burden of "eld" and beastliness once they separate. Although both Ate and Duessa are said to contain "Vile treason" (IV i 17), the word "treason" has dire consequences only for Duessa. The differences between Ate, immortal as a personification of discord, and Duessa, who moves to being a specific historical woman, becomes critically apparent.

Having enacted Archimago's guile in Book II, in this episode with Ate, Blandamour and Paridell, Duessa plays an even smaller supporting role to Blandamour's aggression towards Scudamore. She gives a tiny homily--"Loue is free" (IV i 46)\textsuperscript{39}--in relationship to her claim that Scudamore's betrothed, Amoret, loves another knight. Since Amoret has

\textsuperscript{39} Fowler objects that the proposal that "love is free and led with selfe delight" (IV. I 20) is a "false principle" (30). I disagree, since the idea that love must to be willingly entered into by free will is traditional, but note that Duessa is distorting a truism for the evil purpose of creating disharmony.
been rescued by the woman warrior Britomart, and has travelled with her in an amicable and familiar relationship, made warmer once Amoret was reassured by Britomart’s gender that she was not compromising her commitment to Scudamore, Duessa’s words have some truth to them. Ate takes the taunt much further, so that the two bear some resemblance to Macbeth’s double-speaking witches, except that Duessa’s moment of physical monstrosity is passed: Ate is now the Hag who will delight “all the company” (IV iv 10) as a travesty of a lady to be won in a joust. As such she is set beside the false snowy Florimell, who is lovely to behold but as void of true content as Ate; needless to say, it is Ate at whom “they all gan laugh full merrily” (IV iv 10). However, if Ate picks up the ludicrous role of the hag at what turns into a beauty contest, Duessa is left to carry the charge of treason which they both bore upon their introduction together.

Duessa’s trial takes place in Book V, the Book of Justice, a book which is found by many to be bothersome. On one hand, the specificity

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This is not unerringly true; in 1918, Gough finds topical justification for proposing Book V as “the most suitable book wherewith to introduce the young student to the study of Spenser” at a time—“the present crisis”—when “Britain has once more appeared as a champion of oppressed nations, and especially of ‘the Lady Belge,’ yet again the innocent victim of a monstrous tyrant, who has moreover, like Grantorto, fanned the smouldering embers of Irish sedition into a flame […]” (iii). However, Graham Hough complains that “Invention and narrative power are weaker, the verse is often flat, the peaks of allegorical or pictorial concentration are lacking” and that “the historical allegory for the first time becomes quite inescapable” (191). I suggest that it is the latter grievance which is the most bothersome. Hough expands upon the difficulties attributable to Spenser’s defence of “a hateful policy in Ireland” (192), and to the fact that justice is “not a popular virtue in our age and a more or less conscious resentment against some of its classical forms is one of the current social derangements” (193). Reluctant to be found
of the historical content of Book V, with the Netherlands, French and Irish interrelationship with English, makes for a certain lumpiness—for example it is difficult not to see Belge with her seventeen sons as one of those dumpy political cartoon figures, and the same might be said for Burbon, although he is more vigorous in grabbing up the object of his “greedie great desyre” (V xi 61) and galloping out of the poem with her. These episodes go on for too long from a non-contemporary point of view. Much more importantly, the didactic drive towards genocide, personified in Talus, is a distracting detraction. Book V makes me look back more cynically at the letter to Raleigh, with its conduct book manifesto, and at Book I’s House of Holiness, with hoary headed Contemplation pointing towards the New Hierusalem, which seemed quaintly exhilarating at first reading. Nationalism is an unfortunate noumenal concept when it leads to the justification of genocide, as Spenser’s Book of Justice does. For my purposes in examining guilty of social derangement, I nonetheless draw attention to Spenser’s use of classical concepts to justify his own particular cause in Ireland. Lewis finds that “Spenser was the instrument of a detestable policy in Ireland and in his fifth book the wickedness he had shared begins to corrupt his imagination” (Allegory 349). Goldberg uses Spenser’s own agonising image, declaring that “The poet’s voice is inevitably one with Bon/Malfont. In that contradictory voice, Book V is written” (10). Spenser’s poetic impulse is complicit in the justice of Book V.

Although his declared intention is to restore Spenser to “His traditional position […] among the greatest of our elder writers—with Shakespeare, Chaucer and Milton” (9), Hough admits that in Book V “for much of the time we are contemplating a thin allegorical covering over a somewhat distorted version of particular historical events” (191). The distortion itself illuminates a national mindscape at a point in time, however.

I confess to the teleological misdemeanour of looking at the arbitrary slaughter of people through post-humanist eyes, and not through a rosy pre-enlightenment lens of
Duessa, Book V offers two relevant episodes: most importantly, Duessa’s trial in Mercilla’s court, and secondly, the feminist court of Radigund, who is a separatist Amazon travesty, but nonetheless a figure who has some relationship to Elizabeth as a woman sovereign.

Considering the representation of Mary Stuart in the Faerie Queene, O’Connell argues that although “the clearest and most sustained representation of Mary occurs in the trial of Duessa [...] an earlier episode in Book V adumbrates Mary with a depth and generosity truer to Spenser’s epic intentions [...] the single combat between Britomart and Radigund shadows the conflict of the historical queens” (“Mary” 458). O’Connell notes that “In her beauty, power, and pride, nationalism. However, Nicholas Canny explains that Spenser’s opinion on Irish policy, although shared by the New English in his situation in Ireland, is defensive, and was contentious in his day. Spenser is defensive because, at the time that he, as a coloniser, felt suspicion towards the Old English in Ireland, Elizabeth was more moved by their claims that Lord Grey’s lack of mercy towards Irish rebels was ultimately expensive, so that in 1582 she replaced Grey with Thomas Butler, Earl of Ormond, an Old English Protestant, to the great dismay of Spenser and others like him. Spenser’s views on Ireland were shared by other Munster officials, who also justified ‘extra-legal’ measures against the Irish rebels. Richard Beacon, who shared Spenser’s opinions, included the Old English amongst the Irish, and believed they were corrupted by their environment. Edmund Tremayne who worked for Henry Sidney (Philip’s father), an aggressive advocate of the New English policies in Ireland, noted that the Old English were “like the Irishry,” and advocated that only newly imported officials were capable of promoting civility in Ireland. Spenser was not alone in thinking that English-born Protestants were the only answer to the Irish problem. However, he was one of only four of the New English who were rewarded by Elizabeth, and as such he can be seen as heroic in speaking out for his unrewarded colleagues. Beacon and others were conscious of the fact that their opinions would seem radical to English readers (Canny 404). Spenser was aware that his tribute to Elizabeth involved risks as it tried to influence her.

Rosemund Tuve notes that Spenser must have seen Radigund as being similar to Delilah or Cleopatra, the “passionate or great woman who wants ‘lawlesse regiment’ and destroys Justice and virtue to get it (like Duessa, like Adicia, like the Scottish Queen)” (88). She thus makes the same point as O’Connell a little less explicitly.
Radigund seems a fitting representative of Elizabeth’s most dangerous rival” (“Mary” 485). I am grateful to his observation, which makes me aware that Duessa is related to Radigund.

Just as Duessa counters Una, Radigund counters one of the characters who shadows Elizabeth. Radigund is challenged and defeated by Britomart, the figure who represents Elizabeth as a female warrior. The male knight, Artegall, fails to conquer Radigund, because her beauty causes him to lay down his arms, and consequently to be condemned by contract to fulfill her will (which happens to impose upon him the psychological torture of living as a woman). In contrast, Britomart shows the superiority of feminine resistance to beauty: she refuses to agree to an immoral contract, wins the combat, and decisively beheads Radigund. This is Britomart at her smartest.44 She then goes on to rescue her gullible man, reverting to her habit of staring without quite comprehending, when she sees him in “vncomely weedes vndight” (V vii 41), and, struck as dumb as Penelope upon Ulysses” return, “stood long staring on him, mongst vncertaine feares” (V vii 39). (Conspicuously, Britomart has considerably greater control over the object of her gaze than Penelope, being, in fact, in charge of the rescue and recovery of Artegall. Britomart’s frequent failure to put her finger on what she is seeing makes her a plausible character; irritatingly, or likeably human,

44 Sheila Cavanagh spends a chapter showing that Britomart is “surprisingly dim-witted” (139-172). She is quite right, although Britomart’s inability to comprehend is sometimes a strength.
according to one's own nature.) In this moment of uncertainty, both Artegal and Britomart are at their most likable, being caught in human ineptitude.

However, in the confrontation between Britomart and Radigund, the chain of linked female characters doubles up on itself. Britomart belongs with the Elizabeth shadows; Radigund with Elizabeth's enemies. In her strident feminism, her exploitation of gender role play to humiliate the knights she captures, and her coercion of them through a contract which forces the surrender of their wills to hers, Radigund is somewhat like the Wife of Bath and her hag (who, as a generic loathly lady, is like Duessa).

Radigund is also like Duessa in being a candidate for Mary Queen of Scots, as I have noted above, although Radigund is kept above the humiliation of "eld" and beastliness which makes Duessa one of the characters whose evil is disgusting. Yet, at the same time, the similarity between Britomart and Radigund is striking, including in the fact that they both fall in love with Artegall. As a militant sovereign, almost, but not quite as powerful as Britomart/Elizabeth, Radigund/Mary is defeated in combat. Yet it is Duessa, the grotesque and lascivious side of Mary rather than the proud warrior, who is put on trial and condemned.

Duessa's trial is also a trial of judicial systems which endorses
Elizabeth's right to arbitrate internationally. The quality of holiness which motivates Book I, providing the vision of the New Hierusalem, is extended outwards to license the sovereign of the elect nation to adjudicate over the world. Just as Una is Elizabeth as the representative of the one true faith which is the foundation of holiness, Mercilla is Elizabeth as wielder of imperial justice. Spenser encapsulates his interpretation of historical events, and his covert advice to Elizabeth to be more direct in Ireland, in the sections of Book V which surround Duessa's trial. The representation of gender continues to enervate this didactic political drive.

The first representative of Mercilla's court is Samient, the maiden ambassador who is treated rudely when sent to make peace with Mercilla's neighbours, a "mighty man" and "his bad wife, that hight Adicia" or injustice (V viii 18-20). Samient is another damsel pursued by lusting males, two "paynim" knights, while she flees "flying on a palfrey fast [...] / With locks all loose, and rayment all to rent, / And ever as she rode her eye was backward bent" (V viii 4). We have seen this image

45 O'Connell points out that "Structurally, the book falls into three unequal sections. The first section (Cantos I-iv: 20) is concerned with illustrating what we call the Common Law. The second (iv:21-vii) explores the limitations of law and the necessity of its being supplemented by equity. The third (viii-xii) demonstrates the role of the Queen's justice beyond the borders of England, in the conflict with Spain in the Netherlands, in Ireland, and in the trial of Mary Queen of Scots. The thematic movement of the book, then, is outward from the common operations of English law to the place of England in establishing Justice among nations" (281). Duessa's trial, as an allegory of Mary Queen of Scot's trial, is thereby represented as relevant to English intervention in Ireland. Thus the same issue of sovereignty which motivates the loathly lady of the Corca Laidhe text surrounds the trial of this Spenserian loathly lady.
before in the flight of Florimell. Spenser now creates something like another Florimell simulacrum, and gives her the job of ambassador, one to which she is unsuit ed. She is rescued by Arthur and Artega ll, although she also rescues them from their own knightly propensity for battle: once they have killed one of the pagans each, and then are about to set upon each other, in that knightly habit of non-recognition, Samient dissuades them, allowing reason to intervene.

She tells them her case, and they devise a plan to “worke auengement strong” upon the Souldan and his evil wife (V viii 24). Hamilton observes that the Souldan is Phillip II of Spain and that the incident is England’s defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 (FQ 584). The idea of subduing neighbours is thus imperial, and the theme of virtues, which began with the inner one of holiness, and works through the personal virtues of temperance and chastity, now has moved outward from soul to empire.

Although the trial of Duessa is a replica of Mary Queen of Scots’ trial, Spenser’s endorsement of Elizabeth’s role in Mary’s execution is burdened with his desire that his queen extend similar justice to the Irish and the Old English who resisted Protestant civility, and he sends his knights on “a straunge aduenture” (V ix 4) along the way, as a reminder

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46 Given the historical speculation by Gough, that the incident may refer to commissioners sent by Elizabeth to the Netherlands in 1587 (258), the fact that Samient is not only feminine, but a damsel in danger of dishonour, described so similarly to Florimell, is curious.
of the Irish situation. Granting the Souldan's property to the damsel, while banishing his evil wife to the forest to be a tiger, Artegall and Arthur are encouraged by Mercilla's ambassador to capture Guyle or Malengin, "a wicked villaine, bold and stout" (V ix 4), using his own methodology: trickery. Malengin resembles the Irish, who wore mantles, those "vncouth vestiment"s (V ix 10), which were viewed critically by the English as symbols of Irish resistance and elusiveness. His ways are so hidden that "scarse an hound by smell / Can follow those false footsteps of his" (V ix 6), a description which admits some of the paranoia and conflict of the Irish situation.

Malengin's serial shape-changing introduces another folkloric moment, with Ovid's Proteus as one classical precedent, which should trigger awareness that no one who employs this strategy ever gets away. Artegall and Arthur entrap Malengin, luring him out with Samient as a decoy. Harold Skulsky points out that the principle that "fraud deserves fraud," or that "nothing done to a feigned friend is wrong" was a staple of Renaissance emblem books, but notes that entrapment is to this day a problematic ethical and legal issue (450). The entrapment of Malengin,

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47 Dunseath notes that "According to sixteenth-century English legal theory, Ireland was not a properly constituted nation, neither by de jure nor de facto. Ireland was considered an outlaw province of the realm and had not rights under natural law" (7).

48 Dunseath rightly points out the classical precedents for the deep caves in which Malengin hides (198); however, Ovid and Virgil's use of cave-dwelling to signify fox-like craftiness and demonic love of darkness is over-written with guerrilla tactics in Ireland. Dunseath wrongly dismisses the fact that "some of the Irish insurgents lived in caves"
through guile employed by the good, is a miniature of Spenser’s attitude to the Irish, one which he links to Duessa’s trial, as examples of English mercy. It is critical that Spenser wedges the trial of his loathly lady in between two Irish episodes, endorsing Elizabeth’s execution of Mary, but structurally implying that his queen should also move decisively to force Irish subjection. In the process of trying Duessa, Mercilla is demonstrating her right to international rule.

Having disposed of Malengin, Arthur and Artegall proceed to the court of Mercilla, a “mayden queene of high renowne” (V viii 17). Hamilton gives footnote evidence that there are parallels to Elizabeth in a similarity between Mercilla’s court and Hampton Court, including the giant porter; the lions and fleur-de-lis of Elizabeth’s arms; and the rusty sword which Elizabeth kept as symbol of the peaceful nature of her reign (FQ 592). In this mirroring, the court of Mercilla enacts the theatricality of Elizabeth’s performance of royalty.

However, Malfont who was once Bonfont, with his tongue nailed to a post at the entrance to Mercilla’s court, is another of the Faerie Queene’s hauntingly sadistic images; the viciousness of the punishment speaks against the censorship literalised in the nailing of the tongue. The pain and discomfort in the lobby are a distraction from the description of Mercilla’s splendour (scriptural in tone), which includes little cupids who

(203) which is highly relevant in showing the perspectival nature of caves. If the Ovidian fox inhabits a cave, so does the Irish underdog.
fly in and out as a fashion statement about divine approval of her justice. Once she has received Arthur and Artegaill she places them on either side of her (like scales, since Artegaill is the equal of Arthur) and gets on with what she was doing before they appeared, which is the “dealing of Justice with indifferent grace / And hearing pleas of people meane and base” (V ix 36). The prisoner brought to the bar is none other than Duessa, who is accused of conspiring with her lovers Blandamour and Paridell to “depreyue Mercilla of her crown” (V ix 41); the treason first proposed as vile in Book IV has now become punishable. 49

Duessa’s trial is a dialogical debate which leads the reader to convict her. Zele strongly emphasises her heinous act, and brings as evidence against her Kingdom’s Care; Authority; Law of Nations; Religion; and finally Justice. He is countered by those advocates who

49 I do not have space here to reiterate the historical events surrounding the trial and execution of Mary Queen of Scots. One source of historical material is Kerby Neill, who describes what he calls “the battle of the book,” that is, the written propaganda on both sides of the dispute between Mary and Elizabeth. K. Neill reports that Mary was designated “the Scottish Circe” by her opponents, a slur which points to how suitable a loathly lady is to stand in for her (204). K. Neill notes that “Spenser’s attitude toward the entire problem is in no way original, but is merely the poetic expression of the commonplace views of the Protestant English party” (209). Douglas A. Northrop elucidates some of the legal issues involved in the international controversies which Spenser is representing, including the trial of Mary Stuart. Placing Duessa’s trial within the context of other legal issues in the book, for example, Artegaill’s contract with Radigund, he shows that “Spenser’s defence of Elizabeth is included within and co-ordinated to his general conception of justice” (277-94). Gough gives an informative, accurate, and fair account of this section of Book V in his notes (270-286). His sympathetic understanding of both Spenser’s position, and of repulsion towards it, along with a lucid style, makes his 1918 work still well worth consultation. His conclusion to the initial discussion of Mary Stuart’s trial is that “the impartial reader will feel that Spenser, by his eager partisanship, has missed a great opportunity of depicting a deeply tragic conflict” (274). See also James Emerson Phillips and Antonia Fraser. But since it is Duessa as the loathly lady who is central to my examination here, I do not include details of Mary’s history.
plead for her: Pity; Regard of Womanhead; Danger; Nobility of Birth; and finally Grief.\textsuperscript{50} Elizabeth wanted to make it clear that Mary was not tried according to common law, and was found guilty on several counts; Spenser emphasises this view of the trial.

Arthur is inclined to pity Duessa, "Through the sad terror of so dreadfull fate, / And wretched ruine of so high estate" (V ix 46), and Zele renews his efforts, bringing more witnesses: Ate the spirit of Discord raised from hell by Duessa, and as well, Murder, Sedition, Incontinence, Adultery and Impietie. Arthur withdraws his sympathy.\textsuperscript{51} Then there is the final stanza in which Mercilla indulges herself in the emotional catharsis of a "Few perling drops from her faire lampes of light"—tears of compassion, even as she passes the death sentence—although "she" plainly sees that "she of death was guiltie found by right" (V ix 50).\textsuperscript{52} This confusion of the personal pronoun "she" emphasises the similarity between Elizabeth and Mary at this moment of truth. The Canto finishes

\textsuperscript{50} Hamilton records references to the trial of Mary Queen of Scots in this section, frequently citing Gough (\textit{EQ} 595-96).

\textsuperscript{51} Again Hamilton cites historical evidence that this is Mary Queen of Scots who is on trial. Gless points out that, given Ate's "earlier activities and thematic scope" it is surprising that the case against Duessa depends "so directly on this figure of diabolic duplicity and anarchism" (202) and calls upon blind faith "about the author's intentions […] to secure readings" of Book V (203). He is registering the discomfort of many readers which I noted earlier.

\textsuperscript{52} Dunseath declares "It is a mistake to imply Mercilla's tears are useless" and seems to find comfort in the fact that "Her gentle weeping is a deliberate act" (219). Although I believe that Spenser intends these tears to show the compassion appropriate to a nonetheless relentless judge, I find both the tears, and particularly their deliberation, an indulgence by the winner of a power struggle.
abruptly; three stanzas into the next, Canto 10, the two knights agree that a rather obliquely described death sentence, "her doome," is "a rights." By the time Duessa is sentenced, we are persuaded that she is guilty and should be punished, and the curtain falls on her swiftly.\textsuperscript{53}

This trial is sandwiched between two Irish allusions (with Arthur's rescue of Belge as added international intervention): the capture of Malengin, which I have already discussed, and then the larger project, in which "noble Artega\'ll," "having left Mercilla, straight way went on his first quest, to weet to work Irenae's franchisement" (V xi 36). The second Irish episode again guides Elizabeth towards the action which Spenser believes is appropriate in Ireland.\textsuperscript{54} Artega\'ll's delay in his main quest is almost fatal for Irenae, which is a reproach to Elizabeth. Artega\'ll blames the heavens for his own delay, using the excuse which he has previously disdainfully rejected in Terpine's mouth; the earlier rejection of fate as an alibi also applies to his own use of the same excuse for delay as he goes

\textsuperscript{53} Nohrnberg provides an extensive biblical and religious reading of Duessa's allegorical function in Book V, and notes that "The fall of Duessa stands for God's judgment on the promiscuous 'great citie' of Revelation" (711). He correctly locates Spenser's Duessian tendency to multiplicity. The historical reading is the primary allegorical one here, however. Nohrnberg furthermore declares that "Duessa, who can be executed as Mary Queen of Scots, cannot be executed as Duessa—especially if she also implies the 'double sense' of allegory itself" (769). This acknowledgement of the everlasting principle of Duessa is in line with my own reading of her.

\textsuperscript{54} Dixon coins Kenneth Burke's term "suasive", noting the "suasive dynamic" (4) of Spenser's poetry, finding in Spenser "a polity where private virtues find realization in a 'politicke' order" (13). The reverse is conspicuously true in Duessa's construction: the polity of Spenser's Justice is secured upon the execution of the mutable, female-gendered and grotesque body of Duessa.
to rescue Irenae, who is Ireland.\textsuperscript{55} There is further procrastination in the Burbon episode, one of those allegories which is awkward at the literal level in order to accommodate the secondary narrative of the French Henry of Navarre, and his contingent adoption of Catholicism. Artegall’s delay heightens the urgency of Irenae’s fate: she must be rescued from Grantorto, whose name signifies great wrong.\textsuperscript{56}

Artegall takes a one-day cruise to Ireland, where Talus has to wade ashore and sternly batter, without remorse, the inhabitants who would prevent Artegall’s arrival. When the corpses are “scattered over all the land / As thicke as doth the seede after the sowers hand” (V xii 7), Artegall calls Talus off and sends a messenger to Grantorto to intimate that it is not for “such slaughters sake” that he has come, but to engage in a one-on-one combat for the fair Irenae (V xii 8). Hamilton provides the curiously calm aside on this advocacy of genocide that “The biblical

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Artegall rescues Terpine from Radigund’s women’s gallows, and asks how Terpine got himself into the “wretched case” of yielding “to proude oppression / Of womens powre that boast of mens subiection” (V iv 26). When Terpine, “confounded in his mind, / Partly with shame and partly with dismay,” blames “the worke of heauens,” asking “who can scape, what his owne fate hath wrought” (V iv 27), Artegall rebuts him with the reclaimer: “Right true: but faulty men use oftentimes / To attribute their folly vnto fate, / And lay on heauen the guilt of their owne crimes” (V iv 28). Terpine is in fact delivered back to his death at the hands of the women through Artegall’s distraction from his task by Radigund’s beauty, and now Artegall appropriates Terpine’s first excuse.
\item Elizabeth Heale notes that there is a specifically legal resonance to tort as a wrong or injury to a person or property (339), although the Latin participle tortus from the verb torquere, to twist, springs to my mind, so that the name summons the great tension and wrestling of Irish attempts to elude colonisation. Grantorto is a lawless giant such as the rebellious Titans of Genesis, and he is not just menacing Ireland, but represents the combined threats of rebellion and Roman Catholic aggression in France as well as Ireland. It is possible to identify Artegall with Lord Grey the Lord Deputy in Ireland, and to see Grantorto as Desmond, the Irish nationalist opposing Grey (Heale 339). Grantorto is similar to Orgoglio, Duessa’s erstwhile lover.
\end{enumerate}
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reference may support the historical one; as the seed which is sown is not quickened unless it dies (1 Corinthians 15:36), the Irish must be slain so that Ireland might be renewed" (EQ 614). We arrive at the cutting edge of Spenser’s argument, which is Talus’s iron flail, mowing down the mob. It is not an easy passage for post-colonial readers. Like Duessa, Spenser is irresistibly seductive in his performance, he is playful, an expert, all embracing, thoroughly engaging. Yet his political agenda, his impulse towards genocide, is revealed as a disturbing nether side.

Elsewhere I consider the Irish sovereignty hag as a personification of the kingdom of Ireland; here, Duessa, who is a differently nuanced example of the same archetype, is a signifier whose meaning shifts. She is executed as Mary Queen of Scots, being no longer the Catholic church she represents in Book I. At no stage does she represent Irish nationality, yet Spenser uses Elizabeth’s condemnation of Mary to try to persuade her to go further in Ireland. Spenser takes the loathly lady, with her freight of Irish futurity, and executes her as he constructs a vision of English expansion into empire.

Having considered Duessa up to the moment that she leaves the text, condemned in a trial pointedly framed by Irish episodes which direct

57 Mary’s Catholicism was a factor in her trial, although not the most important one; her alleged conspiracy against Elizabeth was what cost Mary her life more than her avowal of the Catholic church in opposition to Elizabeth’s representation of the Church of England, the one true church. Spenser intended to represent this emphasis a little differently, so that the same Catholic fervour which found Mary a religious martyr might be countered with protest that she was a leader of her nation into heresy.
Elizabeth to act decisively, I offer two parallel readings further of *Faerie Queene*, before concluding with a consideration of how the Mutabilitie Cantos provide closure to the ideas which Duessa represents. These two readings are contradictory. Like aspects of Duessa, one is dismal, one enchanting. They should be mutually exclusive if the *Faerie Queene* were a world based only on logic.

Talus stops his slaughter; Grantorto accepts Artegall’s challenge; Irenae cheers up like a withered rose receiving drops of rain when she sees that rescue is imminent. Grantorto comes out armed like an Irish foot-soldier, and Hamilton finds the iron age in his mail (*FQ* 615), although the same must be said of Talus’s flail. Artegall finally kills the giant with the sword Chrysaor; this is the sword stolen by Astraea from Jove’s house, and made for the war against the Titans. Like Chrysaor, much of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* is filched from other sources; yet his method of compounding what he takes means that the work is considerably more elaborate than the sum of its parts. Amongst the complexity, the loathly lady is disempowered and put back in her place within a patriarchal system. Duessa’s decapitation is in accordance with justice as Spenser wished it to be; but is an ignominious termination.

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58 The connection between Elizabeth and Astraea is explicated by Frances Yates. 59 Dixon notes that Duessa epitomises “in her crimes against the state all previous private and public villainies: the ‘injustice’ for which she stands indicted is a cluster of structural components including crimes against holiness, temperance, chastity and concord” (143-4). Spenser could not have chosen a more apt motif to load up with such a cluster than the indecorous loathly lady.
for a loathly lady tale.

   With Duessa and all she stands for condemned in the court, and the Irish rebels knocked back by the questionable means of a stolen giant-killing sword, the book finishes with the hags Envy and Distraction and their pet the Blatant Beast setting upon Artegall. He ignores them, although bitten by a half-gnawed, yet not quite dead snake, and sets off for fairy land. But the harshness, and even the intricacy with which Spenser wraps up the loathly lady rebounds within the uncertainties of the text. Artegall never reaches fairy land or union with Britomart. Gloriana is gone for good; Arthur never finds her. In the real world, Spenser was not successful in persuading his queen to be more ruthless in Ireland. Ben Jonson’s report of Spenser’s demise—that he died for lack of bread in King St, London, having been burned out of his home in Ireland, and that a little child burned there too—is pitiful. Subsequently, the Blatant Beast, flourishing in the favourable clime of post-colonialisation, may be said to have the last bark.

   On the other hand, Spenser’s enchantment is too powerful to be glibly dispelled by a teleological dislike of his politics, including his sexual politics. He is successful at creating the kingdom of our own language, and, since English is so dominant, in one sense his fairyland has taken over the world. Before moving to conclusion with the Mutabilitie Cantos, I want to pause at a happier configuration of Spenser
amongst his own creation. Although Duessa is harshly dealt with in Book V, this is not quite the last glimpse of the loathly lady, since there is a Book VI incident in which Spenser conjures up Chaucer’s Wife’s Tale, bringing the motif back into play.

In the first proem to the Faerie Queene, Spenser throws aside the “Oaten reeds,” the instrument of the Shepheardes Calender, for the “trumpets sterne” more suitable to heroic epic. In Book VI, the book dedicated to the virtue of courtesy, Colin Clout’s pipe resounds again. Calidore, the knight of courtesy, lays down his arms as he seeks admission to the world of Pastorella, an idyll whose centre is the poetic act itself. He witnesses a magical world where “that iolly Shepheards lasse” (VI x 16), who is linked to the shadows of Elizabeth, dances amongst “An hundred naked maidens lilly white, / All raunged in a ring and dauncing with delight” (VI x 11). Colin Clout, the poet whose music enables the lass to dance, “pypt apace, whilst they him daunst about” (VI x 16). David R. Shore identifies this anagogic experience as the instance when the poem comes close to expressing its own mystical process: “In the dance of the maidens to the music of the shepherd’s pipe we glimpse the harmony, perfect and eternal, that underlines and informs the mutable patterns of temporal existence” (138). There Calidore, the intruder from the court who has thoughtlessly offered gold as a response to a speech against ambition, watches “this straunge sight” “long astonished,” “rapt with pleasaunce” and not knowing “what to weene.”
Resolving “to know” (VI x 17), that is, to literalise the poetic inspiration, he breaks cover from the woods which hide his voyeuristic presence, and goes towards the vision. Instantly the dancing ladies “vanisht all away out of his sight” (VI x 18). Hamilton’s footnote records the similarity to “an episode in Chaucer, Wife of Bath’s Tale: when the knight sees the dance ‘Of ladyes foure and twenty, and yet mo’ he draws near ‘In hope that som wysdom sholde he lerne. / But certeinly, er he cam fully there, /

Vanysshed was this daunce, he nyste where. No creature saugh he that bar lyf, / Save [...]’ (992-8)” (FQ 691). Hamilton stops the quotation there, before the loathly lady manifests in her horrid form, the “eld” which she shares with Duessa. For a moment the world of Colin Clout is the same world as the Wife’s Tale, when “Al was this land fulfild of fayerye,” and “The elf-queene, with hir joly compaignye, / Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede” (WBT 859-61). Spenser has imported the Chaucerian hag’s magic as an emblem of his own act of poetic transcendence. The echo of that instant when Chaucer’s loathly lady is first manifest has a tenuous link to Duessa, but one which places a reminder of the Wife’s hag at what is arguably the epiphany of the Faerie Queene: Book VI’s tribute to a pastoral Elizabeth--"that iolly Shepheards lasse"--a vision which also apotheosises the poetic act. The loathly lady component of Duessa is an emblem of Colin Clout's performance.

The “Mutabilitie Cantos” bring these two incompatible readings into alignment, albeit as an enigma. A sense of mystery is conveyed by
their form as a fragment, that form most apt to gesture towards the unspeakable sublime.\textsuperscript{60} Within this piece, both Mutabilite and then Nature expand some of Duessa's attributes, so that the themes which she has introduced are bought to climactic completion. Although it would be simplistic to claim that Book VII is a dilation of Duessa, my sense that Duessa is emblematic of Spenser's method in the \textit{Faerie Queene} is reinforced by his final focus upon the threat, the limitations, and the inevitability of change.\textsuperscript{61}

In his personification of Mutabilitie, Spenser reconsiders at a more profound level the fickleness which he has encoded within Duessa's performance of gender. Duessa's name advises that she is dual-natured (although I argue that she is, in fact, multiplied) and, in keeping with the loathly lady tradition, she is both fair and foul. Mutabilitie is named as the abstract quality of change which underlies the universe in which things grow and decline, are made from dust and return to it. Such a character

\textsuperscript{60} There are two Cantos of 55 and 58 stanzas respectively, but the Cantos are numbered vi and vii. A third fragment, the "vnperfite" viii has only two stanzas, which form a complete review of life, death and the meaning of everything. Although previously these were regarded as unfinished, the sense of completion in the final prayer--"graunt me the Sabaoth's sight" (VII viii 2)--suggests that closure has been achieved. Hamilton notes that Spenser seeks "the rest which comes after the six days of history—the six books of his own history, \textit{The Faerie Queene}" (735). If this is not the intended ending, it certainly is a fortuitously terminal break.

\textsuperscript{61} Dixon, too, observes that "Mutabilitie appropriates the function of Duessa as corporate icon for anti-exempla of justice and all its dependent virtues" (180), and notes that "Mutabilitie, in her prosopographic dichotomies of ethos and pathos contains [...] the seeds of her own moral antithesis" (181). I add to his observation the comment that when Nature, terrible, beautiful, and multi-formed, controls Mutabilitie, the redemptive paradigm of medieval loathly lady tales is preserved by proxy.
serves as a reminder that the loathly lady is partly constructed from the sense that women change, that their sexuality may be alarming as well as attractive. Yet Constancy, the virtue of Book VII, is arguably impossible given the mutability of mortality. The loathly lady motif is predicated upon mutability; the intrusion of a giantess of this name amplifies the mythic side of Duessa. In her chthonic trip to her ancestress, Night, Duessa has a other-worldly dimension, but it exists amongst her performances of courtly femininity; and her curtain-fall trial reduces her allegorical meaning to a historical and individual one: she is Mary Stuart. Mutabilitie is an embodiment of the larger principle of change to which Night and Day belong. The study of Justice through Duessa’s trial in Book V takes another twist through Mutabilitie’s challenge to the justice system of the gods. Mutabilitie is a “Giantesse” (VII vi 13), reconsidering her disinheritance as a “Titanesse” (VII vi 3). She begins by force, climbing to the “Circle of the Moone” to attempt to throw Cynthia from her throne (VII vi 8). Since Cynthia was one of Elizabeth’s assumed titles, the feminine wrestling match brings back a parallel of Mary Stuart’s perceived challenge to Elizabeth. At this point, Mutabilitie is like Duessa in Book V. However, Mutabilitie’s tactics, in leaving off a physical struggle which is evenly matched, to appear in Jove’s court and make a quasi-legal contestation, ensures that the mythical context remains in the 

62 Her case as a displaced indigenous person seeking to restore ancestral rights resembles the grievances lodged this century by native peoples. This is one of several
foreground. Through myth rather than the smaller scale of historical occasion, an ontological argument is advanced which will finish with a closing prayer for eternal life.

Nonetheless, the gods are made in man's image. Masculine distraction by beauty is a theme in the previous books; Jove too "when he looked on her louely face, / In which, faire beames of beauty did appeare" (VII vi 31) is moved by Mutabilitie's beauty, "That could the greatest wrath soone turne to grace / (Such sway doth beauty euen in Heauen beare)" (VII vi 31), so that, although he cites previous victims of his anger, he is patient towards the beautiful giantess. Elsewhere such distraction is a mortal fault, as when Artegal is distracted by Radigund's beauty, but no moral value is attached to Jove's behaviour. It is simply characteristic of him according to his mythology, and the episode is an example of the stratification of moral tone which runs through the work.\(^{63}\)

Earlier I noted that Duessa is credible when lovely, and below consideration when grotesque; like the author, the gods give kinder justice to those of fair form. Nonetheless, gender inequality cuts both moments when the *Faerie Queene* eerily adumbrates historical sequences.

\(^{63}\) The most conspicuous example is Hellenore, who runs off from her elderly husband to a more cheerful life with a troop of satyrs. Her husband attempts to rescue her, and is subjected to the sounds of her having sex nine times with one of them, after which she rejects his offer of love within marriage. The episode is curiously devoid of condemnation. Lesley Brill considers that it "shows by bad example the necessity in human life of the titular virtue of the Legend of Chastity," having shown how Hellenore is objectified as "what we would now call a sex object" (352); however, this does not accurately acknowledge the moral detachment of the episode, which appears almost as a pastoral frieze.
ways: as well as seeing her as an object of beauty, Jove reminds Mutabilitie that she is a “foolish gerle” (VII vi 34), asserting his dominance as an older male even as he allows himself to be influenced by her youth and femininity.

Mutabilitie is not foolish. She rejects Jove as “no equall ludge” (VII vi 35), pointing out to him that he, in his “owne behalfe maist partiall seeme” (VII vi 35), demanding a higher court before the God of Nature. Her complaint and appeal again remind me of present day reassessment of native land claims, particularly since the shift of court moves the narrative from the mythical realm to the landscape surrounding Spenser's home at Kilcolman Castle. Arlo hill, a name taken from Aherlow (FO 720), is the site for a reenactment of a somewhat softened version of the Diana and Acteon tale. The episode finishes with a genuine regret that “those woods, and all that goodly Chase, / Doth to this day with Wolues and Thieues abound; / Which too-too true that lands in-dwellers since haue found” (VII vi 55). The mythical is superimposed upon the local, and in this chimera, the Irish sovereignty issue activates the colloquial “too-too” truth from Spenser's perspective as an in-dweller. That he should get in another word against the Irish rebels as Mutabilitie presses her claim provides a clue as to what the outcome will be.

Having shifted to the familiar landscape of his home, Spenser imports the gods to his own turf for the big trial, with Nature herself as the adjudicator. He foregrounds the discomfort of shifting the mythical into
the natural in spatial terms:

So full they filled euery hill and Plaine:
And had not Nature's Sergeant (that is Order)
Them well disposed by his busie paine,
And raunged farre abroad in euery border,
They would have caused much confusion and disorder (VII vii 4).

To some extent Spenser is himself Nature's sergeant, taking busy pain to make an order of the disorder which both Duessa and Mutabilitie might seem to represent. Nature, when she appears into the multi-tiered world of sergeant Spenser, is the magnification of a similar principle of constant change.

Nature's size is in keeping with representations elsewhere, and of other personifications such as Philosophy, yet it makes an analogy with the Irish sovereignty hag, who, as a personification of the land of Ireland is "High [...] as any mast" and with an ear "Larger than a sleeping booth [...]" (73). The hag's stature, like Nature's, is indicative of her wide-ranging influence. Spenser's Nature is "far greater and more tall of stature / Then any of the gods or Powers on hie" (VII vii 5). Nature's size is measured against the gods because she is a higher source of judgment than them. Hamilton points out that the description of Nature's size echoes Mutabilitie's "stature tall" (VII vi 28), endorsing my own reading that Duessa, Mutabilitie and Nature bear a serial relationship to each other. Duessa is the principle of duplicity rather than change: her shape-changing flesh precautions suspicions towards the performance of femininity, which functions as a sign of sin. Her mutability is not part of a natural scheme; she is demonic; like a lamia (and as Mary Stuart) she
must be scotched, and Spenser does this in a way which ensures reader complicity. She is duplicity as deceit rather than duality. Mutabilitie represents the changes which belong to Nature; for this reason, she cannot be erased. Her change does not represent deceit, yet she is in the posture of an indigenous rebel. Like Duessa, she also resembles Mary Stuart in her logically argued contestation of Cynthia's throne. However, her natural place in the world ensures that she will not be punished or controlled. Nature, the higher power to which Mutabilitie appeals, shares with Duessa an indefinite form. Like Duessa, she is "euer young yet full of eld" (VII vii 13), yet whereas "eld" is sadistically itemised in Duessa's description, Nature is above such an account; she is "Vnseeene of any, yet of all beheld" (VII vii 13). In this paradox, Spenser emphasises his own process of personification, his incarnation of an abstraction which is the foundation of all experience. Furthermore, from Nature's face and "physnomy" it is impossible to tell "Whether she man or woman inly were" (VII vii 5), although the same stanza introduces her as "great dame Nature." Her hermaphrodite form, and the acknowledgement of an inner truth signal the idea of gender performance; Duessa engages in only feminine performance, but she is an adept at such dramatics. Nature, whatever form is suggested for her, is intransigent, cannot be decried as Duessa is.

Nature is veiled, with some claiming that this "to hide the terror of her vncoth hew," others that it could not be seen because it "such
beams of splendor threw / That it the Sunne a thousand times did pass” (VII vii 6), and the poet conjectures that the latter may well seem true, for her “garment was so bright and wondrous sheene, /That my fraile wit cannot deuize to what / It to compare, nor find like stuffe to that” (VII vii 7). Employing a protest of inability to describe the sublime, he elevates his personification by likening her to Christ’s appearance to the disciples on Thabor, “When they their glorious Lord in strange disguise / Transfigur’d sawe [...]” (VII vii 7). The comparison is almost sacrilegious, as Spenser summons biblical epiphany to his own mythification; it serves too as a reminder that shape-changing is vilified in Duessa, whereas in Chaucer’s tale, and other loathly lady tales, transfiguration is wonderful, a parallel with religious use of flesh as the vehicle for salvation.

Spenser’s Nature, the personification of a wide-reaching force, is endowed with the dread, awe and unspeakable beauty which in earlier tales belonged to the sovereignty hag and other medieval loathly ladies. Mutabilitie is immortal, yet with a characterisation which links her to some of the references of evil elsewhere in the Faerie Queene: the Irish rebels and Mary Stuart. Mutabilitie remains unpunished for the challenges she undertakes. Duessa is at the abject end of the series; despite her chthonic links, she is weak enough to be executed.

With the unendurably deceptive duplicity of Duessa out of the way, Nature redeems Mutabilitie, restoring her ambiguities within an ultimately Christian scheme. Mutabilitie appeals to Nature as the equal mother of
all, who will therefore “deale indifferently” (VII vii 14). Her claim is twofold. She declares her ancestral inheritance “From my Grandsire Titan vnto mee, “ Deriv’d by dew descent” (VII vii 16), and she shows that all within “the whole worlds raignn” (VII vii 15) is subject to her, according to the four elements. She summons a pageant to silently signify what she has just told: the seasons from Spring to Winter enter; then the months (beginning with May); followed by Day and Night (Duessa’s anestress, we might remember); the hours; and finally Life and Death.

After this impressive masque, she demands of Nature, “Lo, mighty mother, now be judge and say, / Whether in all thy creatures more or lesse, / CHANGE doth not raign and beare greatest sway [...]” (VII vii 47). Jove makes the counterclaim that time is controlled by the gods, which Mutabilitie outbids with the following challenge: “Yet what if I can proue that euen yee / Your selues are likewise chang’d, and subiect vnto mee?” (VII vii 49). She challenges Jove to describe where he was born, since although the accounts vary, “all consent that ye begotten were, / And born here in this world [...]” (VII vii 53). The challenge seems to address the act of myth-making itself, to reach beyond Jove to those who invoke him, most conspicuously here, Spenser, implicated in another self-reflexive gesture.

Until this point Mutabilitie has done well as her own representative, throwing in a red herring and producing silent witness. A sense that the changes she cites are circular is beginning to build up
against her, and despite the courage and enterprise of her challenge, the case slips away from her. After an expectant silence, Nature decrees that change allows things to “worke their owne perfection,” so that they “raigne ouer change, and doe their states maintaine” (VII vii 58). She advises Mutabilitie to be content to be ruled by Nature, and promises that a time will come when “none no more change shall see” (VII vii 59).

Spenser offers two more stanzas of contemplation upon Mutabilitie. He concludes that she does bear “the greatest sway,” and this, he laments, “makes me loath this state of life so tickle” (VII viii 1), which he continues to rhyme with “fickle,” and finally “sickle.” In his final admission of his loathing of mutability, Spenser locates another motivation for his contortion of the loathly lady motif. He finds consolation by considering “the pillours of Eternity, /That is contrayr to Mutabilitie” (VII vii 2), and concludes with a prayer for “Sabaoth’s sight” (VII viii 2). The Mutabilitie Cantos add to the meaning of what Duessa is: as well as the interconnection with other female characters as discussed above, she is also part of a series, with Mutabilitie and Nature as dilatory shape-shifters. I speculate that chaos-within-order is always an aspect of the loathly lady motif, and that Spenser is actualising, in the fullness of the set of shape-changers, the enigma which surrounds the loathly lady.

Yet the motif is lethally accurate for his own concerns about English contestation of Irish sovereignty, given the earlier usage in Irish kingship myths. Spenser promotes his own perspective by effectively
confounding the two challenges inherent in the loathly lady. Although Duessa is Mary Stuart rather than Ireland, the use of a shape-changer applies the leverage of their own nationalistic personification against the Irish. If Spenser is disconcerting to a modern reader for some of the visions he manufactures, he is apt in his application of sources, and perhaps especially of the popular or non-classical ones.

Spenser's variant inflexion of the loathly lady is centred in Duessa, but bleeds into the characters she resembles, and from whom she takes colour. She is bestial and linked to Catholicism like the dragon of Erroure; proud like Lucifera; a deadly temptress like Acrasia; a performer of femininity, like Phaedria. Like Ate, she is an abstraction as the daughter of Deceit and Shame, with an ancestress Night; yet whereas Ate is limited to this dimension, Duessa is multifaceted. Radigund shares with Duessa aspects of Mary Stuart. Both are opposed to characters who represent Elizabeth I, Spenser's avowed audience, whose presence is spread through many of the female characters. Arguably Elizabeth's presence provides a unifying feminine centre to the Faerie Queene, although I insist that Spenser's negation of the female force which the loathly lady motif embodies is symptomatic of his wide repertoire in representing the idea of woman: he can be deferential and celebratory, or as relentless as his own figure Busirane in the penning of women. In this range of ambivalence, which is highly effective at both ends of the spectrum, he is similar to his own creation, Duessa. His reinscription of
the loathly lady motif to revoke previous feminine power is a disturbing under-side from a feminist perspective. At the same time, Colin Clout piping up a vision just pulls back from allowing the loathly lady a place on the edge of the sublime.
Conclusion

My inclusion of Duessa brings this investigation back to its setting out point, the surroundings of a motif which is as old as the Irish hills. The Irish Sovranty makes poeticism a kingly attribute; the poet legitimises the king and kingdom as his Sovranty does, by his invocation of her. Thus, from the start, the loathly lady is essentially referential to the poetic act which constructs her. Despite his quite different use of the motif, Spenser obeys this pagan imperative. Duessa embodies Spenser's poetic method in the same way that the Wife of Bath and her hag materialise Chaucer's play. The loathly lady's unstable feminine flesh manifests the authorial design of her creator.

Her shape-changing form follows narrative function, enabling a happy ending against the odds of mutability. The paradoxes of the beastly bride and the hunter hunted are coupled; the slippage of inversion allows a loosening of gender roles. The nexus of ideas which the loathly lady incorporates is complex and fraught with tension: anxiety about food and sex, fear of assimilation, suspicion of human beastliness; the signification of feminine flesh, the relation of word to flesh, of genre to gender; initiation into maturity, social hierarchy, the power ratio underpinning heterosexuality; and kingly ideals, colonialist expansion,
ecology, syncretism. In all of these, contestation fosters identity, with the union of opposites providing redemptive closure.

The motif carries an elusive sense of archetypal truth profitably mapped through the loci which define the loathly lady. For Niall's futurity, she keeps a well whose water mingles pagan and Christian life-forces. She emerges from the forest wilderness of medieval text, both beastly, with the lowest degradation of human flesh, and powerful, a quasi-deity with all the forces of Nature. Although she is a forest denizen, she penetrates and outwits the court, that seat of mortal power. Mann convincingly argues that Chaucer's "most valuable contribution" is "not any particular configuration of gender-relationships, but simply the demonstration that reconstruction is possible" (Geoffrey 194); had she added the significance of the loathly lady into her analysis of the Wife of Bath's Tale, she would have strengthened the case for how fully Chaucer destabilises gender role restriction there. By importing the pagan goddess figure to rule over the dynamics of marriage, Chaucer goes a great deal further than even Mann allows.

The location of the idea of nationhood in the land is adumbrated by the Irish sovereignty hag, inherent in the Arthurian connection, and vestigial in the land issues of the Wedding of Sir Gawain. The relationship of land and court to national identity is consistently (although variously) refigured in loathly lady tales. The hag's propensity for the

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1 Margaret Jolly notes that "the hierarchical and encompassing logics of race and sex [...]"
brokerage of nationalism as well as kingdom propels her into contention. Leerssen draws a distinction between "nationality" and "the idea of nationality" (13), as though nationality might exist beyond its mental construction as an idea. In contrast to Leerssen, I regard nationality as a cerebral categorisation, always only an idea, and similarly problematic as ideas of masculinity and femininity. Spenser's use of the loathly lady in the discourse of colonisation is highly apt, while at the same time his adaption demonstrates that the motif may be inflected by an opposite political intention from the Sovranty myth's. Duessa provides purchase on the way that the loathly lady embodies the contestation of sovereignty, and interpersonal will. Text and the motif within it remain sites of contention. Shape-shifting keeps open the options of challenge, compromise, change, and conjunction. Chaucer affirms the character of the Wife when he allots the loathly lady tale to her mediation.

The qualities of the goddess inhere to the motif even when she is a bespelled maiden and not an experienced shape-shifter. Narrative intersect" (34); the hag exists at this intersection of busy discourse. Michael Neill is likewise bemused by the idea that nationality is seen to 'really exist'. He begins his essay, 'Broken English and Broken Irish': "No man or woman," WRITES THE KENYAN NOVELIST [sic] Ngugi wa Thiong'o in an incautious moment, "can choose their biological nationality". Questioning the Marxist Ngugi's use of the phrase 'biological nationality', 'now that even "race" has been deconstructed as an effect of ideology', he finds that, 'Ngugi's slip is all the more revealing, exposing the deep essentialism that affects our thinking in such matters' (2). Neill identifies the problem of such essentialism: 'People may argue about the proper boundaries of the nation---about its geographical, political, cultural, linguistic, or racial constitution---but there is seldom any doubt in the minds of the disputants that such boundaries really exist or that (after due process of "ethnic cleansing") they can be established and placed beyond dispute' (2). The dispute, and our inability to move beyond it, is the rub. D. P. Moran declares flatly: 'International misunderstanding is one of the marks of nationhood' (25).
compulsion implies that these two estates of women are virtually exchangeable, another collapse of social boundaries. Ostensibly Spenser's rendition censures through the vilification and execution of Duessa, suggesting that he was sensitive to the motif's implications of proto-feminism. Yet the influence of the goddess inheres in his displacement of Duessa's energy onto the figures of Mutabilitie and Nature. The fragmentary final cantos complete the cycle of redemptive union that the medieval versions establish as the romance pattern of the tale.

In the original design of this thesis, the two-tales-both-ways-Canterbury-pilgrimage, twenty-four book romance-epic version was to have traced the loathly lady through Beaumont and Fletcher's Women Pleas'd, and the Romantic lamia, to present day usage. The current ongoing conflicts underpinning a post-colonial, post-modern, market-force driven world make the motif still viable. I intended the main focus to be on the medieval, but to show how the paradigm established there infused the motif with agency in the contestation of will. I expected to find that the loathly lady paradoxically reflected her mediator's design, variously, yet consistently, and yet operated with the independence of a motif which belongs in the subconscious, having emerged from the primeval forests of pre-history.

Revealing the workings of gender codes by dismantling them, the loathly lady is constructed from ambiguous ideas of feminine flesh. In late
medieval texts she is counter to most canonical representations of women in English literature. She is authoritative; like the poet who constructs her, she controls the medium of language. Feminine, she commands the masculine. Although she foregrounds the extremes of feminine flesh, she is not maternal. She exploits the medium of the body, instead of being bound by reproduction. She is sexually active; her will must be done. From her inception, she unlocks the riddle of what women desire, scrambles the semiotics of the female body, and confounds gender role restriction. That is many-shaped.
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UMI
SOUL AND SOCIETY IN A TECHNOLOGICAL AGE:

AMERICAN DRAMA, 1920-1950

by

Dennis G. Jerz

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of English
University of Toronto

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SOUL AND SOCIETY IN A TECHNOLOGICAL AGE:

AMERICAN DRAMA, 1920-1950

Ph. D. English, 2001

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Abstract

Literary scholarship sometimes perpetuates an appearance of a dichotomy between art and technology, despite the fact that both share a similar etymological origin (the Latin *ars* and Greek *techne* both mean “skill”) and an essential connection. American drama between 1920-1950 explores the inescapable relationship between man and machine, during an age when machines become increasingly domesticated and accepted as an index to the American dream. The marriage between dramatic art and dramatic technology stems not only from the physical realities of staging, but also from the intimate connection of technology with human labor inside and outside of the household (*i.e.* family, and “career” or employ)—two foci especially prominent in American drama. Technology shapes and defines the values interior to the human soul, individually and collectively (*the civitas*) in addition to producing the external, physical environment in which people live (*the urbs*). Drawing on the experiments of European Expressionism, especially under-acknowledged German models in drama and film, American dramatists found new techniques for developing character and theme, as well as innovative staging techniques. Most important, however, the three decades of drama examined in this study illustrate three progressive stages in the human response to the
machine. In the Twenties, O’Neill’s *The Hairy Ape* and *Dynamo*, Rice’s *The Adding Machine* and *The Subway*, and Treadwell’s *Machinal* tells stories of self-destructive hostility toward advancing mechanization. In the Thirties, Odets’s agit-prop *Waiting for Lefty*, Hall-Rogers’ Federal Theatre production *Altars of Steel*, and Luce’s conservative *O! Pyramids* illustrate socialized acceptance of the machine, across a wide political spectrum. Finally, in the Forties, Miller’s *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*, Wilder’s *The Skin of Our Teeth*, and Williams’s *A Streetcar Named Desire* show the deeply intimate penetration of technology into individual and social life, manifesting itself as both an on-stage prop (as a wheel, a light bulb, or a wire recorder), and as an addition to the playwright’s arsenal of dramatic tools.
For my wife, Leigh

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1. Introduction

Even when its effects are destructive, technology (the application of knowledge to affect the human condition) expresses the human instinct for survival. Second only to language, Lewis Mumford sees the city as "the most precious collective invention of civilization" (53). The city demands a complex transportation and economic network linking rural agriculture with urban demand, as well as a complex social network, linking people of various social classes and ideologies. Mumford, Jacques Ellul, James Dougherty, Marshall McLuhan, and (more recently) Hugh Kenner are among the many technological critics who have examined human culture as shaped by tension between mechanized society on the one hand, and the ideal life of leisured intellectual inquiry and natural goodness on the other. While Aristotle argues that the polis is a required component of a truly human life, Mumford points to Cleinias' observation (Plato, Laws I) that the city exists in a natural state of competitive warfare, calling into question whether urbanization is good for humanity. Perhaps both suggest the city as an arena, in which humankind is profoundly on display. Conflict and balance within the city form the subject of Plato's Republic, under the explicit metaphor that the city is the soul writ large. The city embodies the physical and conceptual results of human efforts to live with (or in spite of) one another, while theatre embodies human efforts to scrutinize the soul, allowing the individual to live as a compassionate, perceptive, and intellectually active citizen. Theatre has historically blossomed in "that sphere in which, at any given time, man seems most called upon to define himself" (Eder 124). In a sense, then, the theatre is the soul of a city.
Dougherty observes that, to the nomadic Jews, God was honored as a city-breaker (5). Until the establishment of the Temple in Jerusalem, the Bible consistently presents cities as either military or moral threats, or both. Looking further back into Jewish tradition, we find that Adam and Eve were cast out of their original, permanent home as punishment for their transgression of God's law; they also received complementary curses: one for Adam (who must work by the sweat of his brow) and one for Eve (who must suffer during childbirth). The two Biblically-cursed forms of "labor" correspond conveniently to two major themes in American drama. Arthur Miller perhaps best describes the theatrical interest in these two modes of human life when he asks, "How may a man make of the outside world a home?" ("The Family in Modern Drama" 73). It was Cain, the first murderer, an outcast among the post-Edenic outcasts, who later founded the first city (Gen. 4:17). Augustine's *The City of God* used the city as a metaphor, identifying Rome (recently fallen to the barbarians) as a splendid worldly city, and contrasting it with the promise of the New Jerusalem, the theocratic communion. As notions of the sacred and the secular continued to diverge, gradually giving rise to the concept of the separation of Church and State (popularly enshrined as one of America's most treasured principles, although the phrase appears in no founding document), the concepts of city and citizenship changed as well. Dougherty uses *urbs* (the brick-and-mortar mechanized spaces, as in "urban planning") to refer to the physical city, and *civitas* (the concept of citizenship, from *civis*, "citizen") to refer to the philosophical community – a distinction which this thesis sustains even when many other distinctions between technology and art collapse.

In its reliance upon various techniques that enhance mimesis, all theatre can be seen as technological. Today we generally limit the terms "art" and "artistic" to the
realm of ideas, and restrict the terms "technology" and "technological" to the physical; yet the division is artificial, because the difference is merely technical. The realm of art and the realm of technology have only recently diverged from their classical roots – ars (Latin) and techne (Greek). In their original forms, both words simply meant "skill."

The creations of a technician may be artistic (especially in the theatre), and all the best artisans study technique. The artisans and art of a particular age both depend upon and determine the techniques in practice at the time: “Before the dramatist can write a play for the theatre, the theatre has to be there. And not only a theatre in the abstract, but a very particular kind of theatre – the theatre of the playwright’s own epoch” (Gorelik 17).

The amplification device within the masks of classical Greek actors, for example, suggests the long-standing co-operation between theatrical artistry and technology. Modern theatre invites many more convergence points for artistic and the technological creativity.

Advances in stage lighting enabled Robert Edmund Jones to depict – via expressionistic projections on the interior of a curved plaster cyclorama – the psychological terrors Eugene O’Neill describes in The Emperor Jones (1920); likewise, the expressionistic sound effects of The Hairy Ape (1922) and Elmer Rice’s The Adding Machine (1923) and the ultra-naturalism of the city sounds and textures (including a poured concrete sidewalk) for Street Scene (1929) further suggest how closely modern experimental theatre depends upon technology. Later staging efforts, such as the theatrical minimalism of Thornton Wilder’s Our Town (1938) and The Skin of Our Teeth (1942), the psychological expressionism of Tennessee Williams’s The Glass Menagerie (1944) and A Streetcar Named Desire (1947) along with Mielziner’s fragmented set design for Death of a Salesman (1949), all recall the expressionistic experiments of the Twenties. Our heritage
of experimental theatre depends upon the flexibility of a "black-box" stage, capable of creating, heightening or even annihilating theatrical forms; it, like the city, can be seen as both a technological and a social artifact. The later vestiges of expressionism complement the ensemble method acting called for by the psychologically complex characterizations and intimate family portraits of postwar American drama. In addition to the realities of staging, the texts themselves seem to argue for a new reading of modern American dramatists, whose work frequently depicts numbed human souls, silhouetted against the glare of a technological society. A clear understanding of these dramatic works and themes would seem to call for a technological critical vocabulary; yet, when it comes to the literary study of American drama, technology itself — either as a theme to be explored with conventional critical methods, or as a critical avenue through which to approach the cultural significance of a work or movement — receives only intermittent attention.

From their various philosophical perspectives, social thinkers such as Mumford, Dougherty, Ellul, McLuhan and Frye have concerned themselves with preserving the individual's sense of self-worth (be it historical, religious, psychological, etc.) in a rapidly-progressing world, generally signified by burgeoning cities which collapse the boundaries of space, time and thought. In the early Twenties, the force exerted by Joyce's *Ulysses* on prose and Eliot's *The Waste Land* on verse was akin to that of expressionism upon American drama; in fact, the two literary movements reached New York simultaneously. American expressionism of the Twenties scrutinized the effects of technology upon the human soul with an intensity that would not return to popular American culture until the cold-war/science-fiction era of the Fifties; however, few of these technological critics and
thinkers focused their sights on American drama for any length of time. Studies of modern urban life feature prominently in American novels (such as Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* and Sinclair Lewis’s *Babbit*) and poetry (including Hart Crane’s *The Bridge* and Pound’s *Hugh Selwyn Mauberly*). In American literature, studies of canonical figures such as Thoreau, Clemens, Whitman, Fitzgerald, Dreiser regularly examine the accelerated speed of mechanized life, as well as the steady urbanization of America’s social and artistic consciousness. Even the resurgence of the Southern Agrarians was a reaction against Northern industrial threats to Southern traditions of leisure and independence. This attention to technology was not new; increased attention to the human response to technology is a natural outgrowth of the passing of Enlightenment-era optimism, the cynicism and suspicion of technology that followed the Great War, and the rise of city-inspired literary experimentation. In *The Machine in the Garden*, Leo Marx finds contradictory agrarian and industrial dreams co-existing at the core of America’s founding myths – America was revered as an unspoiled land of plenty, which the newcomers set about industrializing as efficiently as possible. Kenner likewise traces the inspiration of modernity’s “mechanical muse,” such as that found in Wordsworth’s romantic praise of “Steamboats, Viaducts and Railways” or in Walt Whitman (“I Hear America Singing,” and “I Sing the Body Electric”).

The work ethic is hardly separable from the machine ethic; Benjamin Franklin’s veneration of efficiency, Henry Ford’s application of the assembly line, and countless moralists who published tracts enjoining housewives and businessmen to follow scientific principles in the management of their responsibilities are all extensions of the American tendency to invest great resources into establishing, gauging, and adjusting social status
through comparative material gain. The automobile invites the office worker to live in the countryside, yet it demands perpetual gas and maintenance, and causes longer commutes and neighborhood-killing urban sprawl. “By the early 1920s Americans were beginning to pay a considerable price for what historian James Flink has properly called our ‘car culture’” (Segal 30). The American fascination with the automobile has received relatively little direct attention from the stage, yet the environment created by the “car culture” has given rise to much of the country’s most acclaimed, most definitively American drama. The urbanization of modern life is one of the core precepts of modernism, and a major subject for modern art, together with its ancillary contraction of family ties, the delineation of separate public and private labor zones, the concentration of various ethnic groups, and the passing of pioneer-style economic and philosophical self-reliance and self-confidence. Although Pound argues that the modern citizen “has a perfectly good right to live in his cities and in his machine shops with the same kind of exuberance that a savage is supposed to have in his forest” (137), the pace of mechanized society rises into an “accelerated grimace” (Maubertly, “E. P.” II.2), and the inner life suffers. McLuhan queries the relationship between soul and machine with the following parable:

As Tzu-Gung was traveling through the regions north of the river Han, he saw an old man working in his vegetable garden. He had dug an irrigation ditch. The man would descend into the well, fetch up a vessel of water in his arms and pour it into the ditch. While his efforts were tremendous the results appeared to be very meager.
Tzu-Gung said, "There is a way whereby you can irrigate a hundred ditches in one day, and whereby you can do much with little effort.... You take a wooden lever, weighted at the back and light in front. In this way you can bring up water so quickly that it just gushes out. This is called a draw-well."

Then anger rose up in the old man's face, and he said, "I have heard my teacher say that whoever uses machines does all his work like a machine. He who does his work like a machine grows a heart like a machine, and he who carries the heart of a machine in his breast loses his simplicity. He who has lost his simplicity becomes unsure in the strivings of his soul. Uncertainty in the strivings of the soul is something which does not agree with honest sense. It is not that I do not know of such things; I am ashamed to use them."

(Understanding Media, 63)

The gardener in the parable seems to have no problem using tools (such as the shovel with which he presumably dug the ditch, or the water vessel, both of which mimic the human action of cupping the hands). Yet the old man is "ashamed to use" a machine (a word that comes ultimately from the Greek word for "expedience") that would allow him to "do much with little effort."

McLuhan's source for this passage is the memoirs of Werner Heisenberg, who had good reason to hold technology up for scrutiny. Drafted into the German army at the outbreak of WWII, Heisenberg was at the forefront of Hitler's efforts to create a nuclear bomb — a single-mindedly grotesque exaggeration of the clenched fist. Modern life re-
quires a degree of specialization that Mumford, together with experimental European dramatists such as Kaiser, finds harmful: "As a result, the specialized worker, a magnified hand, or arm, or eye, achieved excellence and efficiency in the part, to a degree impossible to reach except by such specialization; but he lost his grip on life as a whole" (103). A human conditioned to operate a machine cannot at the same time nurture a soul. Mumford’s reference to “a magnified hand” alludes to the similarly-distorted workers in Georg Kaiser’s Gas trilogy (1917-1920). In New York, successive productions by the New York Theatre Guild of Georg Kaiser's From Morn to Midnight (1916), Ernst Toller’s Man and the Masses (1920), and Karel Čapek’s R.U.R. (1920) sent a strong signal to the new American playwrights of the period. In the early American plays influenced by European expressionism, technology is a terrifying and alien force (linked to the urbs), threatening to obliterate the civitas, thus reducing the worker to a soulless drone.

Even before the Great Depression, American expressionism was already being absorbed into a "respectable gallery of possibilities" that offered a dramatist a formal alternative to realism (Bauland 26). Just before the seminal expressionistic achievements of O’Neill and Rice, Provincetown Players co-founder Susan Glaspell wrote The Verge (1921), which employed to great advantage such expressionistic elements as “telegraphic” dialogue and distorted sets, and a (female) mad scientist obsessed with unnatural scientific pursuits. The play may well be worth examination as an early example of expressionistic theatre, but the heroine’s identity as a scientist is far more important to the drama than is her relationship to the fruits of her research. For a similar reason, this thesis excludes the dramas of John Howard Lawson (Roger Bloomer, 1923 and Proces-sional, 1925), which are among the best examples of American expressionism, yet only
tangentially refer to technology itself. When experimental plays employ technological effects as a device, in order to facilitate feminist or socialist statements, they fall outside the scope of this study (which examines dramatic depictions of the human relationship with technology per se). Thornton Wilder, Tennessee Williams, and Arthur Miller, having inherited experimental forms from expressionism, respond in later decades to the new set of moral issues raised by another world war. This later generation of American playwrights acknowledged what was by that time the well-established presence of the machine — not as a nightmarish threat, or even a political rallying point, but rather as an entrenched presence in the minds, hearts, and even souls of the American people. Technology, formerly a symbolic social force, became an intensely personal part of the citizen’s private life.

Mardi Valgemae’s 1971 Accelerated Grimace remains the most thorough treatment of technology as an expressionist motif in American drama. In Expressionism and Epic Theater, J. L. Styan, finding the German movement “limited from the beginning by its nihilism,” examines a wider range of theatrical forms, observing that, while expressionism as an overt theatrical mode ended as quickly as it had begun, “expressionistic techniques are now part of the common pool from which many contemporary playwrights and directors draw” (62). Sherrill Grace’s Regression and Apocalypse: Studies in North American Literary Expressionism offers a concise overview of the origins of expressionism, as well as a systematic review of expressionistic elements in Eugene O’Neill; but her study focuses neither on drama nor on the early 20th century, which means much ground remains uncovered. Mark Fearnow’s The American Stage and the Great Depression: A Cultural History of the Grotesque examines American theatrical expressions of a culture
trapped between hope and disillusionment, poverty and plenty, past and future; as such, materialism and urban life feature regularly in his study.

Nevertheless, with the exception of Valgemae, the existing scholarship on American drama from the Twenties through the Forties rarely offers an extended line of inquiry on technological issues — except in most studies of labor drama, and in some studies of Eugene O’Neill. O’Neill’s most notable experimental work — the plays that distinguished his earliest contributions to the American stage — was the result of his domestication of expressionism, as imported primarily from German authors (especially Kaiser and Toller). Parallel cases can be made for Elmer Rice and John Howard Lawson, even though all three Americans denied being influenced by German expressionism. Lawson, whose *Roger Bloomer* (1923) featured identical office workers moving in mechanical unison and climaxed with a terrifying but cleansing dream sequence, claimed that he had to ask a friend what the word “expressionism” meant when he heard it applied to his work (Valgemae 73) — this, despite the fact that the word was widely applied to the previous year’s productions of Kaiser’s *From Morn to Midnight* and Capek’s *R.U.R.* at the Theatre Guild, and O’Neill’s *The Hairy Ape* at Provincetown.

Analyses of labor drama regularly focus on the relationship between family life and industrial labor (see Levin, Himelstein, Smiley). By articulating a position on industrial employment, radical and leftist labor theatre is therefore always on some level “about” technology. Yet, following the lead of the playwrights they examine and the ideals they share, Marxist critics typically consider technology as a social and political commodity. As such, they examine the limited range of social ills that can and must be cured only through a social revolution. Contemporary technological speculation likewise
frequently involved Marxist idealism, which had attached its own ideological significance to the technological age, without considering the machine as a human artifact that has cultural meaning beyond its utility in the workplace. In 1920-21, Dora Russell, a young idealist with dreams of reforming the world, began writing what she hoped would be a manifesto for American youth, offering a post-romantic blend of natural and industrial metaphors for Communism, whether it be "budding and blossoming like a flower on the sturdy plant of competent and organized industry," or "a whirling heart of fire that must consume ancient evils [and creating] industrialism anew, a thing, it may be, of undreamed of power and beauty." Russell also reported two views of a technological future. In one, the machine triumphed in America, in Russia, and the whole world: "There were long hours of mechanical slavery, black and ugly factories, fatuous towns and futile luxuries. Thought and art were dead; the population petulant and trivial" (xiv). In the other,

. . . the spirit of communism in Russia had leapt like a great wave to meet the West, and Western science and skill -- its twin brother -- had reared its head and sprung to the meeting with an exultant roar. So they met at last, soul and body, and went springing skywards in a clear, green pyramid of joy. . . . The power of the machine was broken forever; it served instead of commanding. . . , and everywhere the bright roofs of lovely hamlets, the spacious factories, the grassy tree-girt spaces / where children and students met to chatter and play, and workers to dance and sing after their easy labours. (xiv)
Russell, who envisions both “soul” (communism) and “body” (Western industry) uniting to defeat the machine, promises such a final glorious vision “not for the few, but for all, if the spirit of man in justice and harmony would but conquer and yoke the mechanical monster to his will” (xiv). Her idealistic hopes, like those of many who had looked to Russia for a hasty solution to ancient problems, quickly faded. Reflecting in 1983, she recalled that many former socialists from all walks of life, not just political activists and not just artists, were swept up in a false idealization of Soviet Russia, as promoted by a small group of influential intellectuals.

Thomas Scanlan’s Family, Drama, and American Dreams, and Thomas Greenfield’s Work and the Work Ethic in American Drama, 1920-1970 overlap the present dissertation and each other in several areas, including treatments of frontier independence, immigrant aspirations, and the shift from agrarian nostalgia to urban pragmatism, as they variously impact the American theatre. Much as Mumford sees the city as a container for potentially destructive forces channeled inward rather than dispersed outward, Scanlan observes that America’s most revered playwrights have written little other than dramas about dysfunctional nuclear families (5). The extended networks of friends, relations and neighbors of an Ibsen or Chekhov play are intimately involved in the struggles of the household they populate, so that the events of these European dramas are “always larger than the family emotions being dramatized.” By contrast, the “obsessed, frenetic, and warring families” of Strindberg’s realistic phase are much closer to the isolated nuclear families often depicted in American drama (6). Scanlan’s study of the family and Greenfield’s study of work also roughly correspond to the first two chapters of Bonin’s study of Major Themes in Prize-Wining American Drama (on “woman and marriage”
and "work and material rewards"). Bonin sees these two foci as relatively recent contributions to the much older traditions of classical plays dealing with war, politics, and religion. Klaic's *The Plot of the Future: Utopia and Dystopia in Modern Drama* comes perhaps the closest to examining technology as a social and moral force, although Klaic limits the focus to dramatic visions of future societies, and does not focus on American drama. While technology *per se* does not appear as a separate object of inquiry in any of these studies, the authors approach technology indirectly, in order to examine the human response to the mechanistic and urban forces which fill the plays of the period.

But Scanlan himself seems to underrate the importance of that approach. He finds in O'Neill a "relative lack of interest in work," despite the fact that several of his early plays touched on technological, urban, or working-class issues. Scanlan may be right to call Yank's journey "a quest for identity that is entirely spiritual and is largely divorced from the issue of work" (36), but surely labor and the soul are united in *Desire Under the Elms* (1924), which intimately connects Cabot's veneration of a harsh God and his lust for the farm he inherited from Eben's mother; further, the nature of modern labor informs at least part of the conflict raging within *The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape*. Scanlan concludes that O'Neill's lack of interest in labor meant that the domestication of this particular European theme was left to languish in the hands of lesser American dramatists such as Augustin Daly (*Under the Gaslight*, 1867), Clyde Fitch (*The City*, 1907), and Edward Sheldon (*The Boss*, 1911). Meanwhile, cup-and-saucer comedies only superficially examined the working world (via office romances), and frontier melodramas at least tangentially dealt with corrupt landlords or prospecting efforts. But even before Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* (1923) foregrounded the significance of tech-
nology in American culture, O'Neill's personal fascination with wounded families, his public acknowledgment of Strindberg's influence upon his own work, and his early adaptation of experimental stagecraft equipped him to follow up on the European interest in work (cf. Hauptmann's Die Webers and even Chekhov's The Three Sisters and The Cherry Orchard). While O'Neill's technology- and work-related plays were not his most critically acclaimed, they were nonetheless extremely important to his development as a dramatist, and to the subsequent development of later American playwrights. A brief overview of European expressionist ideals may help establish the overall continuity of O'Neill's and Rice's work, and the concern both showed for the fate of the soul in a technological age.

The escapist office comedies, melodramas, and well-made plays prevalent on the stage immediately after the Great War were models of the corresponding European forms, leaving something of a creative vacuum on the American side of the Atlantic—ably filled by expressionist drama. In Europe, expressionism had emerged as a direct challenge to the well-established traditions of realism, particularly Stanislavsky's philosophy of acting. The European expressionists rejected as superfluous the actor's attempts to recreate emotions by recalling past experiences, arguing that delving into the psychology of the character merely distracted the audience and clouded the actor's influence upon the dramatic message. In an appendix to his play The Seduction (Die Verführung, 1913), Paul Kornfield addresses the expressionist actor, in what Sokel sees (xxvii) as the nearest thing to an Expressionist manifesto: "If he has to die on the stage, let him not pay a visit to the hospital beforehand to learn how to die... Let him dare to stretch his arms out wide and with a sense of soaring speak as he has never spoken in
life” (qtd. in Sokel 6-7). Rather than aiming for mimetic and naturalistic effects, the actor should project emotions that are more pure, more intense, more *expressive* than life: “Let him think of the opera, in which the dying singer still gives forth a high C and with the sweetness of his melody tells more about death than if he were to crawl and writhe. For it is more important to know that death is anguish than that it is horrible” (8). This reference to a beautiful artistic expression of an ugly fact reminds us that although theatrical expressionism has come to be identified with nightmarish visions of endless suffering, its origins were more optimistic, even “a form of windy neo-romanticism” (Styan 1). Just as the anguish of death may be expressed through beautiful music, Strindberg, in his preface to *A Dream Play*, illustrates the connection between nightmare and romance: “Sleep, the liberator, often appears as a torturer, but when the pain is at its worst, the sufferer awakes — and is thus reconciled with reality” (192). When the Daughter of Indira finally departs to bring her tale of human suffering to her heavenly father, thus ending the dream, a chrysanthemum suddenly blooms; in *The Ghost Sonata*, as the hyacinth girl dies, “music, soft, sweet, and melancholy” welcomes her to the Island of the Dead. Within the context of an otherwise bleak theatrical vision, then, these images of salvation and release create a stagecraft that is more immediately comforting than the German theatre; but both share the same interest in examining human suffering for the purpose of uncovering sources of additional strength.

In his essay “The Man in the Center” (“Der Mensch in der Mitte,” 1917), utopian pacifist and intellectual Ludwig Rubiner describes his vision for channeling the rebellious and creative energies of art: “We want to bring, for one brief moment, intensity into human life. We want to arouse by means of heart-shaking assaults, terrors, threats, the in-
individual’s awareness of his responsibility in the community!” (3) His invocation of group consciousness is one of the defining characteristics of German expressionism, but expressionism as a whole is equally critical of the faceless mob and the selfish loner. Toller’s *Man and the Masses* (1921) explores the possibility of attaining community as a middle ground between equally nihilistic extremes. To Styan, German expressionism was “limited from the beginning by its nihilism” (62), but to Kaiser, writing in 1922, “Constructing the drama is always the means – never the end..... Drama is a transition – but also the immediate springboard onto completeness. Man, after this schooling, is excellently equipped for establishing himself in the world” (13). Kaiser saw his drama as evoking what he called “der kommende Mensch,” or the “New Man,” who would emerge refreshed and invigorated, from the agonizing introspection called for by Kaiser’s theatrical instruction. Čapek’s *R.U.R.* (produced in Prague, 1921) offers perhaps the clearest image of rebirth – the love-struck Robots inherit a new Eden that has been purged of human folly.

While not as overtly political in character as the American labor plays of the Thirties, European expressionist theater nonetheless represents human suffering and social strife in order to illuminate, as efficiently and as starkly as possible, a philosophy or an idea. Although these plays undeniably employ staging techniques designed to objectify the expression of human misery, at the same time they dramatize the potential for the human soul to transcend that misery – if only through a soaring performance such as that envisioned by Kornfield. The psychological complexities of Strindberg’s examination of human sufferings, and the stagecraft of the German examination of social pressures combine with an American interest in materialism and the pressures of the nuclear family in
episodic, almost cinematic stagecraft, showing us the action from a heightened point of view. While certainly a means of rendering the human psyche on stage, the technique was not without inherent flaws. In The Emperor Jones O'Neill successfully brought the audience along to experience terror on the skeletal level; in order to know Jones, we must see him psychologically dissected and cross-sectioned, almost like a creature in a laboratory. The end result, while theatrically engaging, nonetheless leaves us psychologically remote from the characters. Likewise, we know more about Yank or Zero than they know about themselves, which distances us from the very experience the dramatists wishes to present. Even at its most successful, expressionist stagecraft remained a curiosity (at least to the contemporary American playgoer, who generally wanted to empathize with, rather than analyze, dramatic characters). The age of experimental expressionism on overtly technological themes was essentially over by the late Twenties – a fact suggested in part by the failure of American audiences to embrace O'Neill's Dynamo (1928), Treadwell's Machinal (1928) and Rice's The Subway (1929). A far more important signifier was the success of Rice's very different Street Scene (1929), signaling the rise of new urban realism, new social activism, and modified comedies of manners (for now at least paying lip service to topical political and social themes), essentially subsuming the decade's earlier overt theatricality. While the radical content of much of the drama produced during the Thirties called for radical staging, the results were only sporadically good dramatic productions, and fare even worse as literature.

The theatrical giants of the Forties would later bring back many of the same daring theatrical effects, contrasting them with the conventions of the fourth-wall stages, and charging them with a very different theatrical mission: "If the original German expres-
sionism, limited from the beginning by its nihilism, is now as dead in Europe and America as it is in Germany itself, expressionist techniques are now part of the common pool from which many contemporary playwrights and directors draw" (Styan 62). American experimental plays do not explore the emergence of the New Man, but rather lament the failings of the old one. These men (and women) live in a human society that has taught them to measure themselves by certain standards. By the end of the period under investigation, it can be argued, a new (or renewed) attention to characterization emerged, shifting the dramatic focus from representative characters victimized by or fighting against the forces of social change to the effect of those pressures upon characters attempting to cope with an already irrevocably altered social landscape. On the day of Willy’s funeral, his house is paid off; yet none of the people it sheltered are at home in the world. According to the line of critical thinking that posits Willy Loman as a figure of modern tragedy, the fact that modern social standards are petty and materialistic does not diminish their effect on the human soul.
2. The Americanization of Expressionism:
The Hairy Ape (1922) and The Adding Machine (1923)

In his letter to the Nobel Prize Committee, accepting his award for Strange Interlude (1928), O'Neill credits Strindberg as his inspiration: “It was in reading his plays when I first started to write back in 1913-14 that, above all else, gave me the vision of what modern drama could be, and first inspired me with the urge to write for the theatre myself” (Bogard 427). But O’Neill’s contemporary George Jean Nathan and later critics blame one of O’Neill’s driest and least successful works, Welded, on a misguided effort to mimic Strindberg (Nathan, Intimate Notebooks 24; J. Miller 67; J. Miller and Frazer 61). Certainly in Strange Interlude O’Neill demonstrated his ability to write effective drama in the line of Strindberg, but in 1934, Brecht virtually dismissed O’Neill as a follower of Kaiser (Willett 68). In his Nobel acceptance letter, O’Neill claims he was “never one of those who are so timidly uncertain of their own contribution that they feel they cannot afford to admit ever having been influenced,” lest they lose any claim to originality (Bogard 427). O’Neill readily acknowledges his debt to Strindberg, but is less forthcoming about the influence of the Germans; yet the German role in popularizing Strindberg suggests that the influence question is not a binary opposition. The arrival of German forms was one of the chief catalysts for O’Neill, Rice and other American dramatists.

Gassner categorizes the experimental heritage of American plays into three components, which other critics typically group together under the general term “expressionism.” For his part, Gassner applies expressionism specifically to that drama which ex-
plores the “disintegration of modern man and his twentieth-century society”; futurism/constructivism exploits “the marvelously dynamic nature of the machine”; and finally, surrealism releases “the free fantasy of the unconscious” (Form and Idea 109). As seen by Gassner, expressionism "could be a means towards an end, as when it was employed to underscore some plot situation or some character's state of mind; or it could be an end in itself, as when the entire play and the production were intended to exhibit a chaotic or nihilistic view of reality, as in the previously mentioned Strindberg plays [The Dream Play and The Ghost Sonata]" (119). Gassner's scheme helps to clarify a crucial difference between Strindberg's style and O'Neill's early experimentalism: the former deals more universally with the human psyche, while the latter silhouettes humanity against a distinctly technological world view. Among the thematic similarities between Kaiser's From Morn to Midnight (1916, produced by the Theatre Guild 1922) and O'Neill's The Emperor Jones (written in 1920, produced by Provincetown in 1921), is that each presents events through the tortured perspective of the central character's state of mind; in Strindberg's experimental plays, the prevailing consciousness is the author's dreaming mind (Gassner 121; Valgemae 40). Here, then, O'Neill reveals an inclination for the German model.

Elmer Rice defines expressionism rather narrowly, applying it primarily to the subset of plays Gassner identifies as “futurism/constructivism”:

In the United States there were not more than a dozen such plays produced. Besides The Adding Machine and another play of mine, The Subway, there were John Howard Lawson’s Roger Bloomer and Processional, Sophie Treadwell’s Machinal, and O’Neill’s The
Hairy Ape (and perhaps The Emperor Jones and The Great God Brown should be included). (Minority Report 198)

The first five plays on Rice’s short list foreground urban or technological themes, especially examining the fate of the unprotected individual swallowed up by the social and urban machine. The two O’Neill plays which Rice here relegates to parentheses employ expressionistic staging techniques such as abstraction and the externalization of interior mind states, but do so without examining mechanization in any detail. Judging by the fact Rice placed these non-technological plays on a second tier, we can conjecture that Rice sees as most characteristically expressionistic, those American plays which share the outward formal techniques and the thematic interests commonly linked to German dramatists Kaiser and Toller, and exposed to broad American audiences through the German films The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1919) and Metropolis (1926). Nevertheless, Rice maintained in a 1968 interview that “there is no foundation for the belief that the Americans – Lawson, O’Neill, Treadwell, whatever others there were – were imitating the Germans” (Elwood 6).

Valgemae and Styan argue that many critics have taken too uncritically these denials of expressionist influence, leading to an exaggerated impression of Strindberg’s influence on American experimental theatre. O’Neill’s praise of Strindberg is clearly sincere, and should not be considered merely an effort to stroke the Swedish pride of the Nobel committee members. In addition, some of the technological themes that tie O’Neill most closely to the German expressionists are also detectable in Strindberg. To take only one example, as spokesman for O’Neill’s stokers, Yank exults over his position as prime mover “at de bottom” of industrial society (216). The claim recalls one of the
coal-heavers in Strindberg’s *A Dream Play*, who observes, “we are the foundation of society. If there’s no coal, the kitchen stove goes out and the fire on the hearth too. The machines in the factory stop working; the lights in streets and shops and homes all go out” (241).

O’Neill’s 1924 program note for the Provincetown production of Strindberg’s *The Ghost Sonata* (under the title *The Spook Sonata*) celebrates Strindberg for liberating the theatre from the constraints of realism. For O’Neill, “what we loosely call ‘Expressionism’ – all that is artistically valid and sound theatre – can be clearly traced back through Wedekind to Strindberg’s *The Dream Play, There are Crimes and Crimes, The Spook Sonata*, etc.” (qtd. in Bogard 387). But Bauland warns, “We must avoid the oversimplified and all too commonly stated notion that expressionism in drama sprang like Athena from the forehead of Zeus when Strindberg wrote his ‘dream plays’ and their prefatory remarks” (15-16). According to O’Neill, “Strindberg knew and suffered with our struggle [against the constraints of realism] years before many of us were born” (337). Such a statement is consistent with Styan’s observation that the value of Strindberg’s contributions to the experimental theatre became clear only after the German expressionists had inherited the tradition and added their own innovations. "Only afterwards were the characteristics of expressionism recognized in forerunners like Büchner, Strindberg and Wedekind, and these were claimed as the new masters." (2)

*The Personal Equation* (1915), an unproduced melodrama which O’Neill wrote for George Pierce Baker’s Harvard playwriting workshop, is evidence enough that a familiarity with Strindberg was insufficient to unlock O’Neill’s dramatic talent – at least at that early stage of his writing apprenticeship, when Baker was still a dominant influence.
This early O’Neill effort (published in Bogard, The Unknown O’Neill) is burdened with a heavy, self-consciously topical plot, extremely flat characters, and an Ibsen-inspired climax which employs sentimental spectacle to present a heavy moral. A clumsy exposition establishes the grounds for a generational conflict between Perkins, an aging second engineer on a steamship, and his son Tom, a charismatic member of the crew. Having fallen under the spell of a Communist agitator named Olga, Tom incites the workers to riot, much to the distress of his father, who has developed a strong emotional bond with the engines. He combines the qualities of two of the stokers from O’Neill’s The Hairy Ape: Perkins shares both Yank’s pride in technology, and Paddy’s sentimental romanticism. Much of Perkins’s dialogue could have been written for Star Trek’s devoted engineer Scotty (especially in light of the way the Scotty character has aged over the course of thirty years of movie and television sequels): “I seem to hear [the engines] speaking like a friend to me, times when I’m lonely and, well, sort of sick of things – and they’re a comfort. And in a storm, I know I can hear them groan with pain, and suffer, and I feel so sorry and try to do all I can to help them” (5). Perkins is equally upset at Tom for thumbing his nose at convention by maintaining a free-love relationship with Olga. Perkins and Tom taunt and provoke each other in the inevitable boiler-room showdown which leaves Tom an invalid and an imbecile.

A melodramatic plot twist reveals that Olga is carrying Tom’s child, whom she threatens to destroy in an effort to wrest Tom away from Perkins. The final moments of the play reveal a few glimmers of dramatic talent, as Olga works herself up into a radical political frenzy, during which she manages to convince herself that Tom’s sacrifice was not in vain – until Tom’s voice, giggling and uncomprehending, repeats her last line:
“Long live the Revolution!” This final spectacle recalls the onset of Oswald’s illness in *Ghosts* (1881), but with one important difference: Ibsen brings down the curtain while Mrs. Alving is still contemplating her horrible dilemma (whether to carry out her son’s suicidal request); while O’Neill, on the other hand, has Olga crumple in guilty defeat.

Since O’Neill destroyed the tension mounting in the finale, the engine-room scenes stand as the best in the play; yet these are presented in a perfectly conventional crowd sequence, without any of the brooding fatalism of O’Neill’s one-act sea plays (1916-18) or the experimental sound effects and vocal patterns that distinguish the below-decks scenes of *The Hairy Ape* (1922). Despite its considerable flaws, the play is marginally valuable for the insights it offers to the playwright’s early struggles to tackle typically O’Neillian themes, while still shackled to a stifling dramatic mode. The most tellingly constrictive elements are the heavy pronouncements issued by a moralizing doctor at Tom’s bedside: “You cannot set yourself against the laws of God and men without being punished. . . . He might have been different if he had had the influence of a home” (62). When taken together, the high melodrama marking the father-son conflict, the timely presence of Olga’s radical rhetoric in a play devoid of social comment, and the awkward invocation of a raisonneur who is otherwise not involved in the plot, suggest that O’Neill was attempting to build an entire play for the thoroughly undramatic purpose of illustrating a trite moral through Olga’s collapse – a textbook sentimental climax that undercut’s the play’s pretension to examine complex social issues.

Once O’Neill grew confident enough to strike out on his own, creating bolder dramatic approaches to more complex moral issues, he returned to many of the same themes. For instance, in *The Hairy Ape*, we see further rejections of both the narrow vi-
sion of the futurist (that is, Yank as he is when we first meet him) and the unsatisfying, obtuse vision of the radical (notably the socialist agitator Long). In *Anna Christie* (1921), we witness another sea-cursed father’s dubious efforts to jerry-rig a family unit. Perhaps less obviously, in *Desire Under the Elms* (1924) we see another lonely patriarch seek companionship from the source of his livelihood: the bond Perkins feels with his engines is akin to that which Cabot feels with his cows: “I kin talk t’ the cows. They know. They know the farm an’ me.” (238). Further, the power of the faint hope of Tom’s recovery is an early illustration of O’Neill’s reverence of the life-sustaining lie, to which he later returned at the height of his creative powers, in his masterly dissection of the pipe-dreams propping up the denizens of Harry Hope’s bar (*The Iceman Cometh*, written 1939). Finally, the tension between Perkins and Tom is a relative strength, even though the father-son antagonism is a bare shadow of the shifting network of much more complex forces that push and pull the members of the Tyrone family in *Long Day’s Journey Into Night* (written 1940). In *The Personal Equation*, O’Neill exploits these themes to the fullest extent possible, despite the burdens of shallow characterization and plodding dialogue, and, most important, the oppressive forms of realism.

The artistic shortcomings of *The Personal Equation* suggest that O’Neill’s familiarity with Strindberg was not enough – at least not yet – to propel him to the experimental heights which would soon alter the shape of American drama. If Baker’s course did not provide O’Neill with a useful playwriting methodology, it nonetheless did bring him into contact with useful models: Baker had recently returned from Germany, full of reports about dramatic experiments there. While at Harvard, O’Neill began learning German – to study the dramatist Wedekind and other German playwrights (Valgemae 27), as
well as to explore Nietzsche and Freud, whose influence on O’Neill is more widely recognized. Although no single expressionistic play seems to have influenced O’Neill to a great extent, Bauland observes that he “was surely engaged by” German expressionism, and finds “too many resemblances to too many models for us to credit coincidence” (18).

For instance, O’Neill’s *The Emperor Jones* (1921) bears a strong thematic relationship to Kaiser’s *From Morn to Midnight* (produced in New York in 1922, but available in English translation since 1920). In both plays,

> ... a small man trying to achieve a form of worldly greatness, loses his illusions one by one. Kaiser's protagonist does so by progression, O'Neill's by regression; both find release only through the fatal bullet. And both plays make extensive use of light and sound to accentuate the deterioration of the mind and body of a hapless fugitive from the pettiness and terror of his own life which he does not understand. (Bauland 19)

O’Neill applied standard expressionistic staging techniques (subjective projections, short episodic scenes, internal monologues, etc.) to deconstruct the thin veneer of civilization separating all humans from savagery. The techniques themselves were not new, although they were new to the American stage. By the next year’s *The Hairy Ape* (opening three months after the American debut of *From Morn to Midnight*) Bauland finds him already "skillfully synthesizing an expressionistic framework with palpably realistic details" (19), and so quickly placed his own creative mark upon the standard experimental forms he inherited. Rice managed a similar achievement in *The Adding Machine* through his addi-
tion of stream-of-consciousness monologues as a vehicle for characterization, and his deft application of humor.¹

Shortly before producing their signature expressionistic works, O’Neill and Rice had each seen Robert Wiene’s expressionistic silent film, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919). The movie was remarkable not only for being one of the first written especially for the screen (rather than adapted from an existing literary or legendary source), but also as the first to aspire to an artistic, rather than photorealistic, vision of the world. For instance, to create an unrealistic, nightmarish setting, the director employs painted cutouts for interior and exterior sets, arranging them asymmetrically, skewing all the horizontal and vertical lines. The misshapen angles, grotesque make-up and striking lighting effects defined a visual standard for German expressionism, spread worldwide by the film’s popularity. Many of this film’s formal innovations and melodramatic touches are now the defining marks of the horror film genre.

The movie’s main narrative, told via the hero’s flashback, concerns the somnambulist Caesare, who emerges from a coffin-like enclosure to carry out Dr. Caligari’s murderous commands. On the verge of killing the heroine, Caesare falls in love with her instead. Carrying her limp form into the hills, the monster flees a posse of villagers, led by the hero. The chase is brief and anti-climactic, for the monster soon tires, drops the girl, and tumbles to his death. The hero is shocked to learn that “Caligari” is actually the respected director of a nearby insane asylum. After surreptitiously accessing the director’s journals (acted out in another flashback) the hero learns of the director’s obsession

¹ Other American dramatists, including Wilder, Williams and Miller, would further extend the palette of American expressionistic techniques, harnessing their power for their shocking contrast when placed within otherwise realistic productions.
with the legendary mind-control experiments of a mystic named Caligari, whose identity and research the doctor has adopted. The discovery of Caesare’s body – which testifies to the failure of the experiments – incites “Caligari” to fits of grief and rage, after which he is himself taken off in a straitjacket. Having concluded the main narrative, the story now returns to the outer frame, where it becomes clear that the hero has been relating the entire story from inside the walls of the asylum (a plot twist suggested by Fritz Lang, who would later direct the equally influential *Metropolis* [1927]). Most of the major characters from the main story reappear as inmates, including the monster Caesare – now alive and placidly stroking a flower. After attacking the asylum director with a cry of, “He is Caligari!”, the hero is subdued and removed. The ambiguous finale comes with the director’s ominous announcement that he now knows how to cure the hero’s delusion.

According to Valgemaee, “quite a few American experiments in dramaturgy as well as in production are indebted to this single work of Continental expressionism” (9). Rice reported seeing the film at a private screening, during his unproductive stint as a Hollywood writer, in 1919 or 1920. “. . . I was greatly impressed by the film (as I have been upon subsequent viewings). I certainly did not have the film in mind when I wrote *The Adding Machine*, though what its unconscious influence might have been, it is, of course, impossible for me to know” (Valgemaee 66). O’Neill saw the film after its American release in 1921, writing on June 10 that it had opened his mind to “wonderful possibilities” he had “never dreamed of before” (*Selected Letters*). Many important visual elements in the following year’s production of *The Hairy Ape*, such as the contrasts of light and darkness in the stoker scenes, the imposing, skewed angles of the set pieces, and
“even the ‘sculptured pose’ of a prisoner in his cell” (Valgema 34) echo elements in the German film.

The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari does not directly address technology or materialism, except that as a type of the “mad scientist,” Caligari’s evil comes from his tampering in God’s domain. Another European work with widespread influence in America, Czech playwright Karel Čapek’s R.U.R. (Rossum’s Universal Robots), also draws on the madness of science, but specifically observe that an obsession with material productivity excludes consideration of the soul from the moral philosophies of capitalist opportunists and radical labor agitators alike. Far from vilifying technology, Čapek permits technological utopians, humble workers, sensitive idealists, and even the Robots themselves each to voice heartfelt but ultimately irreconcilable truths. R.U.R was published in 1920, first produced in Prague on January 25, 1921 and produced by the New York Theatre Guild in 1922. Although written and staged according to melodramatic conventions, its intellectual plot drew the attention of, among others, Shaw and Chesterton, who numbered among those participating in a public discussion of R.U.R. in London. Shaw observed that man is enslaved to routine, whether that routine is imposed by technology or not; Chesterton found the play a satire on irresponsible capitalism. Čapek responded, via The Saturday Review, to what he felt was the excessive thematic attention critics were paying to his Robots. “For myself, I confess that as the author I was much more interested in men than in Robots” (qtd. in Harkins 90).

The Robot is the ultimate commodity – a factory-built living machine, marketed by an idealistic businessman who hopes to turn human society into a work-free utopia. After human anxieties and greed lead to wars and depopulation, an awakening Robot so-
ciety learns how to hate and how to kill. Lacking any frame of reference outside of the technological environment which gave them birth — no Nature to follow other than the restrictive order of the assembly line — their rebellion ushers in a grotesque new civilization that values nothing but self-serving efficiency and meaningless industry. After the extermination of all human consumers, unwanted goods pile up in storehouses, and the Robots keep working, simply for the sake of the ideals of productivity and efficiency. Virtually every encyclopedia or textbook entry on the word "robot" mentions the play R.U.R. as the source, even though for the neologism, Čapek credits his brother Josef (his sometime collaborator and an accomplished artist in his own right). The immediate worldwide success of the play immediately popularized the word, from the Czech word robota, meaning "drudgery" or "servitude" — a robotnik is a worker or serf, according to Kussi (33). Although the term today conjures up images of clanking metal contraptions, Čapek's Robots (always capitalized) are mass-produced living beings, the product of what we would now call genetic engineering. R.U.R. includes vague descriptions of "kneading troughs" and "vats" for processing a chemical substitute for protoplasm, and a "stamping mill" for forming Robot bodies. A more imaginative and scientifically plausible description of the artificial creation of armies of workers would have to wait for Brave New World (1932). In Huxley's novel, factories stimulate the budding and multiplication of fertilized ova destined for the working class, and then deliberately stunt embryonic development. The process turns the remaining, unmodified elite into relative supermen, a status not unlike that which Domain imagines for a humanity served by an endless supply of Robot laborers.
In *R.U.R.*, an idealistic young woman (whose name, Helena Glory, suggests the power of a female archetype) plans to awaken the souls of the Robots. Her disruptive dramatic function bears a passing resemblance to that of O'Neill's Mildred, who makes a similar foray into worker territory. Helena receives from Domain, the general manager, a compressed account of the company's father-and-son founders, Old Rossum and Young Rossum (archetypal figures who do not appear on stage, their founding actions having taken on mythic proportions by the era in which the play is set). A Frankenstein figure, Old Rossum was bent on usurping the role of the Creator by artificially reproducing a man in painstaking detail, while pragmatic son put a stripped-down model on the market.

Domain: Practically speaking, what is the best kind of worker?

Helena: The best? Probably the one who-- who-- who is honest-- and dedicated.

Domain: No, it's the one that's the cheapest. The one with the fewest needs. (41)

Unlike human beings, Robots have no knowledge of being oppressed, and therefore work tirelessly. They have perfect memories, but no creativity, and no emotions. Since their experience is completely circumscribed by industrialism, they lack instinctive knowledge of nature. Nevertheless, a psychologist admits that once in a while a Robot will throw down his work and gnash his teeth. Rather then treating such events as product malfunctions, Helena prefers to interpret them as signs of the Robot soul. After inexplicably accepting Domain's marriage proposal, she remains on the island, figuratively married not only to Domain but also to the other executives, who themselves variously represent science, engineering, finance, etc. In that role, she asks a scientist to modify certain Robots,
so that they might develop souls. Speculating on what would happen if one such modified Robot – also named Helena – were to “wake up,” the scientist imagines his creation hating him for making her beautiful but unable to love. Rice indicts Mr. Zero for a similar sexual nullity (in his decision to flee the intimacy of a sensual afterlife with Daisy), but sterility is only one of a catalogue of failings which doom Zero’s soul to an endlessly degrading cycle, and sexuality is not explicitly connected to the image of the adding machine itself. While Domain praises a world in which human labor is unnecessary, the Robot rebellion suggests that there is no real humanity left in a society which has abolished Nature. The Robots’ murderous manifesto only hastens the inevitable demise of humanity: “Robots of the world, you are ordered to exterminate the human race. . . Work must not cease!”

A melodramatic “missing papers” plot device (involving the formula for creating Robot protoplasm) means that the Robots are themselves faced with extinction as the existing units wear out. Without the missing formula, and following the extermination of all humans who might recover it, “The only thing [they] cannot produce is Robots. The machines are turning out nothing but bloody chunks of meat” (tr. Novak-Jones 98). Nevertheless, in a speech deleted from Selver’s less-than-rigorous 1923 English translation, the Robot leader vows: “We will give birth by machine. We will build a thousand steam-powered mothers. From them will pour forth a river of life. Nothing but life! Nothing but Robots!” (100). This utopian dream, spoken by a Robot named Damon (a demon?) is akin to that of Domain (Dominus, Lord?) – both leaders hope to use machinery to improve upon Nature. Without knowledge of physical love, the Robots cajole, threaten and beg Alquist (whose name suggests the Latin pronoun aliquist, “someone, anyone”), the
last remaining human, to help them discover what they call "the secret of life." The issue is not merely one of generation; rather, the allegorical names suggest a philosophical debate over qualities of the soul, in the vein of medieval morality plays – a debate which also informs O’Neill’s *The Hairy Ape* and Rice’s *The Adding Machine*.

Indeed, all three plays call to mind an adage from the Enlightenment past. Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Emile* (1762), a philosophical thesis presented as advice for raising the perfect child, begins with the following pronouncement: “God makes all things good; man meddles with them and they become evil.” To Rousseau, civilization was a great step backwards in the natural development of the human species. “[P]rejudice, authority, necessity, example, all the social conditions into which we are plunged... stifle nature... and put nothing in her place” (5). In his natural state, Man “is tied to no one place, he has no prescribed task, no superior to obey, he knows no law but his own will; he is therefore forced to reason at every step he takes. He can neither move nor walk without considering the consequences. Thus the more his body is exercised, the more alert is his mind; his strength and his reason increase together, and each helps to develop the other” (98).

The natural state stimulates thought and self-awareness, and is therefore humanizing. An industrial worker, removed from the stimulation of nature, numbed by mindless, repetitive tasks, is debased. Although Rousseau thought more about the cultural excesses of the aristocracy than the economic excesses of industry, his theory does apply to one of the artistic concerns developed by dramatists in the Twenties: the dangers of allowing technology to serve as the steward of the secret of life.

Both Rousseau’s uncorrupted “Natural Man” and Čapek’s factory-built Robots illustrate the same message about the corrupting nature of human civilization. Similarly,
O’Neill’s *The Hairy Ape* dooms Yank for existing only in a world of things – an *urbs*, a series of confining physical spaces and material structures, which prevent him from belonging in any *civitas*, or community of human ideas. By contrast, the sterile human corporation and the lifeless factory society of the Robots in *R.U.R.* satirize the excesses of human economic systems (the exaggerated value placed, in the case of capitalism, on the possession and consumption of goods; or in the case of communism, on the process of factory labor in a society that has been violently liberated from all human consumers).

The human and Robot conceptions of utopia are incompatible; since the Robots learned theirs from the humans, the blame for the resulting dystopia rests squarely on those humans who shirked work, in favor of machine-age comfort.

Through the corporation, Rossum’s Universal Robots, Domain gains power over the world. Domain envisions a world of human leisure: “I wanted not a single soul to be broken by other people’s machinery... I wanted to turn the whole of mankind into an aristocracy of the world” (130). But another executive, moved at the eleventh hour by the sound of Helena’s piano playing, indicts them all for ignoring the finer things in life: “The world was wonderful and we – we here – tell me, what enjoyment did we have?”

As if in reply, the business manager, tidying up the accounting books, mutters, “Five hundred and twenty millions” (131). Left to their own devices, the Robot civilization accomplishes its materialistic goals without grasping the secret of life. Nature eventually re-emerges triumphant in the form of two of Helena’s specially modified Robots, whose sensitivity makes them unfit for work. When each passes an impromptu test by offering to die to save the other, Alquist renames them Adam and Eve, and bequeaths to them the world; they may perhaps avoid the errors of their predecessors. *R.U.R.* is, in this sense, a
literal answer to the Biblical question which captivated O’Neill’s later work: “For what
does it profit a man if he should gain the whole world, but lose his soul?” (Mark 8:36).

**Industrial Isolation in The Hairy Ape**

In *The Hairy Ape* (1922), Yank’s mechanized world view initially provides him
with what all moderns seek – a place to belong; yet his soul is stunted and brutish as a
result. The stoker’s quarters force people of many ethnic backgrounds into close com-
munion, but they are mostly drunk, and their chatter evokes not a true community but
rather “the bewildered, furious, baffled defiance of a beast in a cage” (165). The play
was produced in 1922, the same year which marks the appearance of several other
groundbreaking versions of urban numbness, across several genres, including Eliot’s *The
Waste Land*, Joyce’s *Ulysses*, and Lewis’s sympathetic portrait of a white-collar drone,
*Babbitt*. In the same year, New York saw the American premiere of *R.U.R.*, whose fac-
tory-bred Robots, like Yank, lack any frame of reference outside the industrial environ-
ment that called them into being. Formed by similar social forces, each of these other
brutish figures more frequently exhibit the numbed dullness of a domesticated beast than
the untamed violence which Yank represents. A cousin of this tamed brute might be
traced to Faulkner’s *Benjy* (*The Sound and the Fury*, 1929) through Steinbeck’s Lennie
(*Of Mice and Men*, novel and play, 1937). Their mental deficiency preserves their inno-
cence even when their actions result in violence (as in the case of Lennie’s accidental
murder of Curley’s wife, or Benjy’s perceived threat to schoolgirls walking past the
gate), which makes these brutes are entirely sympathetic – unlike Yank.²

² See chapter 6 for a discussion of Stanley Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire*
lenged by a shipmate’s sentimental recollection of the days before coal-burning steamships turned the romance of sailing into the drudgery of coal-stoking, Yank defends his mechanized turf:

Hell in de stokehole? Sure! It takes a man to work in hell. Hell, sure, dat's my favrite climate. I eat it up! . . . Slaves, hell! We run de whole woiks. All de rich guys dat tink dey're somep'n, dey ain't nothin'! Dey don't belong. (176-177)

Mildred, lounging on the upper-class deck of the same liner, confirms Yank’s conviction that the idle rich are only half-alive:

I would like to be sincere, to touch life somewhere. [With weary bitterness] But I'm afraid I have neither the vitality nor the integrity. All that was burnt out in our stock before I was born. Grandfather’s blast furnaces, flaming to the sky, melting steel, making millions – then father keeping those home fires burning, making more millions – and little me at the tail-end of it all. I'm a waste product in the Bessemer process – like the millions. (182-83)

Like the R.U.R. executive who cleaves to his “millions,” Mildred measures herself according to wealth that she did not work to produce. Her hollow wish for vitality echoes Helena’s initial vision of herself as a Robot advocate; just as Mildred is unable to shake her father’s aristocratic legacy, Helena’s inexplicably rapid marriage to Domain identifies her with the human elite. Even as Helena lives the life of an aristocrat, her efforts to reach out to the Robots (by meddling with the development of their souls) and later to

(1947) as a more successful version of Yank.
protect humans (by destroying the formula for producing Robots) are disastrous both parties. Mildred’s quest likewise crushes her own self and indirectly destroys Yank, yet all along she remains passive. Her aristocratic idleness leaves her too morally bereft to accept Yank’s fundamental humanity: “paralyzed with horror, terror, her whole personality crushed, beaten in, collapsed, by the terrific impact of this unknown, abysmal brutality, naked and shameless” (191). Instead of acting upon her recognition of Yank’s humanity, she cries out and collapses.

Yank, for his part, loses what had been an iron-firm grip on his own neatly circumscribed world; the intrusion raises the obscure possibility that something may be wrong with his world. Long’s unsuccessful attempt to convert Yank to socialism is the occasion for one of the play’s most truly expressionistic scenes: Yank attempts to assault the grotesque marionette-like socialites, but they effortlessly ignore both his taunts and his fists. A visit to jail dimly awakens Yank’s sense of justice, converting him briefly to radical activism, but his vengeful rage excludes him from the pamphlet-and-pipe-smoke stuffiness of the local Industrial Workers of the World office. His downward spiral eventually brings him face-to-face with a zoo ape:

So yuh’re what she seen when she looked at me, de white-faced tart! I was you to her, get me? On’y outa de cage – broke out – free to moider her, get me? Sure! Dat’s what she tought. She wasn’t wise dat I was in a cage, too – worser’n yours – sure – a damn sight – ‘cause you got some chanct to bust loose – but me –

[He grows confused] Aw, hell! (Scene 8, p. 229)
While Yank cannot share the comfort Paddy draws from memories of pre-industrial sailing vessels, he believes he can communicate with the ape, calling the animal "Brother." Instead of returning a fraternal handshake, however, the ape crushes Yank's ribs in a fatal embrace — suggesting that recognition of the beast is not enough to keep beastliness at arm's length. "Even him didn't tink I belonged," observes Yank, with surprising dignity, from the floor of the ape's cage. With his final breath, he accepts the only identity left to him:

Ladies and gents, step forward and take a slant at de one and only

— Hairy Ape from the wilds of — [He slips in a heap on the floor
and dies. The monkeys set up a chattering, whimpering wail. And,

perhaps, the Hairy Ape at last belongs.] (232)

Yank ultimately identifies himself with no person or group, and dies unable to forge or endure any social connections. Even in his final self-realization he is isolated: note that in his last breath, Yank identifies himself as the "one and only," and his death comes before he can name "the wilds" from which he sprang. His origin is an industrial wilderness, akin to the "ghoul-haunted woodlands of Weir" in A Streetcar Named Desire (252), which is how Blanche Dubois relates to the L & N tracks outside the Kowalskis' flat.

Chapter 6 will examine in detail the thematic connections between The Hairy Ape and A Streetcar Named Desire, positing Stanley as a successful reincarnation of Yank, succeeding in what has become, especially after World War II, an irrevocably technological society.

O'Neill himself insisted that his experimental probing of psychological depth made Yank's problems universal, not economic or ideological. In the November 19,
1924 *New York Herald Tribune*, he complained that his audiences “don't understand that the whole play is expressionistic. Yank is really yourself, and myself. He is every human being. But, apparently, very few people seem to get this . . . no one has said, ‘I am Yank! Yank is my own self!’” (Cole 235). While *The Hairy Ape* speaks powerfully to the inner fears of the rootless individual awaking for the first time to the uncertainties and dangers of modern mechanization, O'Neill was nevertheless perhaps asking too much if he really intended to make the average theatre-goer identify so completely with this character, whom the tone and retrograde motion of the play paints as so alien.

**Overwhelming Intimacy in *The Adding Machine* (1923)**

Elmer Rice had greater success getting audiences to identify with his anti-hero. *The Adding Machine* dramatizes the dehumanizing power of the physical city of mechanized spaces (*urbs*) by presenting the dreary life, death, and after-life of Mr. Zero, a white-collar drone who learns that, after 25 years, “the Boss” has fired him in favor of a machine. In the expressionistic spectacle depicting Zero’s inner turmoil, the stage rotates and overlapping sound effects screech as the one-dimensional Boss jabbers, "... efficiency – economy – business – business – BUSINESS" (29). Tried and executed for the boss’s murder, Zero finds himself in a bohemian paradise with his secret love Daisy, who had killed herself in despair over losing him. Unmoved by her love, conditioned by a lifetime of misery, Zero retreats to a dingy supernatural office, where he operates a celestial adding machine. Finally, “Lieutenant Charles” announces his plans to reincarnate him in order to operate “a super-hyper-adding machine, as far from this piece of junk as you are
from God” (136). Falling for Charles's empty promise of a beautiful companion named “Hope,” Zero stumbles pathetically back into life.

The dramatized events, depicting one iteration of the decay of Zero’s recycled soul, are defined by the physical and mechanized spaces of the urbs, emphasizing the loneliness of living in a compartmentalized, industrial society. The stage directions specify that a single bare light bulb provides the light for scenes that take place in Zero's bedroom, his office, and his zoo-like jail cell. The stage directions for the trial scene specify a “great empty space in the middle of the courtroom,” which suggests the isolated field that a single light bulb would illuminate. His afterlife office is “similar in appearance” (123) to his earthly office, which implies the same harsh lighting. All these spaces, whether confining Zero within a cramped interior space or pushing him out into a vast emptiness, isolate him from other human beings. The graveyard of scene six and, to a much larger extent, the Elysian Fields, are exceptions, because they depict Zero as part of a community in the afterlife, but Rice makes it a point that Zero cannot bear the intimacy of those locations.

While physical spaces and forces dominate The Adding Machine, time serves an important function as well. It does not flow or connect us to communal or racial histories, but rather marks out unbearable, closed periods of monotony and paralysis. The intensity and proximity of the forces controlling Zero’s life matter much more than any processes or events he undergoes in time. Mrs. Zero's opening monologue – an unbroken babbling isolated from any historical context outside of escapist movies – is one brief

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3 The zoo/jail scene, cut from the original production, went unperformed until Rice restored it for a 1956 revival (Durham 53). References to this scene are from the Longman Anthology of American Drama.
sample of what is obviously the continuous non-communication in the marriage: “You'll be holdin' down the same job at the end of another twenty-five years - if you ain't forgot how to add by that time” (5). After rhapsodizing on the exciting lives depicted in the movies, she returns to reality for a frighteningly accurate appraisal of the lot of common creatures like herself and her husband:

I've been slavin' away for twenty-five years, makin' a home for you an' nothin' to show for it. If you was any kind of man you'd have a decent job by now an' I'd be gettin' some comfort out of life - instead of bein' just a slave, washin' pots an' standin' over the hot stove. I've stood it for twenty-five years an' I guess I'll have to stand it twenty-five more. (6)

While our sympathies in this scene clearly lie with Mr. Zero, his wife articulates an unbearable truth. His 25 years of service are meaningless to “the Boss” - they produce no impression, just as Mrs. Zero's 25 years of service produce no emotional bond. As a domestic slave to a white-collar slave, she “has enough strength of character to assert herself in her expression of hatred and resentment against her life, [but] she lacks the power and insight to direct her anger anywhere but against Mr. Zero, thus making both his life and her own worse than they already are” (Greenfield 42). Indeed, each squelches the other's meager efforts to find comfort outside their pathetic marriage (he by withholding money for tickets to romantic popular movies, she by calling the police on “Judy O'Grady” to stop his voyeurism). Their failings form an immense gulf of private misery between them, even as they lie together in bed. Twenty-five years after Zero's
death he is still alone, and still adding figures, but this time mechanically (using the giant celestial adding machine), without using even the small piece of brain that he had earlier used to employ pencil and paper. As he was in life a cog in the urban machine, he is in the afterlife a cog in the equally impersonal cosmos.

Zero's one chance for redemption comes through his workmate, Daisy. In life, they face one another across mirror-image desks, insulated from their work and from each other by identical sleeve-protectors and eye-shades. With the windows of their respective souls thus obscured, neither suspects the other of the emotions which propel the scene, as the characters alternate between dictating streams of numbers and voicing their internal thoughts. Zero fantasizes about a woman he has seen undressing with the shades up, and about being married to Daisy. When she independently thinks about being married to him, the excitement accelerates her dictation, prompting Zero to snap, "What do you think I am, a machine?" (19). Zero does, in fact, think of himself as a machine, in that he values himself only for his ability to work. His primary fantasy during this scene involves his hopes for a promotion. A better job means that he will be able to trade his cramped urban conditions space for a somewhat improved situation, though it is still fundamentally the same: "Then me for a place in Jersey. And maybe a little Buick. No tin Lizzie for mine" (24). He does not realize the extent to which he shares his wife's materialism ("If you was any kind of a man you'd have a decent job by now" [6]), which defines and creates their domestic prison. While both reach for fantasies to make their individual lives more bearable, neither entertains the notion that Zero's identity as an individual might come from some arena other than work.
Daisy has managed to avoid becoming totally mechanized, because she has some access to a sensual fantasy life, fed by her exposure to the movies. She expresses her loneliness and isolation by dreaming of "Them kisses in the movies – them long ones – right on the mouth" (23), and she seems hurt when Zero speaks unkindly to her at the moment she thinks most kindly of him. Nevertheless, she is in some ways little different from Zero’s wife, who also attempts to live vicariously through the movies, or from Zero himself, who fantasizes about the exhibitionist. Zero's fault is the greater, because when Daisy wants to seize upon the opportunity to be happy with him in the Elysian Fields, he retreats to his adding machine. While she is only “Daisy” or “Miss Devore” to Zero, in the script she is “Daisy Diana Dorothea Devore,” the only human character to have a real name. Instead of reaching out to make human connections, Zero retreats from the responsibilities and pleasures of human company. Numbers are monotonous and numbing, and therefore a source of comfort, however pathetic.

In a treatment of all the significant names in the play, Brown notes that the prostitute's name is given as Judy O'Grady in the stage directions, but he identifies this merely as a stereotypical lower-class Irish name. It is never spoken on stage. Daisy and Mrs. Zero refer to the names of several movie stars, and Shrdlu (whose name is a special case, to be dealt with shortly) mentions that Dean Swift and Abbe Rabelais are among the bohemians living in the Elysian Fields, but in the play these characters do not appear as individuals, but rather as examples of human creativity. Swift and Rabelais are probably mentioned to unite concepts of religion and sensuality in a way that neither Zero nor Shrdlu can accept. Some of the sightseers in the zoo/jail scene (cut in the original production) do refer to each other by name, and some of the supernatural characters have
individual names, but nevertheless Rice gives four names to Daisy, underscoring (for Brown) her fundamental anonymity, emphasizing the process by which mechanized society consumes identity, making it the only luxury that the common people can afford. In the crowded urbs, they remain nameless, alone. But these names (especially the floral “Daisy” and the divine “Diana”) represent a kind of natural and supernatural order which the mechanical world restrains.

Reacting against the oppressive power of the urbs, Rice displays deep suspicion towards any kind of restraint, even very simple restraints, such as shoes. In the Elysian Fields, Zero seems amazed to learn that “[s]ome of the people here go barefoot” (85), and later perhaps he stubs a toe when he dances with Daisy, since he stops suddenly, and the stage directions say, “He limps off” (119). Uncomfortable in Paradise, Zero notes that he is unused to being outside. Later, Lieutenant Charles indicts him for exhibiting the dullness of an animal, but not sharing in the animal’s instinctive sensuality. Although Zero is secretly attracted to an exhibitionist he has watched from his apartment window, and although he does contemplate a life with Daisy, even as he tries to fight against his own nullity in the courtroom scene, the shoe motif returns to sap the strength from his invective: “Pretty soft for them shoe-salesmen, I’ll say, lookin’ at women’s legs all day” (57). His frequent recourse to nonsensical numbers or petty details such as the critique of shoe-salesmen distracts him from his opportunity to defend himself before the jury. The murderer Shrdlu is similarly restricted and weakened by social convention, particularly his mother’s coddling. He announces with pride that his employers had let him “specialize in shoe catalogues” (76). Both Zero and Shrdlu are more comfortable with their shoes on, but the characters who belong in the supernatural world do not suffer from these fail-
ings. The Fixer's "bare feet are in sandals" (Longman 208), and Lieutenant Charles is likewise "barefooted" (123). Like the more complex technological artifacts that surround Zero, the shoe confines and weakens those who use it.

Zero, cut off from the human beings in physical proximity to him, isolated from the great ideas of the human beings that went before him in time, and isolated from the soil of the earth by the shoes on his feet, traces his own personal roots no farther backwards than the day, 25 years ago, when he started working for the Boss. Cultural history is for him a dim recollection, gleaned from a movie screen, of the pyramids he helped build in an earlier life: "Them big pointy things?" (132). Charles ultimately chalks up Zero's ignorance of his previous lives to supernatural efficiency:

Charles: They figure that the souls would get worn out quicker if they remembered.

Zero: And don't any of 'em remember?

Charles: Oh, some do. You see, there's different types; there's the type that gets a little better each time it goes back – we just give them a wash and send them right through. Then there's another type – the type that gets a little worse each time. That's where you belong! (129-30)

As Zero's self-knowledge grows, so, too, does his psychic paralysis, which finally overwhelms him: "How did I know what you were goin' to tell me? Now I can't stop thinkin' about it! I can't stop thinkin'! I'll be thinkin' about it all the time!" (221). Zero's lament at having his eyes opened echoes Yank's painful efforts to "t'ink," and the violent results of the Robots' exposure to human history in R.U.R. (one of the Robot leaders learns
about revolution and violence by studying in the library), especially since none of these characters finds a satisfactory solution to dramatic dilemmas. Written while melodramas, with their carefully-defined good and bad characters, were still popular, The Adding Machine performed poorly at the box office. Those who expected Rice to deliver biting social criticism were also likely disappointed—we simply cannot pin the blame for Zero's plight on the Boss, or the evils of Capitalistic society, or the repressing institution of marriage; for, even though Zero escapes all of these things in the Elysian fields, he still returns to his impersonal numbers (Brown 266). For Rice, the common man can only grow base and ugly under the rigid system of conventional roles in an industrial society.

To the artist who fears for his own position in a technological society, a number is impersonal and terrifying. In Rice's day, advances in printing technology, and a surge in the amount of readily-available printed material caused some to fear that the mass-production would devalue the written word, in the same way that mass-production devalued other items formerly produced by trained craftsmen. The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1919), Rice is one of the earliest artists to prophesy on the pitfalls of a mass-media society in America. To emphasize Zero's absorption in the celestial task which occupies him in the afterlife, Rice's stage directions call for a stream of adding machine tape that "climbs the walls and chokes the doorways." In production, designer Lee Simonson had the inspiration to fill the stage with an immense adding machine — with huge keys that Zero operates as if the action of a single digit has subsumed the place of his entire body. The increased visual importance of the adding machine in this final scene helps to make up for its largely tangential relationship to the rest of the play, and reinforces its root message about the indifference of modern society towards the debased souls that it pro-
duces. Movies play an important function in defining the interior lives of Mrs. Zero and Daisy; the cultural connotations of the courtship ritual, romance, and escapism are utilized by Rice (here and, later, in The Subway [1929]), especially their melodramatic, unrealistic images of romance, against which he places the colorless and sterile misery of his characters.

The newspaper, however, is an even more powerful image of modern culture, much more pervasively woven into the structure of the play than even the adding machine itself. From Zero's recollection of the arrest of the exhibitionist ("They didn't even put my name in the paper, the big bums" [12]) to the trial scene, ("When I read all about him in the paper an' about his three kids I felt like a cheap skate, I tell you. They had the kids' pictures in the paper, right next to mine" [56]) to the afterlife, in which Shrdlu and Zero have each read about the other's crimes (71, 72), the newspapers record the only significant events that such lost, insignificant people can perform. The newspaper also weaves its way into the characters' psychology. During their parallel monologues in scene two, Zero and Daisy each imagine their deaths reported in headlines — Zero imagines that the exhibitionist has slain him in retaliation for getting her arrested, and Daisy imagines her own suicide. The papers, as a vehicle for expressing feelings of guilt and depression, replace the conscience, asking not "What have I done?" but rather "What will the papers print?" Newspapers are also a faded copy of the power and value of literature represented by the presence of Swift and Rabelais in the Elysian Fields. Shrdlu's only contact with literature comes from Treasure Island: "It is a wicked book — a lurid tale of adventure. But it kindled in my sinful heart a desire to go to sea. And so I ran away from home" (74). Zero, who admits he "never was much on readin'" (74), never had the
chance to break free. He does however, recall an occasion when something he read in a newspaper moved him quite powerfully:

I was readin' about a lynchin', see?... I was readin' about it in the subway, see? Right at Times Square where the big crowd gets on. An' all of a sudden this big nigger steps right on my foot. I'd of killed him sure, I guess. I guess he couldn't help it all right on account of the crowd, but a nigger's got no right to step on a white man's foot. (58)

Zero rejects the man's perfectly reasonable excuse (the crowd pushed him) because he has vicariously become a member of the lynching mob. The paper gives Zero a message of hatred and violence, which he accepts wholeheartedly, and repeats gleefully to the jury. His monologue bears a passing resemblance to Joycean stream of consciousness, but the former is self-conscious rambling, not random thoughts and associations sparked by stimuli in the external environment (as in the Joycean model). Through this vehicle, Rice indicts a world in which the confining, self-reflexive nature of daily newspapers provides us with role models who are just like us, trapped in the same closed, fearful society.

Zero works with numbers, the raw material of commerce and technology, but those numbers have no further significance for him; similarly, Shrdlu, a proofreader (76), works with the raw materials of thoughts and ideas, but rejects the liberating message literature can convey. The name "Shrdlu" comes from a place-filling word that a typesetter operator uses in order to fill out a line that contains an error:

His quickest way to obtain nonsense was to run his fingers down either of the two leftmost columns of his keyboard, triggering
ETAION or SHRDLU in that order. And why those letters in that order? Because they are the twelve most frequent letters in English, and a powerful [mechanical] reason, overriding human convenience, had placed them where they obliged the operator's left little finger to make an absurd 51 percent of the keystrokes.

(Kenner 5)

Brown provides the source which links Shrdlu's minister, Dr. Amaranth, with printing technology:

Aligners have a secret seven-word sentence for testing typewriters' typing... the meaningless – and yet provocative – “Amaranth sase-susos Oronoco initiation secedes Uruguay Philadelphia”. (Bleven 202)

The fact that the artists populating the Elysian Fields continue in the afterlife the creative, non-technological activities they carried on in life underscores the idea that, as far as Rice was concerned, only artists (who reject technology, progress and the Boss's mantra of "business – business – BUSINESS") deserve to attain bliss. Treasure Island might have saved Shrdlu, but we are less convinced that anything at all could have helped Zero. We can, however, piece together Rice's view of personal salvation by reading between the lines of Charles's final attack on Zero.

In his next life, Zero will be taught all the wrong things, will "learn to fear the sunlight and to hate beauty" (220). Charles faults him for his personal moral weakness and uselessness, but also for his inability to experience animal passions without shame or inhibition. Aldous Huxley would develop a similar idea in his 1932 Brave New World,
in which a technological society controls its populace by conditioning them to expect exactly what their station in life entitles them to receive. For example, lower-caste babies are conditioned to their inner-city lives of grime and ignorance by learning to associate flowers and books with electric shocks (20). Like Huxley’s workers or Čapek’s Robots, Zero lacks a history or culture that could provide him with a framework upon which to examine or construct ideals to challenge his conditioning. Even the memories of his previous failed lives are erased before his soul is recycled. Charles dismisses him as the raw material of slums and wars — the ready prey of the first jingo or demagogue or political adventurer who takes the trouble to play upon [his] ignorance and credulity and provincialism. (221)

During his life, Zero has no access to any ideals which would lead him towards greater goods. Sensual pleasures are the highest good Zero might have been able to attain, either in life or in the afterlife, but the urbs has debased him so completely that he cannot achieve even this. Rice here seems to place sensual pleasure at the moral summit where western religions have traditionally placed faith, truth and goodness, and dramatically negates characters like Shrdlu or the unseen Dr. Amaranth, who seek a higher standard. Virtue and vice, as such, are not at issue. Rice’s apparent advocacy of uninhibited, heartfelt action seems to counter that of Dr. Amaranth, who is so quick to blame Shrdlu’s “sinful heart” for a matricide clearly motivated by long-term sociological and psychological mistreatment. Just as the Humans on Domain’s island destroy the faulty products whose symptoms of “Robot’s cramp” reveal signs of an independent will, so too does the society of The Adding Machine eliminate the citizens who reveal their own souls through
an impulsive action. Through his references to environmental conditioning, Rice manages to make Zero sympathetic despite the character’s misogynic, voyeuristic, bigoted, and murderous overtones. Rice criticizes the society which produces such damaged creatures and then refuses to take responsibility for what it has produced.

If Zero's own suffering draws no cosmic concern in the play’s nihilistic universe, then neither should any collateral suffering he should happen to cause as he stumbles through his miserable life. Merely surviving is not enough to turn him into a good person; likewise, the sins he commits as he struggles to survive do not cause us to reject him as a bad person, for we cannot blame Zero personally for surrendering to his environment. Ibsen's Peer Gynt faces a similar fate when the Button Moulder pronounces him neither good enough for heaven, nor bad enough for hell. Because selfishness and egocentrism have defined his whole interior life up until that climactic point, Peer cannot face the idea of losing what little identity he claims for himself. The Fixer (who appears only in the deleted zoo-jail scene) echoes the Button Moulder’s sense of cosmic economy when he sentences Zero to reincarnation. Zero, marked as a slave from the very beginning, has little chance to create any sort of identity, yet he clings to it nonetheless. Rice likely expects that we, his audience, share Shrdlu's desire to see the real injustice punished, and that in our frustration with the whole cosmic system that marked Zero's soul as slave-material from his first trip through life, we will find fault also with the American economic system that thrives on Zero's slavery. But the play’s final supernatural raiisonsneurs themselves fail to transcend rigid mechanization: The Fixer glances at his watch, suggesting that even this winged figure of Death must adhere to a schedule (Longman 209); later, Lt. Charles punches his servant Joe in the jaw, then delivers the curtain line,
“Hell, I'll tell the world this is a lousy job!” (143). The fact that Zero will continue to be a hopeless, stupid cog in the vast machinery of an unjust celestial system is what makes his plight so terrifying. The urbs in which Zero lives precludes his participation in any civitas, and the enlightened community of authors and artists in the Elysian Fields enjoy themselves in a pre-industrial, uninhibited golden age. For Rice, as well as O'Neill, urbs and civitas are mutually exclusive.

We may fault Rice for asking us to pity Zero, without providing the hero with a fully-developed conflict that acted upon anything like a classical hubris; still, the play does instill in us the classical feelings of pity and terror. Just as O'Neill did not simplify the argument of The Hairy Ape by singling out any group or individual to take the blame for Yank’s plight, so too, Rice approaches tragic feelings by depicting evil in the form of a cosmic system which operates on the inhuman principles of industrial productivity. It is this principle, material production for the sake of material production, that led to disastrous dependence upon Robots in R.U.R., essentially creating a race of anemic Mildreds. Although his theatrical successes brought him fame and wealth, when his first play (the courtroom drama On Trial) opened to great acclaim in New York, Rice was sleeping each night on a fold-out cot on in his parents’ living room, having recently abandoned a dependable if unrewarding law career. Although surrounded by the material and economic struggles of ethnic inner-city denizens who struggled to pay the rent and secure the American Dream, Rice remained skeptical of the consumer ethos, because of the damage it inflicts on human nature. In Chicago to open a concurrent production of On Trial, he felt a desire for an “industrial education,” and so visited the stockyards. In a factory
there, a young man at a conveyor belt stared at a parade of cans of beef: “a horrible picture of imbecility.”

I felt strongly about the stultifying effects of industrialism; the moronic boy for me personified the evils of the machine age. Like everyone else, I use, and am served by, innumerable mechanical devices, but I have always disliked them and the system that produces them, on psychological, moral, and aesthetic grounds.

Of the new automobile assembly line that would make Henry Ford famous, Rice noted, “the whole process struck me as inhuman and demoralizing.” But his objections remain the same whether the factory was controlled by the bosses, the labor unions, or a glorious post-revolution workers’ government, for “I had the same feeling nearly twenty years later when I saw the Ford-installed assembly line in the tractor factory at Stalingrad” (Minority Report 126-27).

Yet, in the same passage he describes his train trip to Chicago as “romantic,” for “[t]he sleeper and the diner were novel and interesting experiences.” He also records his own youthful fascination with Lindbergh, and records with delight his own first trip in an airplane. While he considers his first contact with technology in the early Twenties to have been horrible, he would later marvel at the technological advances he had witnessed over his lifetime:

My younger children have no conception of a world in which the automobile, the motion picture, the airplane, radio and television were astonishing novelties. It is hard to believe that there could
ever again be, in so short a period, so many radical changes in the externals of life. (229)

While Rice notes that the changes are in the “externals” of life, his admiring observation of technological progress was, by the Sixties (when he wrote his autobiography), commonplace enough that it could have appeared in the public relations materials for countless high-tech companies.

While the adding machine does indeed separate Zero from his job, it presumably provides work elsewhere in the economic system: somebody works in an offstage adding machine factory, sells adding machines door-to-door, services them, and provides food and clothing for everyone involved in the adding machine consumer network. Further, the oft-repeated notion that Zero is “replaced” by a machine is not entirely true. What is a tragedy for middle-aged Zero becomes a modest opportunity for someone else, for the Boss praises such machines because “a high-school girl can operate them” (200). The story of this girl is not part of this play, but it might perhaps be glimpsed in the bored typist of The Waste Land, Sophie Smith from The Subway, the Young Woman from Machinal, or even Laura Wingfield from The Glass Menagerie. We may, of course, question the essential value of the new jobs. An economic critic such as Veblen, Morris, or Marx would point out that no one person makes an adding machine, the way a master craftsman makes a violin, or even (to take a mundane example from the play) a shoe. Zero has likewise never created anything – he has merely put in time on the job, and the high school girl who operates the adding machine will certainly do the same. The American economic system would favor the “moronic boy” of the Chicago stockyards or the “high school girl” of The Adding Machine over the countless out-of-work middle-aged Zeros
competing for the same jobs. Their situation is typical of the workers in a rapidly industrializing nation.

As America moved from a nation of self-employed individuals (80 percent in 1800) to a nation of employees (67 percent in 1870 and 80 percent in 1940), the commitment of the American to his work and to his working life decreased in its intensity. (Greenfield 7)

While the worker’s personal commitment to his work diminished, large numbers of recent immigrants were competing for the same jobs — a fact not lost upon the dinner guests of Mr. and Mrs. Zero:

Damn foreigners! Damn dagoes! Damn Catholics! Damn sheenies! Damn niggers! Jail 'em! Shoot 'em! Hang 'em! Lynch 'em! Burn 'em! (They all rise. Sing in unison.)

My country 'tis of thee,

Sweet land of liberty! (47)

Rice, born Elmer Reizenstein, a Jew, here bitterly exposes the xenophobic desperation of a WASP society that feared for its future. Further, he saw grave danger lying in wait for a society that had allowed its sources of livelihood to be fractured and compressed into increasingly more specialized subdivisions. Zero's own recourse to his numbers reveals a pitiful gesture towards a civitas:

Goddam them figgers! I can't forget 'em. They're funny things, them figgers. They look like people sometimes. The eights, see?

Two dots for the eyes and a dot for the nose. An' a line. That's the
mouth, see? An' there's others remind you of other things — but I can't talk about them on account of there bein' ladies here. (55)

As the layers of external, civilizing order fall away, both Zero and Yank are revealed as unable to share any kind of intimacy with other human beings. As case studies of helpless individuals whose environment conditions them for lives of misery, these early American expressionist plays do generate some of the pity and terror we would expect from tragedy; however, they ultimately offer only a vague, general indictment of the state of the human condition. It was not their intent to explore the effect of specific social conditions or specific moral choices on the plight of their protagonists. Denied any socially productive outlet, primal energies turn inward to shatter their inner being. The protagonists (who are ideologically, socially and sexually sterile) die and vanish without leaving any discernable mark on the world. While many elements of expressionistic stagecraft persisted in later drama, by the end of the decade, expressionistic American playwriting seemed to suffer a similar fate.
3. Sensualizing and Sanctifying Technology:

Machinal (1928), The Subway (1929), and Dynamo (1929)

In America, “expressionism was used by artists and critics to identify any kind of theatrical experiment except symbolism,” (Wainscott 92) but signs from various quarters suggest that, despite the prevalence of the term, American interest in continental expressionism was short-lived. In 1926 an American group called the Theatre Creative drew support from those who objected to the rapid, pervasive influence of German drama. Valgemaë calls the efforts of this group “utterly futile” (111), and in 1928 Lawson optimistically wrote that expressionism “is giving boisterous indications of a young but lusty vitality” (Valgemaë 83). Nevertheless, in that same year, radical Ben Blake lamented what he found to be a dying experimental theatre — although he mostly refers to his own fading hope for proletarian drama. Meanwhile, Philip Barry, Robert E. Sherwood and S.N. Behrman were already making an impression with their own domestic adaptation of British high social comedy (Embler). Styan recognized its influence upon canonical American drama, but he felt that German expressionism was “limited from the beginning by its nihilism” (62). Kerr even goes so far as to call expressionism “the logical dead end toward which our drama had been moving” (60). After the first wave of expressionistic plays in the early Twenties (as discussed in the previous chapter), American dramatists had already applied, on domestic themes and in domestic modes, the most successful elements of German experimentalism. If expressionism was fading, it had already made a lasting impression as a platform for social criticism.
The 1928-29 season brought three of the most expressionistic, most overtly technological, and the most bleak critiques of modern society created for the American stage: Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal* (1928), Elmer Rice's *The Subway* (1929), and Eugene O'Neill's *Dynamo* (1929). The modern urbanite was immersed in technology, from the subway rumbling under the streets and the elevator clattering through the apartment buildings, to the radios in the living rooms and the reading lights in bedrooms. This intimate connection with technology was a new social problem, but for all their formal experimentalism, all three plays could find only a traditional melodramatic way to resolve the tension: by sacrificing their female leads.

These plays examine the intersections of animal passion, religious spirit, and urban life, frequently blurring or annihilating their borders. Shortly before the stock market crash, these playwrights were less interested in simply dramatizing the struggle to resist modern mechanization. While continuing to deliver the conventional anti-technological message expected of experimental works, they presented a view of technology as an internalized and even fundamental principle of the dramatic medium, rather than an externalized and destructive thematic force. For example, all three authors took great pains to establish their sound effects — in part because the theatre of the time was competing with a movie industry that had just discovered sound and with a radio industry that knew how to use it. Treadwell wrote for an audience “trained to radio, and so accustomed to the drama of the lovely unaided voice” (qtd. in Wynn 33); and she would later refer to her detailed audio notes as “soundtracks” (35). In *The Subway*, Rice made a different attempt to represent the rhythms of urban life, using expressionistic images of the subway, working conditions, and tenement life. Naturalism would bring him much greater suc-
cess when he addressed many of the same themes in *Street Scene*, but both plays experimented with urban sounds. O’Neill’s description of his own efforts is a useful launching point for an analysis of how this trio of expressionist plays used audio effects:

This is a machine age which one would like to express as a background for lives in plays in overtones of characteristic, impelling and governing mechanical sound and rhythm — but how can one, unless a corresponding mechanical perfection in the theatre is a reliable string of the instrument (the theatre as a whole) on which one composes? (Simonson 118)

In their search for this mechanical perfection in the production of theatre, O'Neill and the others employed, along with sound, a wide range of expressionistic effects (such as complex lighting and projection effects, episodic plots, overlapping dialogue, ambient mechanical sound) combined with a more direct commentary on technological cultural elements (such as the ubiquity of mass-media music and news, as well as that of social conformity and urban confusion). While the new expressionistic conventions provided a new theatrical vocabulary, these highly technological, highly personal, deeply psychological works employed traditional melodramatic elements in order to make the emotional plight of the characters more vivid to audiences. The resulting theatrical environment enabled them to bring to the stage far more intensely personal conflicts than the abstracted characters of the earlier expressionism had allowed. Further, during the rise of popular science fiction, these three expressionistic plays were notable for their successful attempts to recognize — even to indulge in — the seductive power of technology. All three playwrights employed expressionistic techniques to objectify the anxieties of an isolated
individual, projected against the background of a modern society that is not only mechanized, but also eroticized, and even sanctified. The dramatic effect was not uniformly successful, but the experiments were significant gestures towards the unusual combination of abstraction and specification that featured in some of the best works of the Federal Theatre era. Of the three works this chapter examines, only Machinal (with a run of 91 performances) drew significant contemporary attention or even moderate critical praise, and in the end all three were financial failures. Nevertheless, the assimilation of expressionistic elements into such canonical American plays as Our Town (1938), The Skin of Our Teeth (1942), The Glass Menagerie (1945) (especially the reading edition), A Streetcar Named Desire (1947) and Death of a Salesman (1949) is a lasting testament to the overall value of this experimental period.

Re-conceiving (of) the Machine

The early vogue of expressionism in America had coincided with a change in attitude on the part of the theatre towards big business. Wainscott traces this shift by examining plays produced between 1919 and 1929 for evidence of bias for or against commerce. Of 43 that were “business-oriented in primary character, action, and conflict (not just set in the business world)” (162), more pro-business plays were produced in 1922 than in any other year, and no play delivers an anti-business theme until 1921. The reversal coincides roughly with the New York productions of expressionistic, anti-commercial sensations such as R.U.R., The Hairy Ape, and The Adding Machine. By 1926, every new play with a business theme – expressionistic or not – delivers an anti-business message. This subversive message soon became conventional, which under-
mined the experimental value of the means for delivering that message. The message and the medium were becoming stale; after the stock market crashed, both seemed irrelevant. Nevertheless, even as theatre grew increasingly critical of technological change, some contemporary literary voices voiced an opposing, popular view.

For Ezra Pound, writing in 1927, “Modern man can live, and should live, and has a perfectly good right to live in his cities and in his machine shops with the same kind of exuberance that a savage is supposed to have in his forest” (137). Hart Crane, distressed by Eliot’s portrayal of bleak cityscapes, wrote to praise modern America. His poetry (later collected and published as The Bridge, 1930) is neo-romantic, drawing inspiration from the artifacts of modern technology. “To Brooklyn Bridge” turns the towers and span of an architectural structure into an altar, and the suspension cables into harp strings. The bridge’s curves “lend a myth to God” (8), visually linking the earthly and the divine; architecture and design supplies heaven with the power it can use to move the human spirit. A similarly uplifting treatment of urban life appears in William Carlos Williams’s short poem, “The Great Figure” (1921): “Among the rain / and lights / I saw the figure five in gold / on a red / firetruck / moving / tense / unheeded / to gong clangs / siren howls / and wheels rumbling / through the dark city”. The same central image re-appears in Charles Demuth’s painting I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold (1927), a mystical art-deco tribute to Williams, reproducing in color and in space the metropolitan tension the poet had celebrated in verse. Instead of drawing upon the machine-age angst that had fed the decade’s early expressionistic plays, these modernists tap directly into the pride and power that American society feels when it builds monuments to its own technological greatness.
Initially at the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition, and more explicitly in Paris at the Great Exhibition of 1900, historian Henry Adams noted America's alarming fascination with technology. What had been the most powerful attractive force mankind had known -- faith in the generative force of the Virgin (the archetypal life-goddess, as represented by Venus and the Virgin Mary) -- was tossed aside in favor of the dynamo. No previous human experience had prepared us to deal with such a momentous shift in values, the significance of which was beyond reckoning. Adams felt that Americans were particularly vulnerable to worshiping technology, because the Puritan colonizers had not brought with them any suitable vehicle to acknowledge and transmit the cultural energy represented by the Virgin. Her weak cultural presence in America left a spiritual vacuum, which Americans filled through their misguided devotions to the Dynamo. Adams himself "began to feel the forty-foot dynamos as a moral force, much as the early Christians felt the Cross" (380), and observed that the pace of scientific advancement had forced non-specialists to accept -- without question, and on faith alone -- that which scientists were teaching. As a man of the nineteenth century, he felt capable of comprehending the explosive power of steam engines, but found himself mystified that something so powerful as a dynamo could operate with a gentle hum that would not wake a sleeping baby. He "could see only an absolute fiat in electricity as in faith" (381), because the complex mysteries of the generator, like those of religion, were comprehensible only to specialists. To Brenda Murphy, "Adams's book is about learning to understand and resist the desire for unity, the desire to create a unified force out of a multiplicity of forces by fetishizing some object, whether it be Cross or Virgin or dynamo" ("Fetishizing the Dynamo" 87). Although an agnostic, Adams recognized that faith in the Virgin has historically led the human mind to reflection and creativity, leading in turn to works of
cultural value and enduring beauty, such as the Cathedral at Chartres (which still stirred an “old love” (xxi) in the iconoclast Marina Warner even as she wrote her influential polemic, Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary). But faith in the Dynamo leads only to more dynamos.

If Adams voiced this revelation with alarm, two mid-decade European imports of an overtly futurist character celebrated, via both form and content, the creative potential of technology. The first of these was “Ballet Méchanique,” a short 1924 art film by the modernist painter Fernand Léger, and also a 1926 symphony (originally intended as the film’s sound track) by the American composer George Antheil. The film is an experimental mélange of mechanical and sexual imagery. The symphony premiered in Paris in 1926, before an elite audience that included Joyce and Pound; its employment of industrial sound effects to depict a triumphant work song for the modern age sparked a riot (Friede 50-51). The second influential celebration of technology is the German film Metropolis (1927), based on the novel by Thea von Harbou, and directed by her husband Fritz Lang, who had furnished the insane-asylum framing narrative for The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1919). Metropolis, more remarkable for its stunning visual technique than for its simplistic content, presents a society divided: endless luxury for the elites above ground, and endless toil for the workers below. Although significantly altered by domestic producers with an eye on box office appeal, both brought their sensually stunning treatments of technology to American audiences in 1927.

While the 1927 film The Jazz Singer is accurately credited as the first full-length movie to employ a synchronized sound track, several years earlier George Antheil had developed his symphony as the sound track for Léger’s short film, in which images of
gears and wheels (i.e. components of machines) alternate with shots of a woman’s flirting eyes and lips, along with hats and shoes (i.e. components of a sexualized woman). Mannequin legs appear to dance via stop-motion photography, and a wire loop suggests the outline of a uterus. One brief sequence – less than a second long – shows a heavy peasant woman carrying a large bundle on her head; she approaches the camera, carrying her load a few steps up a flight of stairs. This clip returns periodically over the course of the 10-minute film – sometimes several times in succession. Like the thin fashion model, the heavy working woman is smiling; however, the repetition of the clip makes the peasant’s motions appear as mechanical as the revolving gears. The montage juxtaposes the primal force of sexuality with the modern force of technology, positing the mechanized female worker as essentially interchangeable with the eroticized machine (a theme upon which Lang would draw in the equally erotic Metropolis).

Antheil, an American composer who lived for a time above Shakespeare & Co. (the Paris bookstore frequented by American expatriates), was intimately associated with the Parisian avant garde. His enthusiastic embrace of technology not only as a form but also a theme caused much intellectual debate. A major sequence of his symphony mimics the sounds of a machine breaking down; during that passage, the score repeats a simple motif over and over, more and more laboriously, interrupting it with longer and longer pauses. At one point, the silence lasts a full twenty seconds. The final, frenetic crescendo of sirens, buzzers, five pianos and four xylophones, a mechanical pianola, and “the sound of an airplane propeller” creates, as one would suspect, a lot of noise; but more notable is the sense of control which Antheil somehow superimposes above the chaos, even during the most confrontational, aggressive sequences. His work anticipates
the jarring but vibrant rhythms of hard rock, heavy metal, rap, techno-rave, hip-hop, and almost any other music form associated with inner-city culture. While the result is far from beautiful, in the ordinary sense of the word, “Ballet Mécanique” gives rousing, optimistic musical form to the progressive spirit of American industry. While performing a score which describes a machine that seems to undergo crippling (if temporary) difficulties, the musicians must work with perfect synchronization and modulation.

The implication is that any imperfections inherent in machinery can be overcome through the perfection of artistry — a notion which reverses and complements O’Neill’s efforts to achieve mechanical perfection through theatre. Hugh Kenner characterizes the symphony, written for a combination of live musicians and machines controlled by Antheil’s paper-punched rolls, as a “score for robotic choreography” (41). In a 1925 article in the Paris Tribune, Antheil himself reveals his intention that the mechanical production of music would give composers greater control over their creations: “A conductor does not want temperamentnal players in an orchestra. All he wants is a player to carry out the orders of the music perfectly, or, in other words, he wants a mechanical player.” According to his effusive patron Ezra Pound, Antheil’s symphony captured “the clatter, the grind, the whang-gang, the gnnrrr, in a machine shop, so that the men at the machines shall be demechanized, and work not as robots, but like the members of an orchestra” (138). To the Tribune reporter, Roger Fuller, Antheil was to music as Picasso was to painting: “[Antheil] conceived the idea for this new form of music at the same time that Picasso... evolved his new cubism, leaving the new classicist period entirely.” Employing a judicious, journalistic objectivism, Fuller describes the unorthodox music in neutral, almost technical terms: “It is just as if you were to listen to the notes of circular saws bit-
ing their way through steel mixed with the crash of a steel die plant”; but the headline writer could not resist the temptation to editorialize on Antheil’s notions: "‘Ballet Méchanique’ to Wipe out Big Orchestras, and Audiences Too.” Before the New York premiere, the humorous implications of Antheil’s musical philosophy were too tempting for media wags to resist. In an editorial for The Evening World, James M. Cain launched a pre-emptive strike against the composer — without having actually heard the composition. Antheil’s New York producer, Donald Friede, promptly invited Cain to his apartment for a private concert, which, according to Antheil (Bad Boy 191), moved the journalist to print a retraction.4

According to Antheil, “from a certain non-musical point of view, Donald Friede did a very excellent job” producing his Carnegie Hall premiere (191). Friede had doubled the number of pianos and xylophones (to ten and eight, respectively), at the suggestion of a local supplier looking for publicity. The ludicrously overcrowded stage was backed with a cyclorama depicting a futuristic skyline. The “sound of an airplane propeller” called for by the score was provided by an on-stage wind machine, fitted with a real airplane propeller, and pointed toward the audience. When it was activated, “[p]eople clutched their programs, and women held onto their hats with both hands. Someone in the direct line of the wind tied a handkerchief to his cane and waved it wildly in the air in a sign of surrender” (Whitesitt 36). The David-Belasco-style staging elements distracted the audience from what Antheil had intended as his entirely serious New York debut. The result was a disaster – but so novel and entertaining a disaster that plans were

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4Cain himself remembered the incident differently, claiming that while at Friede’s apartment, he “paid almost no attention to this tiny guy, Antheil” who “mumbled and
floated for a road tour. Antheil refused to make a further mockery of his work, and so scuttled the tour, although Pound encouraged him to publish the score so that “the three dozen people capable of understanding it will eventually discover that it exists” (White-sitt 41). Before conceding, Antheil revised and toned down his masterpiece. Believing that Pound’s extravagant praises had set him up for failure, he was bitter towards his patron (although he did later write a detective novel about the murder of a concert promoter, thus implying his feelings for Friede). He never lived down his infamy, but he eventually received some measure of recognition: his technique for synchronizing punched rolls on multiple player-pianos led to a patent for radio-guided torpedoes in the early years of World War II, and, in a very roundabout way, to the frequency-sharing technology widely employed today in cellular telephones. (Even odder is the fact that Antheil got his inspiration from a conversation with movie icon Hedy Lamarr.\(^5\))

groaned and hollered at the piano (Hoopes 170).

\(^5\) Lamarr’s first husband, Fritz Mandl, had been one of Hitler’s biggest arms suppliers. At a Hollywood party, she told Antheil what she knew of Mandl’s abortive efforts to devise jam-proof radio guidance systems for torpedoes. Antheil reasoned that techniques he had developed to synchronize multiple player-piano rolls might also encode transmissions to a torpedo-mounted receiver — the frequency changing according to codes punched into synchronized rolls. On August 11, 1942, patent number 2,292,387 for a “Secret Communication System” was granted to “H.K. Markey et al.” (Lamarr’s real name was Hedwig Kiesler, and she was at that time married to writer Gene Markey). A November 19, 1945 AP feature in The Stars and Stripes used the fact as a morale booster (“She said it was lots more fun being scientific than going to the movies”), although the technology was never actually employed. A similar coding method safeguarded sensitive U.S. radio communications during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, but by then the patent had expired. In 1984, an engineering journal mentioned the Lamarr connection in an article on the telecommunications industry’s interest in what had become known as spread-spectrum technology (Kahn). In 1997, Lamarr and Antheil were jointly honored with the Electronic Frontier Foundation’s Pioneer Award.
Present at Antheil’s 1927 Carnegie Hall concert was William Carlos Williams, who noted with some perception that the critics had been more interested in attacking Antheil than they had been in thinking about his work. Without holding Antheil’s art above reproach, Williams admitted that yet another Beethoven concert would have merely “held, cooled, varnished over” the jarring noises of modern life, but Antheil’s music instead “annihilated” the offense, so that “life itself [was] made thereby triumphant.” Mindful perhaps of the “gong clangs / siren howls / and wheels rumbling” he had ennobled in “The Great Figure,” he reported the observation of a musician companion who, after the Antheil concert, called the sound of the subway “sweet.” Williams himself felt that, in the wake of the concert, “when I actually came upon noise in reality, I found that I had gone up over it” (Whitesitt 37). “Ballet Méchanique” (both symphony and film) explores the distinction between primal urges and technological invention by intermingling them. Antheil insists that we acknowledge the unyielding, hypnotic, sensual presence of the machine, even as we probe the soul it obscures. Antheil invokes the exuberant optimism of the Europeans, rather than the pessimism typical of O’Neill’s and Rice’s work.

Fritz Lang’s dystopian morality tale Metropolis (1927), based on a novel by his wife, Thea Von Harbou, uses melodrama and stunning visual imagery to explore the tension between the Dynamo and the Virgin. After opening with a montage of moving mechanical parts (reminiscent of “Ballet Méchanique”), the film contrasts patrician pleasure in a gleaming above-ground city with proletarian suffering in underground machinery rooms and tenements. Just as Lang shows us these sharply contrasting visions of society, he also shows us divergent archetypal images of woman: the slum angel Maria, who
preaches brotherhood and wisdom; and a seductive mechanical double, created to sow dissent among and eventually to replace the workers. At a gala unveiling, the Robot (always capitalized in the English titles, as the word was when used in R.U.R.) mesmerizes a crowd of aristocratic men with an erotic dance, and later incites a mob of workers to destroy the machines. To this mechanical-sexual mélange, Metropolis adds what Jensen calls “an attempt at science-mysticism-religion” (13), employing the emotional power of religious images. The woman’s name, Maria, invokes the Madonna (just as Helena of R.U.R. invoked the classical feminine ideal). In one of the hero’s visions, a multi-leveled machine turns into a gigantic idol of Moloch, consuming the armies of workers who march into its mouth (the artist Eugene makes the same connection in Rice’s The Subway).

Visual style is the film’s chief merit, which even now influences the science-fiction genre. Modern science fiction frequently tests the mettle of the human spirit against the challenge of technological advancement, often employing broadly-sketched, representative characters, apocalyptic and eschatological themes, and plots requiring frequent melodramatic spectacle, while touching on class divisions, the survival of the human race, and religion. The Robot makes her first appearance on a throne beneath a pentagram, later taking on a human appearance and going out among the people (parodying the Incarnation of Christ). As the melodramatic paragon of feminine virtue, Maria advocates peace between the intellectuals and the workers: “There can be no understanding between the brain and the hands unless the heart acts as mediator,” (130*) a line Von Harbou chose for her novel’s epigraph. This mediator is the impulsive and passionate Freder, who brings about a reluctant reconciliation between the Master of Metropolis (his
father), and the burly chief engineer who speaks for the workers. The film bears noteworthy marks of the influence of Čapek’s *R.U.R.*, H. G. Wells’s *The Time Machine*, and perhaps Samuel Butler’s *Erewhon*, but ultimately *Metropolis* “fails to satisfy,” in part because “the viewer sympathises more with the rational father than the simple-minded overly-emotional son” (Jensen 12, 13). Only the drastically re-edited Warner Brothers version (which omitted key character motivations and left the plot disjointed) seems to have survived the bankruptcy of the German production studio, but the movie and novel nevertheless advocate preserving the division between labor and capital, while invoking melodramatic sympathy for victims of violence (perpetrated by the unfeeling machines as well as the unthinking workers).

“Ballet Méchanique” and *Metropolis* confront technology as unavoidable, but not necessarily destructive, and even potentially empowering — thereby unifying the message and the medium. In their early expressionistic works, O’Neill and Rice had treated modern civilization as the antithesis of the natural state, introducing technology as a device with which to reveal and shatter fragile humanity. Their protagonists are afforded isolated moments of terrifying clarity, but nothing can halt their self-revelatory journey down the evolutionary ladder. As we have seen in the previous chapter, abundance of passion drives both Jones and Yank away from civilization, towards identification with animal forces, thus thwarting their respective intellectual struggles; a complementary lack

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6 During Hitler’s rise to power, Hitler and Goebbels recalled being impressed by the movie, and together pressured Lang to make propaganda films. Von Harbou’s epigraph claims that the book “serves no cause, party or class” but merely delivered “a moral which grows on the pillar of understanding.” Nevertheless, when Lang left for France and later America, Von Harbou remained in Germany and joined the Nazi party (Kracauer 17).
of passion dooms Zero to an unending life of monotony and numbness. At either extreme, the wheels of evolution and fate draw the antihero to one or another form of uncomprehending bestiality. The earlier plays dramatized a steady retrograde motion through consciousness and cosmos, with the protagonist always on the defensive; in the latter plays, some spark of life manages to ignite, and a fragment of the soul stirs, for long enough that the protagonist can at least imagine a way out. Just as "Ballet Méchanique" suggests that, even when domesticated within the framework of a symphony, man's modern machinery retains all the primal frenzy of jungle drums; and just as Metropolis had presented a Robot as an erotic icon capable of manipulating the masses, so, too, do the three later plays examined in the rest of this chapter capitalize upon the alluring veneer of technology.

Treadwell, Rice, and O'Neill aim to project a certain concrete psychological state, for the purposes of examining the personal effects (rather than the universal significance) of an irrevocably mechanized culture. Their thematic scope is not necessarily more narrow, since an intelligent audience can still observe specific situations and apply moral or social lessons to more general themes. Like the main concept behind "Ballet Méchanique" and the tenuous deal brokered at the conclusion of Metropolis, these later plays do not artificially separate the dynamo from the virgin; rather, they attempt a more complex, multilayered vision of the human being struggling to persevere, with soul intact, inside an irrevocably technological society. The playwrights examine not merely the environment that conditions the protagonists to misery, but also the turbulent interior lives and the conflicted consciences of those who aspire to transcend their prisons. Confronting the remnants of a traditional faith that no longer satisfies, the protagonists struggle
with judgment and guilt – the legacies of faith in a post-spiritual society. Like Adams, these playwrights recognize the feminine principles of life and flexibility on the one hand, and the mechanical principles of order and reason on the other.

In this effort, they are clearly the dominant figures of the late Twenties. In fairness, however, Lawson, whom the previous chapter identifies as a peripheral figure, deserves a brief mention. Expressionistic Marxism typically queries the ownership rather than the meaning of technology, but one exception in this regard may be Lawson’s Nirvana (Greenwich Village Theatre, 1926), which disappeared into obscurity after only six performances. As the play opens, “[o]n the darkened stage the violet light of an X-ray apparatus buzzes startlingly” (Valgema 78). In Best Plays of 1925-26, Mantle describes it as follows:

Dr. Alonzo Weed, scientist and investigator, has many weird experiences in his effort to determine what, if any, will be the religion on which all peoples can unite in the future. His adventures involve a meeting with a visionary millionaire who would shoot a man to Mars in a monster skyrocket; a free feminine soul who is in doubt as to whether her lover or her husband is the father of her expected child, and most particularly with a young girl who, coming from the country, is so oppressed by the jazzy social life into which she is thrown that she seeks the other life through suicide. Briefly she is brought back from death by the prayers of her Christian Science mother, who shrieks in horror at the demonstration of her own faith, and the girl promptly dies again. (562-63)
As a whole, the play explores Man’s search for a new religion: “a new and bitter realization of man’s relation to the electric void through which he walks” (Sievers 143), and anticipates themes that would receive more attention later in the decade. Drawing on themes O’Neill touches upon in Strange Interlude and Dynamo, Nirvana examines one man’s search for “an electromagnetic Christ” and his dreams of building “a high altar where the spark of power lies in perpetual vibration.”

The quest for a sanctifying technological religion suggests that the modern denizen of the urbs is unsatisfied with machines that are simply tools, yet unwilling to recognize their complicity with the vast social machine. The introduction of religion as a means to negotiate these mutually-exclusive ideas mirrors Lawson’s approach to the roles of the sexually free woman and the inexperienced country girl, in turn recalling the moral opposition between Maria and the Robot in Metropolis. These feminine polarities can be taken as an abstraction of the potentially disruptive effect upon society of the forces of feminine virtue and feminine eroticism — opposing notions at least, from the perspective of a technologically-ordered society, which is geared economically and biologically toward the business of (re)production; the simple exercise of unfettered animal pleasures tends to disrupt this vision of order.7 Rice supplies a spiritual solution to the mechanical question in the cynical cosmic spirituality of The Adding Machine, but the pseudo-religious viewpoint, entirely appropriate to the abstract staging techniques that recall the stark spiritual power of Everyman and other medieval didactic drama, is much more cen-

7 Nirvana’s confluence of sexuality, faith, and technology would certainly make this play worth examining in detail for this chapter, but unfortunately the play remains unpublished.
tralized in the trio of 1928-29 plays which examine the soul as a conduit for both mechanical and erotic forces.

Excesses of the Soul in Machinal

With Machinal (1928), Treadwell garnered praise for successfully using expressionistic devices (including mechanized workplaces and stifling domestic scenes, flat characters, episodic structure, and mass chant) to probe the psychology of a woman who rebels against her life of quiet desperation. While Mr. Zero’s motive for murder is clear, his identity as a murderer is not central to the play – it is only a vehicle to get him into the afterlife, where much more revealing trials expose the fundamental nullity of his soul. By contrast, Treadwell supplies her Young Woman with an understated motive, but an overabundance of soul: “The woman is essentially soft, tender, and the life around her is essentially hard, mechanized. Business, home, marriage, having a child, seeking pleasure – all are difficult for her — mechanical, nerve nagging” (xi). According to Scanlan, the play “borrows heavily in its opening scene from expressionist theater (and particularly from scene II in The Adding Machine) to dramatize the numbing noise and routine of office work" (59). The Young Woman first marries her boss in order to escape restrictive roles as secretary and daughter, and then takes a lover in a quest for freedom; however, finding only heartbreak that way, she kills her husband instead. We learn that her actions were premeditated and personal, yet her motivations are only sketchily articulated. Her frequent silences are the source of much of the dramatic tension, signifying her cascading alienation from roles as employee, daughter, wife, mother, mistress, widow, and even condemned prisoner. In this latter respect, the structure of the play resembles that of The
Hairy Ape, where each scene unravels Yank, much like Peer Gynt and his onion. O'Neill gives us a similar revelatory journey in The Emperor Jones, as does the deep-cutting allegory of traditional religious texts such as Piers Plowman and Everyman. The main difference is that the Young Woman’s passionate misdeeds make her appear more human, the closer she draws to the electric chair.

Contemporary reviewers (as collated by Dickey, Sophie Treadwell 140-50) favorably noted similarities to Rice and other expressionists, and praised Machinal’s formal experimentalism: nine short scenes, punctuated by mechanical noises, off-stage voices, and inferential images reflecting the interior mind state of the protagonist – all staples of expressionism. But many critics hedged about the substance of the play. Atkinson, for instance, noted that the production “cast a moving spell” on the audience, but found that “the precise quality of Machinal escapes definition” (New York Times 8 Sept., 1928). Krutch commended Arthur Hopkins’s direction, but objected to the heroine’s undefined and “indigestible” motives (Nation 26 Sept. 1928). Mantle noted the “mechanistic perfection” of the production (New York Daily News 8 Sept. 1928), and praised it as “the perfect American tragedy perfectly projected” (16 Sept. 1928), but it still left him “as cold as a fish” emotionally. Although “the talk of the early season,” audiences soon lost interest, because (according to Mantle) “[t]he American playgoer has never been one to endorse the tragic drama enthusiastically.”

While the play’s expressionism would seem to demand a flat abstraction from the company, Parent notes that original reviewers do not seem to have commented on mechanical or unusual motion on the part of the actors; in fact, director Hopkins had a “reputation for eliciting a naturalness in performers that was ahead of his time” (92).
Sievers calls *Machinal* "a distinguished example of the fusion of Freudianism and Expressionism" (90), and finds it "notable for the free-association soliloquies which attempt to project the kind of unconscious turmoil from which crimes of violence erupt" (91). If Hopkins blended naturalism with expressionism, the combination was not above reproach; Stark Young noted "a kind of bravery... in the nakedness of [Treadwell's] themes," but he felt that the play weakened in the later scenes, which he found more realistic (*New Republic* 31 Oct. 1928). The frequent references to Hopkins in the initial critical responses to the play led scholar Nancy Wynn to defend Treadwell, not Hopkins, as the main creative force. Nevertheless, settings by Robert Edmund Jones and a final lighting effect described in detail in several reviews (see Wynn 43) doubtless contributed to the play’s success. Yet Treadwell’s pre-production notes “make clear that her style of writing and original intention not only dictated the scheme for the Hopkins’ production but the set design and striking lighting effects as well” (33). Dickey argues that the “sensational nature” of the subject and “the novelty of the form” were “in equal measure” responsible for the play’s critical success (*Speaking the Other Self* 176). Although Gassner writes that “[b]y giving the story an expressive form, Miss Treadwell transfigured the commonplaces of adultery and murder we encounter in newspapers and popular fiction into something considerably more humanly meaningful and socially suggestive,” he practically dismisses the melodramatic content in favor of the appealing form: “If the author had poured the same story into the mold of the ordinary three-act realistic play, it would have been quite unremarkable” (*Twenty-Five Best Plays* 494). To George Jean Nathan, on the other hand, the experimental elements were merely the director’s unsuccessful attempts at using “hocus-pocus” to mask the play’s “hollowness” (*American Mercury* 15
Of the 1990 revival, Robert Brustein wrote: “this tale of a sensitive plant wilting in the age of the machine is declarative, predictable, simplistic. What remains vital and lively, however, are the theatrical possibilities” (New Republic, 27).

The play’s technological form drew much of the attention of contemporary critics. By contrast, more recent critical approaches have focused on gender politics; indeed, the prominent feminist themes are largely responsible for the play’s recent critical rehabilitation. The presence of those themes may also help explain why so many contemporary male reviewers were puzzled by the play’s effect (although the female reviewers did not uniformly praise it, either). Dickey reports that in London, where the play appeared under the title The Life Machine, “most of the male critics... found the deck stacked against the male characters in the play and responded on a literal level to allusions and images” (Speaking the Other Self 184). Although Wynn sees the Young Woman as a type of Everyman, she finds female submission to be the play’s key (31). Ginger Strand and Jennifer Jones likewise see the Young Woman as victimized by legalistic patriarchal discourse, positing her as an objectified female. According to Strand, Machinal is not a play about technology or modernism; rather, at its core it “re-creates the proliferation of news narratives” about Ruth Snyder, a real woman executed for a similar murder just eight months before the play opened. Like The Adding Machine, Machinal is an “expressionist attempt to contextualize an isolated act of murder.” According to Strand, Treadwell “rewrites a man’s plot – that of Rice’s Mr. Zero – with a woman as the subject,” but in fact “[i]t is the protagonist’s relationship to Ruth Snyder – a woman constructed by newspapers – which is crucial here” (163). Just as McDonough raises questions about Yank’s validity as a universal figure on the grounds that critics overlook his
specified masculinity (22), Strand sees the Young Woman as a particular female first, and as a representative psyche second. In a similar vein, Jones argues that Machinal is “the testimony, disallowed by the [exclusively masculine] court of law, that Treadwell wanted to introduce into the court of public opinion.”

Because the audience would undoubtedly have been familiar with newspaper accounts of the Snyder case, the public perception of narrative is a fruitful line of critical inquiry. Jones notes the theatrical elements of the real-life trial (including the fact that David Belasco “came every day and sat in a front row seat” [486]); Kaufmann and Connelly used similar connections to great comic effect in Beggar on Horseback. Journalist Walter Winchell, who had covered the trial and execution of Ruth Snyder, reported that “much of the testimony [in the courtroom scene] was taken verbatim from the trial,” and that even the protagonist’s “cries of despair in the cell scene were copied almost word for word from those uttered in the execution chamber” (Dickey, Sophie Treadwell 149-50). “Ruth Snyder was never far from Sophie Treadwell’s mind as she wrote Machinal” (Jones 485).

The relationship between the trial story and the theatrical form is intricate. Nevertheless, to overemphasize the parallels with the Ruth Snyder case is to gloss over Treadwell’s achievements as an experimental dramatist; furthermore, as the play’s title suggests, of at least equal importance is the prevalence of technological power. The machinery used to execute criminals – the electric chair – stands as one of the most unalterable facts of the drama. When one of the reporters covering the execution asks, “Suppose the machine doesn’t work?” another responds, “It’ll work – it always works!” (82). But we might indeed consider the newspaper (as the manifestation of a complex
system for creating and disseminating texts) as the first technological product at issue in the play. Treadwell’s effective use of news narratives to reveal psychology recalls the function that newspapers played in *The Adding Machine*, where the characters judge the morality of their actions by the newspaper reports thereof – as when Zero confesses to feeling like a “cheap skate” when he sees a picture of his boss’s family in a newspaper report about the crime (56). Characters in *Machinal* similarly reveal their interior lives through the headlines and articles that they read aloud:

Young Woman: *(reading).* Prisoner escapes – lifer breaks jail – 
shoots way to freedom.

Husband: Don’t read that stuff – listen – here’s a first rate editorial. I agree with this. I agree absolutely. Are you listening?

Young Woman: I’m listening.

Husband *(importantly):* All men are born free and entitled to the pursuit of happiness. *(Young Woman gets up.)* My, you’re nervous tonight. *(55)*

When the newspaper headlines recur among the many voices which drive the Young Woman to murder, their choric function foreshadows that of the Living Newspaper of the Thirties. In a very similar way, the multiplication of courtroom narratives examined via the lawyers and reporters, and presented against the background noise of telegraph machines, expresses for the audience the Young Woman’s inner conflict with truth and perception. The play consciously invokes various machines, which transmit and amplify words and thoughts.
Strand's description of *Machinal* as "a play about the law of language" (163) suggests a weak understanding of stagecraft, and of the importance of Treadwell's technological images in particular. The dramatist has in fact found a staging technique that addresses one of O'Neill's and Rice's recurrent problems — how to get drama out of an inarticulate character, when the playwright is still struggling to find the poetic finesse necessary to express the character's inner thoughts. Rice had successfully dabbled with the issue in *The Adding Machine*, which features Zero's poignantly mute submission during his wife's rambling monologue, his infuriated paralysis during the Boss's tirade, and the jury's stony impassivity during Zero's courtroom speech. In *The Subway*, Rice reveals Sophie's character via extended internal monologues; he also explores a larger artistic issue — the role of technology as muse and seducer — via a frustrated poet who struggles to create a great literary work on technological themes. Rice's divided technique is not entirely successful in articulating both the personal tragedy of the heroine's downfall, and the lofty aspirations of the poet's creative vision. When faced with a similarly difficulty to express an artistic vision, O'Neill somewhat awkwardly has Yank comment directly on his own inarticulate nature: "...I kin make a bluff at talkin' and tinkin' — a'most git away wit it — a'most! and dat's where de joker comes in" (253). Brutus Jones likewise struggles to find words with which to interpret the ghastly projections of his tortured psyche. Yet Treadwell's Young Woman is frequently silent. The technology of communication is, like the politics of gender, inseparable from the dramatist's representation of the Young Woman's experience.

The Boss attributes his success to an "ability to spring a good story" (24), yet the Young Woman's stories, restricted and distorted by her surroundings, bring her no such
success. At the office, she exists professionally as an intermediary between her employer's dictation and the typewriter keyboard. Publicly, she is part of a business medium. When her machine breaks, she can only voice her helplessness (9). Privately, she is an accessory to her husband's all-American home, as well as a machine for reproduction. The commentary on news narratives is one of several devices Treadwell employed to stage her drama. Strand posits that the play's purpose is to "stage the process through which event becomes representation, and a woman's experience is obscured" (163). Indeed, when the Young Woman answers even simple questions on the witness stand, newspaper reporters in the courtroom dictate diametrically opposed interpretations; the prosecuting attorney challenges her answers, and even her own attorney manipulates her words. "Her courtroom scene becomes a study of the process by which stories are constructed, contrasting sharply with Elmer Rice's treatment in his Adding Machine trial scene" (167). Whereas the trial of the Young Woman outlines "the process by which any woman's story is reconfigured, retold, and absorbed into an ideology not her own," the trial of Zero is, according to Strand, based upon "the presumption that facts are an easily accessible commodity." But even a brief examination of Zero's trial monologue reveals that his experience is surprisingly similar to the supposedly gender-based experience of the Young Woman. As Strand sees it, "Mr. Zero sits on the stand and his story pours forth uninterrupted and uncontested. At the end, the jury rises and pronounces 'Guilty!'" (167). Her characterization of this scene is misleading. First, but least important, according to the stage directions (and an oft-reproduced production photo), Zero is standing in the middle of the stage for his monologue, not seated "on the stand." Second, the silence in Zero's courtroom does not mean the jury finds his "facts. . . an easily accessible com-
modity.” In fact, according to the stage directions, “The JURORS give no sign of having seen him. Throughout they sit with folded arms, staring solidly before them” (53). Further, Zero himself rambles and hesitates when he speaks, not knowing what to say next, often digressing from the issue at hand as he struggles to express himself. Third, Strand describes the jurors as withholding their pronouncement for “the end” of his speech (167), but in fact the jurors interrupt, ending it for him:

Zero: .... Suppose you was me, now. Maybe you’d ‘a’ done the same thing. That’s the way you oughta look at it, see? Suppose you was me --

The Jurors [Rising as one and shouting in unison] GUILTY! (59-60)

The jurors file out so quickly that he “goes on haranguing the empty jury-box as the curtain falls” (60). Such a scene surely seems very different from what Strand calls the “uninterrupted and uncontested” relation of a story. It is, in fact, not unlike the humiliating experience the Young Woman suffers when the court observers laugh at her claim that divorce was out of the question because “I couldn’t hurt him like that!” (75). Glossing over the statement’s inherent irony, Strand observes that the humiliation “completes the process of her conversion from subject to object” (171), yet Zero’s experience is fundamentally the same. In fact, in a scene cut from the original production, Zero is next seen in a zoo-like cage—a specimen on display for gawking tourists. Zero’s identity as a man appears to confer upon him none of the dignity presumably denied to the Young Woman because of her gender.
Rice has chosen to show only what appears to be the defendant’s final statement to the jury, not a cross-examination. Although we do not see it, Zero refers to a similarly difficult cross-examination at the hands of lawyers: “All that talk gives me a headache. Objection sustained. Objection overruled. Answer yes or no. It gives me a headache”(59). Since Treadwell chose to stage the cross examination, rather than simply have the Young Woman talk about it, the Young Woman’s cross-examination is obviously more prominent. When asked whether her marriage was happy, the Young Woman hesitates, prompting her own attorney to ask leading questions that benefit his overall defense strategy. Strand notes this manipulation and observes, “Already the truth of the woman’s experience is obscured by a restrictive legal logic” (167). Zero, no more a murderer and no less a victim than the Young Woman, makes no effort to conceal “the truth,” through silence or otherwise. In fact, his monologue openly exposes his racism and misogyny, and he even goes so far as to ridicule his own lawyer’s defense strategy: “All that bull about it bein’ red ink on the bill-file. Red ink nothin’! It was blood, see? I want you to get that right. I killed him, see?” (54). Just as the Young Woman chafes under narrow legal scrutiny, Mr. Zero also clings to a heartfelt inner truth that the law does not recognize: “I never said I didn’t kill him. But that ain’t the same as bein’ a regular murderer.” (57) In light of these details, Strand is bewilderingly off-base when she concludes that “The truth of the event is simply presumed to reside in the subject’s narrative,” for Zero himself observes that “There’s some things you can’t answer yes or no” (57). Strand’s observation about “the truth” is moot, or at least misplaced, because the Young Woman has already compromised the truth by participating in a courtroom falsehood. That law will not try a man for being a stiff and suffocating husband seems to be insufficient sup-
port for Strand’s comparison, for the law is equally indifferent to the damage Mrs. Zero
does to her husband’s soul.

Because **Machinal** ends abruptly with the execution, it provides no *post-mortem*
contextualization of the Young Woman’s actions. In its place is the last portion of the
jail scene, performed in blackout, duplicating for the audience the experience of the
blindfolded Young Woman in the moments leading up to her execution. “[T]he very fin-
nal silence in the red-gold glow of the lights on the empty stage was peace for the audi-
ence as well as for the Young Woman” (Parent 88). To Krutch, it was a “blood red
glow;” to Young, “flame colors [representing] the moment of death for the tormented be-
ing;” and to Percy Hutchinson, “the light of morning creeping up onto the hanging”
(Wynn 43). What the lights reveal is only an empty stage – perhaps an appropriate theat-
rical benediction for a woman so frequently silent, but hardly a definitive resolution of
the ideological issues raised by later critics.

Nevertheless, the stagecraft and psychological depth of the subject matter identify
**Machinal** as an important early instance of the kind of sensitive, subjective expressionism
later to be employed by Williams and Miller. Dickey further sees a feminist aesthetic that
attempts to engage a sympathetic audience: “While creating works that depict women as
subjects of the drama, Treadwell cannot yet envision them completely empowered or vic-
torious, but she refuses to allow her audiences to feel comfortable with their defeat”
(Speaking the Other Self 182). To explore why Treadwell “cannot yet” present a female
protagonist who is “completely empowered or victorious” is to beg the question some-
what. In America, her male counterparts focusing on similar themes did not aspire to
present their protagonists in such a manner, so Treadwell’s ending is no major formal de-
parture. Zero and Yank are wholly formed and conditioned by their mechanized environment, yet something permits the Young Woman to resist her conditioning, if only passively. The momentary freedom she finds in expressing her sexuality, together with her frequent recourse to silence in the face of male authority, points to an interior soul life—suppressed, but still detectable—denied to her male counterparts. For this “ordinary young woman—any woman,” what is the source of this a priori temperament? From whence comes the spirit that manages to rise up against the mechanization of office and domestic life, where the Boss/Husband reigns so effortlessly? In a similar way, the painter must paint many shadows in order to represent one point of light. Strand almost has it backwards: **Machinal** is not a staging of formal and linguistic processes which obscure true experiences (as if the Young Woman is one of Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, with a life independent of the text); it rather stages the internal experiences of a woman, “essentially soft, tender,” who confronts a society defined as “essentially hard, mechanized” (Treadwell xi). This conflict is thrown into vivid relief—and thereby made dramatically potent—by the theatrical depiction of the social forces to which Strand refers. The use of newspapers is just one component of the playwright’s much more significant use of realistic elements to create expressionistic emotional effects.

*Machinal* prefigures Rice’s successful and influential use of naturalistic sounds to re-create an urban atmosphere in *Street Scene* the following year. Treadwell’s office scene employs a chorus of workers, each of whom speaks “in the monotonous voice of his monotonous thoughts” —the adding clerk reciting numbers, the filing clerk reciting an alphabetical list. Their superficial conversation blends with the sounds of their machines,
so that the workers resemble the Robots of *R.U.R.*, whose soullessness makes them better suited to the market. The mechanical motif continues in the closing of the honeymoon scene; as the Young Woman tearfully faces the consummation of her marriage, sensual jazz music from a band across the street fades into "the sound of steel riveting," evocative of the sexual act. This noise continues into the hospital scene, where it is identified with the construction on a new maternity wing. As with Rice’s *Street Scene*, offstage noises which link the various episodes are tied meticulously to realistic sources, but the noise of the riveting machine also expresses the Young Woman’s alienation from the child born of her loveless marriage. The harsh sound recurs (as if in reply) when the nurse asks whether the Young Woman had wanted children, and again when her husband enters the room. The sound also implies that by producing a child, the Young Woman has now become a wheel in the social machine that she finds so unbearable.

Even in the speakeasy, a place one would expect to be filled with uninhibited people, the vignettes at the various tables follow a uniform, almost mechanized pattern: the weaker partner yields to the dominant, who then celebrates by calling for drinks with the “*sign of ‘2’*”. These pairs include a “middle aged fairy” who seduces a young boy and another man who pressures his reluctant girlfriend into an abortion. Mating becomes as ritualized and sterile as the workplace. The coercive elements of these vignettes foreshadow Richard Roe’s betrayal of the Young Woman, who at first believes that their “free” act of adultery has “purified” her (51). The playwright may have been asking for too much when the Young Woman rises from her lover’s bed and dresses, in such a manner that “*must turn this episode of her dressing into a personification, an idealization of a woman clothing herself*" (50). The action contrasts with the paralysis and incoherence
which grips her as she undresses for her husband on her wedding night. While the moment could be theatrically effective, especially in a production that seems to call for stilted dialogue and mechanical motion in every other scene, it seems difficult or impossible to represent correctly; by playing an ideal, the actress risks appearing as flat and mechanical as the other characters. But, as we know, the affair ends in the stereotypical way – for Richard Roe, himself a murderer, has no interest in the Young Woman beyond sex; his indifference to her emotions gives her a model for the violence she perpetrates upon her husband.

As expressed in a production note, Treadwell’s goal is “to create an interesting play” about “a woman who murders her husband – an ordinary young woman, any woman.” To this end, she relies upon “the story’s own innate drama... the directness of its telling... the variety and quick changingness of its scenes, and the excitement of its sounds” (xi). In an early typescript, Treadwell expects her techniques to work “by accentuation, by distortion... and perhaps by the quickening of still secret places, in the consciousness of the audience, especially of women” (Dickey, Speaking the Other Self 178). The play is notable precisely because of this tension: in a mechanical, ordered environment, the protagonist’s contrasting naturalness becomes almost lyrical. The Young Woman is not driven by an intellectual search for identity or cosmic meaning, but, so far as she manages to articulate, she desires simply “Peace. Rest and peace” (80). To achieve it will assuage her personal unhappiness in the face of a vague feeling that there must be something more to life. In this respect her search is something like that of Zero and Yank, who are doomed because they have lost their connection to a collective animal unconscious. Zero’s soul, at its best, first lived the life of a monkey, and has gotten more
threadbare with each reincarnation. Yank likewise envies the zoo ape who can “dope dream in de past, green woods, de jungle and de rest of it” (253). The Young Woman has some fear of losing her job if she refuses the Boss’s proposal, but she is more immediately aware that marrying him means freedom from the workplace routine. If the Young Woman does not act, she is destined to become like the Stenographer, a “faded, efficient woman office worker” (1) who pines for the Boss’s attention, and whose bitterness towards life makes her scoff at the heroine: “I’m efficient. She’s inefficient” (3).

Of the Young Woman, whose inefficiency threatens to damage her professional value, Treadwell writes that “[t]he confusion of her own inner thoughts, emotions, desires, dreams cuts her off from any actual adjustment to the routine of work,” and that she is “preoccupied with herself – with her person” (1). This preoccupation manifests itself in the heroine’s pride in her attractive hands; in her desire for a young husband with wavy hair (19) (rather than the bald, clammy-handed Boss); in her refusal of her own baby (apparently because it is “a little bald girl” [30], not the curly-haired angel she wanted [11, 19, 30]); and in her statuesque poses after declaring herself “purified” (51) by adultery. Her own thwarted feelings propel her actions, entirely unsuspected by the characters around her. Freudian critic Sievers in fact calls the play a “portrait of an emotionally starved woman driven to murder by her fixated loathing of sex” (91), although it is specifically her husband, not sex itself, that draws her focused aggression. The most visible sign of her self-preoccupation is a “trick” of rearranging her hair – a detail recalling the “bored and tired” typist of The Waste Land, who “smoothes her hair with automatic hand” after an “unreproved, if undesired” sexual encounter. Learning that she must shave a patch of her hair for the fatal electrodes leads to an indignant outburst: “Is noth-
ing mine? The hair on my head! The very hair on my head!” (79). This identification with hands, hair, and self-possession crystallizes in a simple feminine gesture – the adjustment of her hair just before her execution.

While the Young Woman is alienated from scenes of public life that are dominated by men, she is also alienated from her mother. The mother-daughter episode, entitled “Domestic,” is full of strained, inferential, almost Pinteresque dialogue:

Mother: Aren’t you eating a potato?
Young Woman: No.
Mother: Why not?
Young Woman: I don’t want one.
Mother: That’s no reason. Here! Take one.
Young Woman: I don’t want it.
Mother: Potatoes go with stew – here! (13)

The surface argument about a potato neatly encapsulates the Mother’s dull pragmatism as well as the thwarted, unarticulated state of the Young Woman’s wishes. While the electric chair is the most prominent, and most obviously negative, mechanical image in the play, this episode uses the radio for its distinctly sentimental and palliative effect. After the momentarily hysterical Young Woman threatens to kill her mother, an offstage radio plays “a sentimental mother song or popular home song.” During a similar confrontation twenty years later, Stanley Kowalski will hurl a radio out of a window; but the Young Woman in this scene internalizes the radio’s emotional message, and the fight goes out of her. Wynn mentions Treadwell’s “fascination with the effects of radio,” and quotes her opinion that the Machinal audience had likely been “trained to radio, and so accustomed
to the drama of the lovely unaided voice” (33). The Young Woman possesses a vivid interior life which prevents her from “adjustment” to a “routine of work” (1) – implying that other people who currently live that mechanical “routine” must have “adjusted” their interior life to fit the external requirements of the urbs. Why the Young Woman starts off the play with this sensitive (and stereotypically feminine) temperament is another question entirely – perhaps it is the dea in machina, a necessary contrivance, without which the action could not unfold as Treadwell wished.

We can gather from several details that Treadwell sees the freedom and innocence of childhood as the counterpoint to the soul-crushing routine. For example, the Young Woman twice links references to children and angels (30, 48), and she herself regresses to a child-like state of playful innocence with Roe (47), who initially attracted her attention by comparing her to an angel (43). Roe (originally played by Clark Gable) tells of a romantic and dangerous world “below the Rio Grande,” where he once killed a captor with a bottle of stones because he “had to get free” (40). Through their adulterous encounter, the Young Woman experiences joy for the first time in her life, and imagines their tryst developing into a permanent relationship, featuring rides across the romantic landscape. But Roe does not share that vision, telling her, “I’ll have to be moving on, kid – some day” (48). After he rhapsodizes “Oh – you’re free down there! You’re free!”, a light immediately goes on outside the window, revealing the outline of iron bars. The implication is that he himself feels trapped, now that the Young Woman has become attached to him. When they kiss goodnight, she clings to him, “protective, clutching” until he breaks away, leaving “her eyes shining with tears” (52). The pantomime illustrates her desire to capture him, and prefigures his eventual betrayal, which devastates her de-
fenses — both legal and emotional — and precipitates her confession, which lands her behind bars in the end.

While the Boss/Husband (identified in the dialogue as “George H. Jones”) is far from a sympathetic character, many male critics found themselves identifying less with the Young Woman and more with her victim. He is shallow and stifling, but within the world of the play, he is far from a villain. The Stenographer appears to long for him (which admittedly may say more about her lowered expectations than about his actual desirability); he laughs and jokes (though his humor is coarse), brings flowers to his wife (although she responds with nausea), sings in the bathroom (22), defends himself “with dignity” (24), “indulgently” understands and reassures (25), and is a “mighty nice husband” (according to a nurse) (29), and “happy and playful” (54). He confidently uses the public language he feels is applicable to his vision of domestic life, but each time he succeeds in forcing her to communicate, she falls back on “nothing” — nothing is different about her, she is looking at nothing, she is reading nothing, the moon is doing nothing (54–5). Like Torvald of A Doll’s House, the Boss/Husband has little if any idea that his wife has any interior life, due in large part to her successful efforts to conceal her independent actions. Unable to recognize the few signs of displeasure that she does display, he expects her to participate in a ritualistic celebration of his latest business success: (“Did you pull it off?” “Sure I pulled it off.” “Did you swing it?” “Sure I swung it.”)[53]). Like all the robots in his employ, he speaks and acts mechanically, as when he frequently utters phrases from self-help books, or when he counts out the seconds when the Young Woman asks him for “a minute” of privacy (25). He mistakes her repulsion for sexual shyness, and is aroused by it (54). As if these character traits and personal shortcomings
were not enough to upset the Young Woman, Treadwell has also supplied him with the very physical characteristics—a hairless head and clammy hands—that position him so far from the Young Woman’s (curly-haired, slender-handed) ideal that she cannot help but find him repulsive—yet she marries him anyway.

The real Ruth Snyder had tried to kill her husband seven times, which points either to premeditation or pathology; Treadwell wished to emphasize a different dynamic. Snyder’s real lover was a corset salesman, seeming thus to have less in common with Treadwell’s romantic rebel, and more in common with Willy Loman (another salesman, whose goods are unspecified, but who plies his mistress with stockings). Dramatically speaking, if Treadwell had chosen to create a husband so repulsive that the audience would wish him killed off, or a lover with a less rugged mystique, she would lose the shock value both of the crime and Roe’s unexpected confession, and thus the impetus of the entire denouement. Although Jones is a crude and platitudinous bore, he is hardly the grotesque Boss of The Adding Machine, who babbles incoherently about efficiency, as his “jaws. . .open and close incessantly” and the stage rotates to a “deafening, maddening, unendurable” noise (30). We see George H. Jones only through the lens of the Young Woman’s disgust, but Treadwell carefully supplies him with recognizably human qualities; he is no more flawed than any other creature of the urbs.

The playwright succeeds in achieving sympathy for the adulteress, but she is less successful at justifying the murderess. If we are to be moved by the Young Woman’s final indignation at cutting her hair, we must dispense with her indifference to cutting her husband’s throat. While modern critical interpretations readily supply her with ideological motives, so far as we can tell from her disjointed monologues, she agrees to marry a
man who repels her because she is tired of her daily commute ("subway air – pressing – bodies pressing – bodies – trembling – air – stop – late” [11]), and would rather sleep in mornings ("Mrs. George H. Jones – money – no work – no worry – free! – rest – sleep till nine – sleep till ten – sleep till noon” [12]). In addition, she resents supporting her mother (after threatening matricide, she raves: ‘.I go to work every day – and come home every night and bring my money every week – you just take it for granted – you’d let me go on forever – and never feel any pity” [19]). Finding a husband relieves her of all these burdens, but she feels for him none of the pity she had previously demanded from her mother. Still, the kind of freedom she demands for herself does not actually grant her the peace she seeks. In fact, she no longer wants freedom, or simply peace; instead, she articulates a desire for a permanent (possessive) relationship with Roe, who prefers his own freedom below the Rio Grande. According to the author, “Only in an illicit love does she find anything with life in it for her, and when she loses this, the desperate effort to win free to it again is her undoing” (xi). Foreshadowed by her raving threats of matricide (19), and heralded by the chanting of voices inside her head (58-9), the Young Woman’s actions verge on the psychotic. While the play rightly depicts a woman’s social options as severely limited, the brittle Stenographer is one model of an independent woman who, while pining after the Boss, is at the very least functioning on a daily basis – which is more than can be said for the Young Woman at any stage of her life.

The heroine marries for the purpose of personal gain, and later murders without regret. Strand sees the priest as “the most potent symbol of patriarchy’s monolithic narrative” (173), and as such she identifies him with the restrictive world of earth-bound
power structures; nevertheless, his intentions, so far as we know, are good – even if the Young Woman rejects his eleventh-hour ministering in favor of the comfort she receives from another man, via the off-stage “voice of a NEGRO singing.” Treadwell specifies the Latin chants (which would not have appeared so startling in 1928, when Latin was the language of all Roman Catholic services) and the Negro song as “sounds chosen primarily for their inherent emotional effect” (xi), but they are also men who are not victimizing the Young Woman. A member of a race that was once enslaved, this man can still sing, even on death row. And while the priest cannot forgive her for actions which she does not regret (she says murder “made me free,” and adultery was “heaven on earth” [80]), neither does he condemn her; instead, he entreats her to seek God’s forgiveness. His prayers accompany her to the end, and he utters the curtain line, “Christ have mercy – Lord have mercy – Christ have mercy” (83). In her final moments with the priest, the Young Woman indirectly encounters another man who provides her with a metaphor that, finally, allows her to begin articulating her situation. The audience hears “a whirring sound” (80), and a shadow falls across the stage: “Look, Father! A man flying! He has wings! But he is not an angel!” (80) This same sound, which featured so prominently in the climax of Anthiel’s “Ballet Mécanique,” also recalls the airplane which distracts pedestrians from a royal car at the beginning of Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway: public interest is diverted from traditional power structures to a new technological order. In a similar way, the flying man distracts the Young Woman from the priest’s prayer, as she concludes, “He has wings – but he isn’t free. I’ve been free, Father! For one moment – down here on earth” (80).
Constantly preoccupied with her own search for rest and freedom, neglecting the human needs of her mother, daughter, husband, and even her lover, the Young Woman has failed to satisfy any desires that reach beyond her simply-stated wish for peace.

While the heroine failed to find comfort in the priest’s ministering, and failed to establish a connection with her daughter, Treadwell herself left the copyright for *Machinal* to the “Roman Catholic Church of the Diocese of Tucson.” Dickey reports that in 1990 royalties were generating “more than $1,000 a week” for the “education and care of Native American children, as specified in Treadwell’s will” (Sophie Treadwell 229). This biographical detail helps us to understand the importance of the Young Woman’s brief glimpse of a *civitas*: “Mother, my child; my strange little child! ... She’ll never know me!

Let her live, Mother... There’s so much I want to tell her” (81). Here, for the first time, the Young Woman thinks of building upon her experiences, rather than escaping them. In the mother-daughter dynamic, which she had rejected when she was the daughter, she has at last located a social sphere where she can contemplate transcending the cycle of misery and despair – even though it is too late for her to act upon her revelation. In life, the Young Woman is granted at least this glimpse of a transcendent good, but the fleeting joy of illicit sex and the lasting peace of death are the highest moral goods recognizable to the stunted, earth-bound souls of the *urbs*.

Despite a lackluster original reception (George Jean Nathan, finding the production pretentious and hollow, predicted it would attract “opprobrium and tomatoes” [qtd. in Dickey 146]), over the years several critics expressed the feeling that Treadwell’s play marked a significant achievement – or at least the end point of a theatrical age. Richard Watts Jr. held up the craftsmanship of *Machinal* as proof “pretty definitely that [Ameri-
can expressionism is not necessarily the work of a faddist or one too unskilled to limit herself to the austere confines of the well-made play” (New York Herald Tribune 23 Sept., 1928; qtd. in Valgemae 119). Burns Mantle included it among The Best Plays of 1928-29, praising its experimental staging and at the same time calling it “in many respects, a perfect presentment of melodrama” (225). In 1949, John Gassner included it in Twenty-five Best Plays of the Modern American Theatre, noting that its experimental style, treatment of the individual struggling against mechanized American life, and “vague protest against the blight of materialism” appeared at the end of the twenties “almost as if it had been deliberately produced to sum up trends in the theatre of that period” (494). Wainscott ends a chapter on the decade with the observation that “although Machinal was not the last American expressionistic play of the 1920s, it was the last prominent one, both as drama and production” (140). Metropolis presented the creation of an inhuman, evil Robot, who first appears seated on a throne-like chair, and who takes on the appearance of a woman through a dazzling special effects sequence that pulses with electrical energy. The heroine of Machinal, who is little more than a Robot going through the motions of an ordinary life, reverses part of this progression; having been judged and punished by a society that finds her evil, she loses her life in the electric chair – yet the final epiphany, played out in darkness, fully illuminates the richness and fullness of her humanity.

**Technology as a Vehicle for Sentiment in The Subway**

Rice wrote The Subway in 1923, shortly after his moderate success with The Adding Machine. Yet the former play languished for six years, and even then garnered
only a barely adequate amateur production. It is probably just a curious coincidence that
he named his leads Sophie and Eugene, but his portrayal of a sensitive woman defeated
by technology recalls Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal*; likewise his climactic mingling of
technology, sexuality, and death recalls Eugene O'Neill's *Dynamo*. Rice's character
Sophie shares many traits of Treadwell's Young Woman, including habits of wishing to
sleep late, subway-induced claustrophobia, personal interest in hands and hair (more
prominent in the Young Woman, but still recognizable in Sophie), a vivid interior life
presented through stream-of-consciousness monologues, and the willingness to challenge
sexual mores to escape from a routine life. Where Treadwell's Young Woman only re-
fers in passing to her fear of the crowded subway ("subway – air – pressing – bodies
pressing – bodies – trembling – air – stop – late" [11]), Rice actually brings the subway
and its crowds on-stage for the play's best moment: commuters don animal masks and
leer at Sophie as the car plunges through a tunnel. If we ignore the issues of class
O'Neill raises in *The Hairy Ape*, we might see *The Subway* as a similar story of a beast's
encounter with a woman, only told this time from the woman's point of view. Since
Sophie shares the same subway with her fellow commuters, Rice is not presenting an
earth-shattering first contact between vastly different creatures; on the contrary, the bêtes-
tial images are as much reflections of Sophie's *a priori* fears as they are reflections of the
behavior of "real" commuters. Unfortunately, Rice offers no further exploration of this
intriguing concept, and instead focuses on Sophie's sexual anxieties. Durham feels the
mask episode communicates everything Rice had to say about the brutalizing effect of
urban life, so that little else remains for the remaining seven scenes but Eugene's sexual
conquest of Sophie, a "seductio ad absurdum" (71).
While a London production seems to have been "well received" (141), overall the play's short run left little critical impression of any sort. Heuvel reports that one of the few critics to review the play found Sophie to be nothing more than "a sentimental abstraction," and suggested that the play "should have remained at the bottom of Rice's storage trunk" (140). The script was published in 1929, but Rice cautions that "In its present form this play is dedicated to the reading public only." Hogan offers faint praise, finding the play more expressionistic than The Adding Machine, and calling it equally deft (36); further, he finds the titular machine of The Subway to be much more central to its plot than the adding machine had been (37). Rice himself barely mentions The Subway in his autobiography, identifying the long delay in his ability to find a producer as one of "a catalogue of woes" that drove him to Europe. Rice's simultaneous success with Street Scene instantly eclipsed whatever critical achievements The Subway might have eventually gained on its own merits (Heuvel 35).

Although the melodramatic narrative does lend itself to mawkish sentimentality, the play includes many promising moments of effective expressionism. For example, when the manager treats Sophie like any other piece of office equipment, forcing her to demonstrate a complex filing system, a visiting reporter leers as "her dress becomes diaphanous, revealing the outlines of her figure" (20). At home, where robotic family members intone newspaper headlines and seethe with resentment, a fourth wall composed of bar-like vertical stripes (matching the paper on the other three walls) depicts her middle-class incarceration. The first of two rambling prayer-monologues reveals a morbid fear of sexuality, including nightmares about being chased by men, and guilt about having once let a boy kiss her. She briefly ponders suicide, then imagines being buried alive
– early signs of self-destructive behavior that becomes more obvious as the play progresses. Freud would have us believe that her fear of sex signals her desire to break sexual taboos, as is arguably the case with Treadwell’s Young Woman and O’Neill’s Reuben. Rice does deliver one additional expressionistic scene, in which disembodied voices torment Sophie when she believes she is pregnant, and accusing fingers point at her out of the darkness; but after presenting the transformation of the “subwayites” into animals, and the transformation of the heroic artist into a sexual predator, the rest of the play demands little from Rice in the manner of stagecraft. Nevertheless, the seduction itself is melodramatically effective. Psychologically textured asides (what O'Neill would later call "Interludisms") reveal Eugene’s inner turmoil as he tries unsuccessfully to control his sexual impulses. The seduction takes place in a movie house, with the set arranged with the (unseen) movie screen located on the fourth wall, so that the actors face the audience. While Sophie is sentimentally absorbed by newsreel footage of children, Eugene stares at her and delivers the first of many sharp, penetrating asides: “Incredible naïvité. Incredible” (65). Both voice their thoughts with increasing frequency and passion, while the plot of the (silent) movie seems to mirror their own actions:

[His hand moves slowly over, until it barely touches hers.]

Sophie: He’s touching me. He’s touching me.

Eugene: Stop! Stop! Stop! Stop!

Sophie: [reading title card] “No, Lord Orville, I’m keeping my lips for the man who’ll make me his bride.” (73)

Sophie’s interest in the movie, a sentimental romance set in Ireland, recalls Mrs. Zero’s rambling veneration of similar Hollywood trifles. Although Eugene considers Sophie an
ignorant child, he appears affected by her capacity to be moved by music. Confronted
with evidence that may point towards some germ of artistic awareness, he wonders aloud,
“She has a soul? Has she a soul?” (76) Nevertheless, with “mechanical deliberation,” he
continues his seduction, squeezing her hand and watching for a response.

Sophie: Oh, he’s hurting me – he’s hurting me! He’ll break my
fingers.

Eugene: Now! Now! At last!

Sophie: “You’re a beast, Lord Orville – a vile beast.” . . . I can feel
his nails. They’re digging into me. Go on! Hurt me some
more. (78)

Sophie, who has already briefly pondered suicide and premature burial, again reveals her
sadomasochistic character.

Initially, the expressionistic technique focuses on the melodramatic seduction of
Sophie, but a more ambitious technological theme emerges when Eugene, a struggling
artist, describes his apocalyptic vision, “an epic of industrialism” (94) he wishes to call
“The Subway.”

It fills me . . . obsesses me. . . . The city . . . the city . . . steel and
concrete . . . industrialism, rearing its towers arrogantly to the skies
. . . Higher and higher . . . deeper and deeper . . . All mankind
joining in the mad mechanistic dance . . . bondsmen to the monsters
they have created . . . slaves to steel and concrete. Do you under-
stand? (94-95)
Comparing a subway train to "Moloch devouring his worshiper" (the very image that moves Freder to action in *Metropolis*), Eugene postulates that the few humans to survive a devastating war will make a home for themselves in the subway tunnels, and that ten thousand years later, civilization will rise again. Archaeologists from Africa will find a beautiful young girl, perfectly preserved in an underground chamber, not unlike the premature burial of Sophie's internal monologue.

... through all those centuries ... a young girl asleep ... warm ... radiant ... in that chamber of death ... A vision. ... A vision and a reality ... a vision of beauty, Sophie ... eternal beauty ... beauty that survives death ... that endures forever ... that cannot be destroyed ... [He raises her to her knees and takes her face in his hands.] You're that girl, Sophie ... that vision ... that's what you've given me ... a vision of beauty ... a new faith ... ecstasy.

... (98)

Durham criticizes Rice's emphasis on this half-formed epic-within-a-play, calling it a misguided attempt to capture the poetic force of Hart Crane or Walt Whitman (74), but Sophie is emotionally ravished by it, becoming his disciple, pleading: "Love me" (99). Rice the dramatist does not claim to have the talent to achieve such a lofty artistic goal; and even Eugene the character seems to doubt it, because a hollow internal voice calls him a liar just before he uses this scenario to prime Sophie for his sexual advances.

Sophie's ultimate rapture as she hurls herself before the roaring subway train, like Reuben's as he confronts the Dynamo, suggests that she is a willing participant in her own destruction, rather than the victim of technological rape (an image which Hogan praised
as a powerful image of modern tragedy [38, 41]). The cynical publisher Anderson warns her that she is not the first girl who has so inspired him: "When I first knew Eugene, he was in love with a Russian girl named Elizabeth. . . . I remember he used to try to sell me sonnets which she had inspired. You must have been just about entering kindergarten at the time" (111). Hoping Eugene will give up his pretensions, he offers him the art editorship at a new populist magazine designed to "make the readers think themselves sophisticated." Anderson, who "didn't get rich by backing losers" (112), dismisses Eugene’s epic: "Seems to think that he’s a Dante or a Milton. Well, I have no intention of publishing it. . . . I couldn’t sell a thousand copies of it" (111-12).

While the play turns upon the notion that Eugene's technological epic is capable of seducing Sophie, Collins argues that the simple sex story predominates, and complains that the reader is "misled" into expecting an expressionistic play on technological themes, only to be fed a melodrama (85). This is perhaps too hasty a dismissal, for Rice’s point seems to be that Sophie’s feelings of repulsion, self-hatred, and desire are akin to those which the average citizen of the urbs feels towards the wonders and dangers of the technopolis. The play opens in a windowless office at the Subway Construction Company, which builds tunnels far below the ground and skyscrapers high above it. When George the office boy offers her a rose, the rear wall lights up with an image of a “cheap, suburban bungalow,” reflecting her modest hopes for happiness; but instead of declaring his love for her, George recites phrases that sound like they came from a correspondence school brochure, declaring his ambition for a better job. This scenario draws our attention forward about twenty years, to Williams's use of projected images in The Glass Menagerie. Sophie subsists in a job like the one Laura Wingfield’s disastrous typing course
was supposed to secure her, and both girls are emotionally paralyzed romantics. George’s faith in his automotive mechanics classes is not unlike Jim’s attitude towards public speaking, electronics, and television. Just as George claims superiority over the “tens of thousands of men still tied to routine jobs because they haven’t the courage and the vision to reach out” (8), Jim advises Laura to “Think of yourself as superior in some way” to the “world full of common people” (99). In The Subway, Rice only calls for the one projected image of the bungalow, which fades again almost immediately. Although Rice never integrates the device as closely as Williams does in the reading edition of Menagerie (which represents the script before Elia Kazan changed it for the first production), Rice’s use of the device is an effective critique of the creed of futurism.

The office manager, Bradley, who disapproves of the rose on Sophie’s desk, is a committed futurist: “The light is artificial and indirect. Its color and intensity have been determined by a long series of expert tests. It never varies: day and night, summer and winter, rain or shine, it is always the same; unvarying in its brightness and efficiency” (16). He praises a working scenario much like the one Tom Wingfield finds unbearable, and which social historian Lewis Mumford would later critique:

With air conditioning and all-day fluorescent lighting, the internal spaces in the new American skyscraper are little different from what they would be a hundred feet below the surface. No extravagance in mechanical equipment is too great to produce this uniform internal environment: though the technical ingenuity spent on fabricating sealed-in buildings cannot create the equivalent of an organic background for human functions and activities. (480-81)
Rice prepares the audience, through Bradley’s impersonal treatment of Sophie, to find the sensitive, artistic Eugene a welcome relief. Eugene is an artist who must balance the demands of the commercial world in order to create the kind of organic background Mumford feels is necessary for human life.

Such is also the subject of Beggar on Horseback (1924), a sentimental comedy about a starving composer who unwisely agrees to marry into a vapid family of socialites. In an interview published in 1968, Rice referred to this play when he rejected the idea that American experimental dramatists were reflecting expressionistic German imports:

I do think there is no foundation for the belief that the Americans – Lawson, O’Neill, Treadwell, whatever others there were – were imitating the Germans. If O’Neill had any influence at all it was Strindberg, and some of the plays I suppose you could characterize as expressionistic – Dance of Death and some of those things.... I suppose now – I don’t know, what would you call Beggar on Horseback? Is that expressionistic? (Elwood 6)

Critics do generally consider Beggar on Horseback to be expressionistic, despite its farcical nature. During an extended comic nightmare which satirizes expressionistic techniques, the protagonist, Neil, confronts a growing army of identical butlers and a cocktail party guest who is not only invisible, but also deaf, and must therefore be shouted at. Pressed into service at his father-in-law’s “widget business,” Neil tilts at the windmills of bureaucracy on a quest for a pencil. When he finally secures the proper requisition form, and gets it validated by a ludicrously huge stamping machine, he cannot fill the form out,
because he still has no pencil. As his new wife flirts with other men, he finds himself fantasizing about Cynthia, the girl next door, who values his art not for the social status it conveys, but for the sentiment it expresses. He imagines the two of them living in a cozy cottage, where they contemplate a scarlet sunset that “blushed because we flattered it so” (146). When he is put on trial for finally murdering all his in-laws, the jurors act like audiences at a Broadway show, saying of the judge: “this will be the best trial he’s ever done” (150). When Neil demands to take his case to a higher court, the dais rises a few feet, and the judge asks, “Is this high enough for you?” (154) Convicted of being “highbrow,” Neil is sentenced to the “Cady Consolidated Art Factory,” joining a novelist, artist, and poet, each working from a cage, churning out commercial creations while his father-in-law cavorts diabolically around them, snapping a whip.

Authors George S. Kaufman and Marc Connelly borrowed the story from Hans Sonnenstössers Höllefahrt, by Paul Apel. According to Gassner, they applied the style of Strindberg, “as socialized in the early twenties by Central Europeans like Kaiser, Toller and the Brothers Capek,” and further modified it via the introduction of “original American showmanship” (124). Neil rights the wrong easily enough, simply by waking up and professing his love for Cynthia (as the audience knows he should have done from the start). Rice had himself relied upon a similar blend of expressionistic and comic material in The Adding Machine, such as Mrs. Zero’s non-stop diatribe and Shrdlu’s extravagant miseries. While Zero is no artist, and therefore has nothing to offer society that might be lost by his capitulation to materialism, we are nonetheless meant to take his plight very seriously. Discussing Beggar on Horseback under the category of “Comic Expressionism,” Wainscott says it was “performed with the externals of expressionism
but without the seriousness," resulting in a “play and production [that] effectively attacked commercialism while ironically reaping profits as a successful commercial venture” (128).

In The Subway, by contrast, the seriousness is stifling. Sophie’s boss Bradley embodies the creed of material success, and young George leaves Sophie behind to seek his fortune. The publisher Anderson later sounds the same notes in an attempt to draw Eugene away from his artistic pursuits. She responds to Eugene’s synopsis in a manner not unlike that which William Carlos Williams reported after attending the “Ballet Méchanique,” or set designer Lee Simonson reported when pondering the significance of O’Neill’s Dynamo. All respond to technological images with the same sense of awe that Adams reported, and that will, in the Forties, terrify Blanche Dubois and baffle Joe Keller and Willy Loman, in the context of much more consistently (and even, in the case of All My Sons, almost exclusively) naturalistic productions. If the theatrical naturalism of Street Scene had not met with such stunning success, Rice may have refined his experimental The Subway into something more worthy of his talents; but this – his most thoroughly expressionistic play – was already six years old. Perhaps Rice imagined that an audience made up of real office girls just like Sophie might possibly be moved by such an epic in the same way; yet the real dramatist was constrained by the same popular tastes which stifle the fictional Eugene. Further, the amateur production apparently failed to tap the whatever potential the script contained. Perhaps it would indeed have taken the vision of a Dante or a Milton to realize a successful production of The Subway. When considered as part of this expressionistic trio of plays, The Subway does shed an interesting light on Rice’s particular take on mechanism, sexuality, and spirituality. Street Scene
garnered much critical attention and a Pulitzer, but Krutch found Dynamo a more moving candidate for the prize; still, he conceded that the former was more accessible to the masses (Heuvel 140). If so, Street Scene, despite its initial success and enduring value, was more like the "tripe" Eugene refused to produce, and Dynamo is more like the unmarketable great work which he failed to realize.
The Evocative Discord of Machinery in Dynamo

Apart from the urban setting of All God’s Children Got Wings (1924), the architecture motif in The Great God Brown (1926), and the cryptic reference to “strange dark interludes in the electrical display of God the Father” (199) in Strange Interlude (1928), O’Neill’s mid-decade experimental plays make little effort to fetishize or otherwise examine technology. His earlier The Hairy Ape (1922) does examine technology, but without examining any sexual relationship between Mildred and Yank. Simply by virtue of their stark contrast, his masculine brutality and her delicate aloofness establish a kind of sexual tension – despite her horror at the sight of him, and his claim to have “fallen in hate” (228). Both are components of the great socioeconomic process that has created the industrial age – he the “thing in fire that makes it burn,” she the “waste product of the Bessemer process.” Steel interposes itself between this man and this woman, occupying the space where a sexual union might be expected. As early as 1924, however, O’Neill began developing an idea for a play that would eventually combine a frank treatment of adolescent sexuality, further develop the technological myths explored in The Hairy Ape, and further explore the Freudian maternal fixations at the core of the agrarian Desire Under the Elms (1924). The resulting play, Dynamo, is one of O’Neill’s biggest artistic failures.

Lawson felt that O’Neill’s Dynamo “acknowledged a debt” to his (Lawson’s) 1927 Nirvana (Valgemaee 79), but the idea for Dynamo actually occurred several years earlier. It appears in a 1924 letter to producer and friend Kenneth Macgowan (Selected Letters 189), at a time when O’Neill was deeply involved in his affair with Carlotta Monterey. Many of his letters describe, in alternating paragraphs, his progress in wrapping up Dynamo and in wrapping up his rocky marriage to Agnes Bolton (the original Mildred
in the Provincetown production of *The Hairy Ape*). O’Neill rushed the *Dynamo* manuscript to the Theatre Guild Board of Managers, who accepted it for production quickly, in a rare unanimous vote (Waldau 47), suggesting that O’Neill was not the only one who saw great promise in it. Unwilling to return from Europe until his divorce was final, he remained abroad. Thus unable to supervise the rehearsals and production personally, he wrote about it more frequently and in more than ordinary detail to his theater associates. On several such occasions, he identifies *Dynamo* as “one of the ones” for which he hoped to be remembered.

When produced in 1929, it proved to be a fumbled psychological examination of the destructive power of sex, guilt, and mother-fixation, projected against the equally dangerous backdrop of unqualified faith in technology. The Lights (pious minister and smothering mother) reside in a cut-away house on one side of the stage, while the Fifes (a pragmatic power plant worker and his voluptuous, dreamy wife) occupy the other. Conceived around the same time, O’Neill’s much more successful *Desire Under the Elms* (1924) has similar elements – the cut-away house, the father devoted to a harsh God, and the mother whose smothering love lives on after death. Fife, a cold atheist, ridicules Reuben Light’s boyish faith: “And how does God CALL you, tell me? I’m thinkin’ He wouldn’t use the telegraph or the telephone or the radio for they’re contraptions that belong to His archenemy Lucifer” (437). Mrs. Fife is voluptuous and sensitive, with a 200-lb. figure resembling that of a fertility idol. She is another in the series of sympathetic mother-whore figures common in O’Neill (Cybil in *The Great God Brown*; Abbie in *Desire Under the Elms*, Mary Tyrone and the unseen Fat Violet in *Long Day’s Journey into Night*), but oddly enough this Earth-mother is a disciple of the Dynamo, whose mechani-
cal hum she imitates around the house: "I love the dynamos... I could sit forever and listen to them sing... they're always singing about everything in the world" (436).

As much of a third of the play's total lines are delivered as internal monologues, in the form of extended theatrical asides. Although O'Neill had used similar asides successfully in Strange Interlude, here they carry little emotional or dramatic weight. The characters are too sketchily drawn, the content of the asides is too plot-heavy, and the plot itself — with two complementary romantic leads influenced by two sets of complementary parents — is schematic and fairly predictable, at least until the introduction of the dynamo. Reuben's awakening passion for the Fifes' rambunctious daughter Ada sparks the plot, which lurches ahead by way of overheard conversations and awkward monologues. When God's thunderbolt fails to strike him down for disobedience, Reuben vows to worship instead a man-made image of lightning, declaring: "There is no God but Electricity." After the death of his heart-broken mother, Reuben becomes convinced that her spirit inhabits the dynamo at the local power plant, and surrenders to an overwhelming desire to connect with the mother-machine. O'Neill seems to wish to attach deep, philosophical significance to Reuben's conversion to Electricity, but because the dialogue rarely rises to a truly lyric level, Reuben's preaching that all life is premised upon electricity is not terribly effective; in fact, his most poetic moment is a pedestrian parody of Genesis: "Let there be electric Light."

Despite its technological subject matter, the play is (in its published form) glaringly devoid of social commentary. Fife, thumbing through a technical manual as devoutly as the Reverend thumbs through his Bible, makes a brief reference to superiors who don't understand the operation of the dynamo; but this is not a play about social ma-
chines. Perhaps the best-known labor play, Clifford Odets's *Waiting for Lefty* (1935) climaxes with actors planted in the audience joining the characters on stage in calling for a strike, and thus forcing the great wheels of capitalism to a halt, they lead the audience in the cry, “Strike! Strike! Strike!” The action of *Dynamo* takes the hero in the exact opposite direction: Reuben throws himself upon the mercy of the machine, but when he does so, he is clearly insane.

O'Neill achieves a far more subtle depiction of the young man's confusion of mother-love and emerging sexual awareness— together with the attending psychological consequences. Having rejected his mother, he seeks a replacement through sex with Ada, only to reject her, too: “What we did was just plain sex — an act of nature — and that’s all there is to it.” Despite his efforts to separate the primal forces of faith, knowledge, filial piety and lust, the discordant forces merge horribly in his bizarre veneration of the dynamo:

It's like a great dark idol... like the old stone statues of gods people prayed to... that part on top is like a head... and below it is like a body... not a man's... round like a woman's... as if it had breasts... but not like a girl... not like Ada... no, like a woman... like her mother... or mine... Mother of Life, my mother is dead, she has passed back into you, tell her to forgive me, and to help me find your truth. (474)

Reuben's breathless speech is delivered in fragments, much like the speech with which Eugene enraptures Sophie. Reuben’s final words, as he prepares to electrocute himself
by grasping the dynamo’s breast-like power terminals, clearly identify his suicide as a
retreat from life, a sexual encounter that is also a self-annihilating return to the womb:

I don’t want to know the truth! I only want you to hide me,
Mother! Never let me go from you again! Reuben’s voice rises in
a moan that is a mingling of pain and loving consummation, and
this cry dies into a sound like the crooning of a baby and merges
and is lost into the dynamo’s hum. (488)

This powerful image, expressing with disturbing clarity O’Neill’s continuing fixation on
faith, maternity and sexuality, is somewhat contextualized by the curtain line, “I thought
you was nice and loved us... You hateful thing you!” delivered by Ada’s mother, who
had up to that point been a disciple of the Dynamo, but ultimately beats her fists against it
(489). O’Neill does not, therefore, appear to endorse Reuben’s decision, but in the final
analysis the play offers no viable alternatives.

Dynamo’s internal flaws aside, any O’Neill work that immediately followed
Strange Interlude would likely have been a disappointment, as Burns Mantle noted when
characterizing critical responses in his annual retrospect (Best Plays of 1928-29.5)8.
Brooks Atkinson of the New York Times was almost alone in finding merit in the play’s
grand theme (Roberts and Roberts 89). Nevertheless, the play intrigued O’Neill’s long-
time friend and candid critic George Jean Nathan, who judged it a hopeless muddle, yet
still listed it along with two or three other O’Neill failures that “sink not trivially but with

8 Dynamo was not counted as one of Mantle’s titular “best plays,” and rarely ap-
pears in O’Neill collections.
a certain air of majesty, like a great ship, its flags flying, full of holes” (American Mercury 17 500).

While the play was a failure, O'Neill persisted in his feeling that the production was at fault; he felt that religion and technology overwhelmed what he saw as the play’s psychological core – an exploration of all-consuming mother-love. The original script included extensive references to the Scopes “Monkey Trial,” which foregrounded the religious material much more than O'Neill had intended (leading O'Neill to cut much of it when revising the play for publication [Alexander 279n]). A certain Sister Mary Leo, to whom O'Neill referred as his “dear Adopted Grandmother,” was so distressed by the review of Dynamo in the Catholic publication Commonweal, that she wrote O'Neill to tell him that she had prayed the stations of the cross for him — not because of the poor reception of the play, but rather, for the apparently poor state of his soul. Touched, but still defending his work, O'Neill replied: “since belief is denied to me in spite of the fact that my whole adult spiritual life is a search for a faith which my work expresses in symbols, why then my thwarted search must have its meaning and use, don’t you think, for whatever God may be?” (Roberts and Roberts 232-33).

In his 1931 study, Our Changing Theatre, Dana Skinner (a convert to Catholicism who wrote the aforementioned review for Commonweal) opines that one of the reasons for the failure of Dynamo was that generators are no longer as mythical and mysterious as Adams had first found them, and as O’Neill still seemed to regard them; they are therefore unsuitable symbols for spiritual forces. “Had he taken, not the dynamo, nor even electricity, but rather the mysterious magnetic field from which electric generation emerges, he would at least have been approaching that analogy science has revealed by
which magnetism and cohesion can be compared to the binding force of the universe” (89), by which Skinner means God’s love, but which a physicist of today would call the Unified Field Theory. The ambiguous and unpolished state of Dynamo may be due, in part, to the fact that it was originally announced by the Group Theatre as the first in a trilogy about modern spiritual life – one of O’Neill’s favorite themes. Dynamo is, then, one facet of a greater struggle, a complement to the sudden, easy redemption depicted in Days Without End. In “Fetishizing the Dynamo,” Murphy concludes that Henry Adams had already examined and discarded the fetishes of religion and technology with which O’Neill was still flirting twenty years later. While Adams achieved his own sense of intellectual peace with chaos, whatever synthesis O’Neill might have proposed between these extremes of mother-machine and mother-church remains a mystery, for the failure of the first two installments led O’Neill to abandon the trilogy.

As such, Dynamo is in some respects the unfinished product of a particularly powerful transition period in O’Neill’s personal life. A September, 1927 letter from O’Neill near the end of his second marriage illustrates the close connection between O’Neill’s personal troubles and his progress on Dynamo: while telling Agnes that he will not be visiting their Bermuda home, he all but confesses a plan to take Carlotta on a romantic excursion:

I’ve seen Carlotta a couple of times. I won’t go into that now but wait until I see you. As a matter of fact, there’s nothing much to go into – so whatever you do, don’t get to worrying about that. She’s been damned nice to me and I’ve enjoyed being with her – but that’s the all of it from both sides.
Another reason I couldn't go down [to Bermuda] right away is that through Wertheim I have got in touch with the big hydroelectric people and am going to visit one of their plants soon... It would make a nice four or five day trip through beautiful country there and back. I wish you were there to do it with me. It really isn't 100% American not to do a honeymoon to Niagara Falls! I shall have to advertise for a temporary wife! (Selected Letters 259)

Earlier in the letter, O'Neill had listed several pending medical procedures as his reasons for staying in New York, as well as the imminent productions of Marco Millions and Strange Interlude; but even as he denies the seriousness of his relationship with Carlotta, he taunts Agnes with the image of "a temporary wife." Before mailing this letter, O'Neill received a particularly bitter letter from Agnes, prompting him to add in a postscript (almost as if he felt guilty for baiting her): "Sweetheart, what the hell is the matter with us, anyway? We act like a couple of children and we ought to be ashamed of ourselves!"

Guilt-ridden and miserable, O'Neill finally did go home to Bermuda, but soon began sending love letters back to Carlotta in New York.

Earlier in his life, O'Neill had found himself at a similar low point, during the collapse of his brief marriage to Kathleen Jenkins. In order to provide the courts with evidence of adultery, and so procure a divorce, he had arranged to be seen in bed with a prostitute (Gelb 173). After a disastrous attempted reunion with his estranged father (175-85), and the commission of his mother to a sanatorium (186), O'Neill accelerated his descent into drunkenness, leading ultimately to his suicide attempt at Jimmy-the-Priest's saloon (187). O'Neill lore generally identifies this failed suicide as the creative
birth of America’s first significant dramatist. In *Eugene O’Neill’s Creative Struggle: The Decisive Decade, 1924-1933*, Alexander interprets the violence and nihilism of *Dynamo* as the playwright’s attempt to use art, rather than suicide, to work through his latest feelings of guilt and depression: “He was once again in flight from an unhappy marriage, on the way to a second divorce, and memories of his first marriage swarmed into *Dynamo*” (135). For example, a version of O’Neill’s reluctant proposal to his first wife Kathleen appears in Mrs. Fife’s dreamy recollection of Mr. Fife’s proposal: “As soon as he knew he’d got me into trouble he spoke right up . . . ‘Oh, hell, then I guess I’ve got to marry you’ . . . and I said yes, and I was awful happy” (*Dynamo*, 430). Alexander notes other parallels with O’Neill’s life, such as Reuben’s tense relationship with his harsh father, his consuming love of his mother, and his grief at her death; but one of the most telling pieces of evidence for the connection between O’Neill’s art and life is a fairly elaborate stage direction that links the character Ada’s death with a suicide threat made by Agnes. Such a degree of connection he would not achieve again until *Ah, Wilderness* (1933), which itself was a necessary artistic prelude to *Long Day’s Journey into Night* (written 1940).

Alexander reports that Agnes wrote that she would have gotten a pistol out of a drawer and ended it all, except that the drawer was locked, and she did not have the key. In the final scenes of *Dynamo*, Reuben first contemplates strangling Ada, then, in a complex and seemingly unnecessary bit of business, enters a work area, where he grabs by the throat a man named Jenkins, “tears out a drawer and gets the revolver,” orders Jenkins in a back room “and turns the key in the lock,” and then returns to shoot Ada, twice. Besides the reappearance of the gun, the drawer, and the key (all of which were from
Agnes’s suicide threat), Alexander points to Freud’s theories on the significance of names in dreams, and suggests that Jenkins is a stand-in for O’Neill’s first wife, Kathleen Jennings; Reuben enacts on Ada the death that Agnes was unable to enact on herself.

While we might, with Susan Glaspell, doubt the significance of these names (her one-act Suppressed Desires [1915] satirizes precisely this aspect of psychoanalysis), Reuben does go out of his way to provide one symbolic bullet for each of O’Neill’s previous wives, even though simply pushing his victim off the top of the dynamo would have done the job just as effectively.

While O’Neill seems to have wanted playgoers to engage with the psychological content of his play, critics responded more strongly to the image of the titular machine, emphasized by Lee Simonson’s set, which re-created the interior of a power plant, with metal catwalks and stairs. Simonson, who had suggested and designed the giant, stage-filling adding machine for Mr. Zero’s celestial office for the original production of The Adding Machine, reports that on his first reading of Dynamo, he found the script "incredible" and "strained" (459); nevertheless, he found himself virtually enraptured after visiting the General Electric power plant in Stevenson, Connecticut where O’Neill had visualized the play’s final scene:

Here was power that could give man the strength of a god able to move mountains, the source of blind energy that could execute his commands over a network of metallic nerves beyond the reach of his eyes, that could light his way through darkness, reclaim him from toil, and, if not propitiated, consume him with flame.
Simonson, who had also designed the New York premieres of From Morn to Midnight, R.U.R., and Man and the Masses, speaks with all of Pound's enthusiasm (and none of Adams's trepidation) when he reports that "I have left many cathedrals less awed and humbled. I had been at a shrine where an invisible miracle was daily performed, a transubstantiation no less miraculous than that of the Mass" (460).

In a long production memorandum, O'Neill asked the Theatre Guild to take special care with the sound effects mentioned in his script, because "these are not incidental noises but significant dramatic overtones that are an integral part of the composition of the theatre which is the whole play." Rice and Treadwell took similar pains to work with sound effects, but O'Neill was particularly concerned because he would not be there to approve them. He specifically warns against "a generator sounding obviously like a vacuum cleaner." Referring to a critic who claimed that "the difference between my plays and other contemporary work was that I always wrote primarily by ear for the ear," O'Neill reports that "even down to the rhythm of the dialogue," his plays have "the definite structural quality of a musical composition. . . . It is not that I consciously strive after this but that, willy nilly, my stuff takes that form" (Simonson 117). O'Neill had been at his home in Hamilton, Bermuda in April, 1927, and so could not have attended the New York premiere of Antheil's "Ballet Méchanique." Nevertheless, Nathan's casual reference to the concert during his review of Dynamo suggests some connection:

O'Neill betrays himself in so feverish a personal mood that one achieves much the same feeling that comes over one when listening to that boilerworks symphony of Antheil. In place of smooth persuasiveness there is shillaber lapel-tugging and coat-tail pulling;
in place of suggestive harmony there is simply an ear-splitting racket. (American Mercury 16 373)

But O'Neill wrote:

Looking back on my plays in which significant mechanical sound and not music is called for (nearly all of the best ones) I can say that none of them has ever really been thoroughly done in the modern theatre although they were written for it. Some day I hope they will be — and people are due to be surprised by the added dramatic value — modern values — they will take on.” (qtd. in Simonson 118)

He felt that the theatre, in skimping on technological sound effects, was missing the opportunity to use one of its best tools for “expressing the essential rhythm of our lives today,”

Another significant instance of O’Neill’s use of sound occurs immediately following Yank’s encounter with Mildred in The Hairy Ape, when Yank bitterly rejects a series of ideologically loaded words such as “Think,” “Love,” “Law,” “Government,” and “God.” In each case, one of the stokers first mentions the word, after which Yank repeats it “with abysmal contempt,” and all the stokers, acting as a cynical chorus, intone it in unison: “The word has a brazen, metallic quality as if their throats were phonograph horns. It is followed by a chorus of hard, barking laughter.” Like the boilers burning their endless supply of coal, Yank consumes each of these traditional human ways of making sense of the universe, thus signaling the beginning of his alienating journey. The motion from this early mechanized chorus to a final chorus of grunting zoo animals ech-
oes Yank’s transformation from cog in a vast industrial machine to corpse on the floor of an ape’s cage. We can infer from the Dynamo memorandum that O’Neill had been disappointed by scant attention paid to these sound effects in the production, despite their prominence in the published stage directions. The memorandum continues: “After which dissertation (which has little or nothing to do with ‘Interlude’ or ‘Marco’ but a hell of a lot to do with ‘Dynamo’) I would suggest that some special person with the right mechanical flair be sicced on this aspect of ‘Dynamo’ to get perfect results.” O’Neill is of course referring to his own digression on the specific role of mechanical sound effects in the production of his experimental plays. But these comments provide an excellent rationale for excluding from the present study some of O’Neill’s better-known and more successful experimental attempts, in favor of examining the value of what O’Neill had hoped to achieve in this particular, obscure failure.

The memo also suggests that the Theatre Guild designer visit the Connecticut General Electric plant where O’Neill had envisioned the closing scene. Simonson faced a Catch-22: O’Neill’s concrete visualization of the climax of his play in terms of this particular dynamo forced him to recreate the dynamo in realistic detail; yet O’Neill would later complain that the staging did not do the play justice, in part because the dynamo was so overwhelming. When Simonson went there, he

found that O’Neill had so definitely related the death of his hero to the top of an already old-fashioned dynamo, had so concretely imagined it taking place on this machine, that there was no alternative to copying it for the stage on a slightly smaller scale. (119)
Several years after the play’s failure, he held out hopes that O’Neill was not finished with the projected trilogy.

I continue to feel that in *Dynamo* O’Neill touched the sources of modern faith and despair more nearly than in exploring so much more successfully the insatiable desires of one modern woman for satisfaction in sex [*Strange Interlude*] or in tracing the meaning of fate and retribution through the forbidden passions of one New England family [*Desire Under the Elms*]. For *Dynamo*, despite its failure in performance, was more nearly the kind of success that the theatre needs to day than hundreds of its present successes.

(461)

While O’Neill’s overall theatrical vision for the play was not successfully realized, he had elicited a powerful emotional response from Simonson, who as an influential theatre designer with religious tendencies, was equally moved by the creative powers of the priest, the artist, and the engineer. In Simonson, we can see a modernist take on the social power of the dynamo that had so horrified Adams. To Adams, technology in America was an overwhelming social force because the young nation had no traditions revering either the pagan Venus or the Christian Madonna.

**American Idiosyncracies Thwart the American Expressionism of 1928-29**

The Virgin’s procreative force in America had been muted because “anyone brought up among Puritans knew that sex was sin. In any previous age, sex was strength” (Adams 384). Adams had placed the dynamo on one side and the virgin on the other, but
Machinal, The Subway, and Dynamo upset the balance; in all three plays, a union of technology and eroticism defeats the life principle. According to Valgema, American drama came of age when Freudian characterizations combined with expressionistic themes (95). Technology was no longer the explicit theme of expressionistic drama, but rather a physical manifestation of each play's Freudian core. Human society, and the individual human psyche in general, becomes a machine; like most machines, they show signs of wear before eventually breaking down. The slate of expressionistic plays produced during the 1928-29 theatre season draws, in theme and stagecraft, upon technology. These plays also chronicle the psychological breakdown of the protagonists, mirrored in the moral breakdown of the urbs; however, these three plays offer little insight into how to repair the mechanisms of the soul or society, or, perhaps more important, how to keep either from breaking down in the first place. Ultimately, then, they fail to alter significantly the landscape drawn by their predecessors in the first wave of American experimental theatre. They do, however, accumulate artistic power through their sensually stunning technical displays, which would have been impossible without the existence of the very technology upon which their art commented - a technology which shows the cross-influence of film, music, and theatre.

Technologically innovative, their substance was no longer fresh and inviting; they lack what Gassner calls "imaginative presentation," by which he means a playwright's potential for creating poetry through "nuance, atmosphere, and mood" (Theatre at the Crossroads, 8, 19). "Without such presentation, The Glass Menagerie would have been tenuous. Without the modified expressionism Arthur Miller mingled with realism, Death
of a Salesman would have been humdrum, especially in view of the representative commonplaceness of his Willy Loman” (18).

In theatre of the Twenties, machines seem to exist a priori, outside of the consciousness within which the characters reside; their intrusion into private psychological spaces is an unbearable offense, from which the protagonists cannot recover. By contrast, American consciousness during the Depression is Janus-headed, creating a “grotesque” cultural landscape, simultaneously “resplendent and self-aware of its status as the first technological age, and cringing with fear at the changes that technology had wrought” (Fearnow, American Stage 6). If the theatre is the soul of the city, then the imagination of Treadwell, Rice and O’Neill seems not to have matched the mood of the American soul in the 1928-29 season. The reception of these plays was so weak that Lawson’s predictions about the glowing future of expressionism were proved resoundingly wrong. In any event, the collapse of the stock market in October, 1929 rendered moot any prophetic warnings about the dangers of a recklessly advancing civilization.
4. Theatre of the Thirties: Machines to Socialize the Soul

Waiting for Lefty (1935), Altars of Steel (1937) and O! Pyramids (1933)

The experimental plays of the Twenties, which examined urban dehumanization and mechanized soullessness, illustrated the plight of an abstracted individual clinging to human nature in the face of projected internal fears. Those plays aim to invoke in us the primal feelings we experience through the tortured perspective of the protagonists. Yank and Zero, small souls cut off from networks of power beyond their comprehension, may have been doomed from the start, but the social theater of the Thirties suggests that the rest of us may have some hope. Finding no towering dramatists like O’Neill or Miller, scholars and critics of the Thirties distribute credit for artistic and theatrical achievements during the Depression socially. This egalitarianism is perhaps fitting for a decade fascinated by public welfare issues.

Much Depression-era drama examines the growing influence of technological progress as it relates to the private and public spheres; however, since none of these playwrights produced a body of work with an overall literary impact comparable to that of the “greats,” the significance of this theme remains largely unexamined. The many playwrights active during the thirties (Odets, Saroyan, Sherwood, Behrman, Hellman, Luce) tend to get considered in a lump, alongside the agit-prop groups and the Federal Theatre Project (FTP). For instance, Scanlan, examining the origins of the American family drama, glosses over the Thirties and only barely mentions Waiting for Lefty, which owes much of its theatrical power to its deconstruction of the nuclear family. The high social comedy of Barry, Sherwood and Behrman examines American familial and
social relationships within the context of a rapidly-changing economic and political setting, yet these plays did not examine industrial advancement or the possibility of political change as a theme in and of itself. Greenfield, exploring the theme of work and the work ethic, focuses on the political slant of socially-conscious plays, but his treatment leaves unasked many questions about human relationships as affected by technological dependence. Even when such plays criticize big business for its indifference to the common worker, technology is no longer the monolithic evil that it had been in the Twenties, when machines such as Rice’s celestial adding machine, O’Neill’s dynamo, and Treadwell’s electric chair were unequivocally menacing. Reuben (from Dynamo) and Eugene (from The Subway) are both visionaries, yet their devotion to technology is pathological and destructive. While the Young Woman of Machinal gains a final moment of clarity after an encounter with an airplane, her subsequent date with the electric chair prevents her from acting upon it. An examination of certain key plays of the Thirties will help us to understand how the later dramatists successfully integrated once-daring theatrical techniques. Even as the market crashed and the depression lingered, the American public remained unshaken in its devotion to the mythology of progress.

**America’s Glorious Technological Future**

While social theatre generally presented a bleak view of the present (using its bleakness to incite radical political action), at the same time it suggested that, within the proper political and ideological framework, industrial labor could be humane and even ennobling. Meanwhile, outside of the theatres, influential utopian prophets produced coffee-table visions of the future, in which applied technology would create a unified, har-
monious society, planned and managed on a colossal scale. Corporations had already begun to pay close attention to the emotional and cultural values that middle-class consumers attached to their goods, and had hired theatre designers such as Norman Bel Geddes and Lee Simonson to design showcases, shop windows, and create the products themselves. Once the basic hardware for a product such as the automobile or the refrigerator was established, boom-era competitors rapidly cloned their successful rivals, so that pragmatic consumers saw little to distinguish various models. Theatre men already knew how to use material objects to represent cultural meaning or to generate emotional effects, and were therefore up to the task of ensuring that Americans would continue their love affair with the Dynamo. Even after the stock market crashed, the general public retained its faith in American technological ingenuity, and rival corporations sought ways to attract consumer attention; the efforts of industrial designers became perhaps even more important to commerce, as companies used design strategies to differentiate essentially identical products.

While American labor drama exhorted its audiences to adopt social progress in order to complement the relentless march of technology, a number of fanciful popular books published just before, during, and after the October 1929 crash capitalized upon the general public's fascination with technological progress. In fanciful books such as The Metropolis of Tomorrow (1929), Contempo: This American Tempo (1929), Ultimo (1930), and Horizons (1932), technologically-minded artists posited, with varying degrees of plausibility, how massive public projects might give form to the city of the future. These four lavishly-illustrated works show the influence of Lang's 1927 Metropolis, not just in the design of urban skyscrapers, but also in the sheer scale on which they
depicted human life. They emphasized teeming masses of humanity moving through the Metropolis, less like blood through meandering networks of veins, and more like a viscous fluid pressed into tightly-regulated streams, lubricating a great urban machine (Mumford 34). These artists recognize and develop the potential for stark visuals, borrowed from expressionistic theater, in order to illustrate the theatrical power of technological images, to the eyes and pocketbooks of a public intoxicated by progress.

In The Metropolis of Tomorrow, Hugh Ferris attacks visions of future cities that are simply taller and busier versions of contemporary ones. Denouncing the concept of a raised networks of roads as a violation of “architectural values,” he pauses briefly to consider the poor office worker, past whose window would stream an endless flood of cars. Yet one finds in these works of urban prophecy few such reflections on the plight of the common urbanite who wishes to forge a personal relationship with this idealized urban space. In general, the human inhabitants of these futuristic cities appear en masse, or perhaps as anonymous silhouettes gaping at urban vistas. Humans seem to have no problems that cannot be solved by architectural planning. Acting on this assumption, Ferris describes how the New York zoning laws, as duplicated and applied across the country and throughout much of the world, dictated architectural space on a huge scale. In order to reduce urban gridlock, the laws restricted the volume of the downtown buildings (and thus, the number of people occupying them). To comply with the rules, the lower floors of a building must slope back from the street at a specified angle, and the main tower must occupy no more than one-quarter of the lot.

The unexpected result was a new, vaguely pyramidal, architectural style, which Ferris finds aesthetically pleasing, for its shape imbues the downtown landscape with an
attractive mystical symbolism, infinitely preferable to endless grids of vertical columns. In an illustration of the multiply-arched dome of the Chrysler building, a sunny halo (53) crowns this symbol of human achievement without a trace of irony or rebuke. Lamenting that church spires are now regularly dwarfed by apartment buildings, he penitentially suggests penthouse cathedrals, with room for apartments and offices beneath. This striking architectural solution is conservative, in that it preserves traditional notions of human and divine hierarchy, while it is at the same time radically humanist, for it reminds the faithful just who it was that raised God’s churches so high. Attracted by the vision of order promised by zoning laws, Ferris depicts a future city that concentrates all of its commercial operations, scientific efforts and artistic ventures into three separate districts, radiating from a central public region. He drives home his vision of a tripartite city with a bit of religious whimsy: “THE CITY (its sciences, its art, its business) could be made in the image of MAN (his thoughts, his feelings, his senses) who is made in the image of...” a triune God (although Ferris coyly leaves the analogy unfinished, purporting it to be transcribed from an incomplete archeological text). His veneration of urban architecture reveals the same kind of spiritual fire that consumes the protagonists of the three plays examined in the previous chapter, though the world he depicts features no individual suffering, just efficient communal life on a grand industrial scale.

Contempo is a series of twenty satirical impressions of modern life, comprising illustrations by John Vassos and minimal commentary by his wife, Ruth. Announced in a trade publication on the infamous date of October 29, 1929, it featured a picture titled “The Market,” featuring “the ticker tape like a cobra’s tongue lashing a throng of men
who are relentlessly striving upward." Among other topics chosen for analysis are "The Radio," "The Subway," "Traffic," "The Movies," and "Suburbia." According to one review, "there are some things we take seriously, science, aviation, electricity," and although Vassos has panels treating each of these as well, the topics are "too large for a Hogarth, however modern, and too removed from human control to be treated successfully by a caricaturist" (Taylor, in Dutton collection). The literary editor of the St. Louis Globe Democrat called Contempo "a huge hopper into which are sucked and whirled the sounds and motions and confusions and contradictions of our American tempo," and predicted that, under its influence, Americans will free themselves from Victorian lethargy and begin "Whitmanically flinging their barbaric yawps of victory over the roofs of the world" (Love, in Dutton collection). The same couple produced the more popular Ultimo, which presented the reflections of an anonymous citizen of a totalitarian future, who looks back over a mythical past, before the sun turned cold and civilization moved underground. The anonymous author chronicles the monotonous egalitarianism endured by generations of citizens, who advance from low-status jobs towards higher-status jobs such as scientific work and membership in something called a "mental group." Like its predecessor, Ultimo satisfies a public appetite for technological speculation, while at the same time it criticizes the values of the technological police state that enforces communal values at the expense of individual ones. One copy of Ultimo, obtained from a Harrisburg, Pennsylvania library, was checked out 15 times from 1931-1933, another four times

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9 Photocopies of various clippings and press releases regarding Contempo were graciously provided by Peter Verheyen, from the Papers of E. P. Dutton & Co., Syracuse University. These are from Box 55, John Vassos.

10 William Hogarth, British political caricaturist (1697-1764).
during the later years of the depression, and then only once during WWII, presumably when library patrons no longer needed fiction in order to be part of a great social engineering project (i.e. the war effort). Despite the fact that the story is told through the voice of a citizen who criticizes the fascist and materialistic overtones of his society, the narrator misses no opportunity to describe and depict, in glowing terms, the technological structures, inventions, and processes which make life underground bearable, and which preserve human life by sending an elite group to colonize a nearby star system. Like the servants of the pharaohs, imprisoned within the engineering marvels they helped to build, the mass of humanity labors in order to propel a select few into the afterlife. Dependence upon machines leads to a police state, yet that state is itself a necessary tool for the preservation of the human race. Once again, the machines upstage humanity.

While the other three works aimed for lofty literary insights, Norman Bel Geddes's popular and influential *Horizons* is a careful consideration of the near future of technology, arrived at by noting recent design trends and projecting them along scientifically plausible lines. As an innovator in stage lighting, Jo Mielziner (34) groups him with Robert Edmund Jones (designer of O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*) and Lee Simonson (designer of Rice's *The Adding Machine* and O'Neill's *Dynamo*). According to Mielziner, aside from these three, designers in the Twenties thought of little other than trying to achieve a uniform wash of illumination, to be brought up or blacked out evenly. In his memoir, *Miracle in the Evening*, Geddes describes himself presenting to David Belasco his idea for lining up spotlights along the front edge of the balcony, thus providing light from a sufficiently low angle to reach the back of the stage, but without blocking any sight lines. The innovation (which Belasco seems to have stolen) made footlights obso-
lete, and allowed the director to highlight or de-emphasize different parts of the playing area as the action demanded (139-140). As one of the leading designers in “new stagecraft” (a term Gorelik applies [174] to any of the various experimental successors to Naturalism), Geddes is perhaps best remembered for his lavish neo-romantic production of Max Reinhardt’s *The Miracle*, for which he turned the inside of a theater into a vast cathedral, lit by 800 electric candles, with pews replacing seats and the smell of incense filling the air; also, for his equally lavish plans (c. 1921) for an unrealized production of Dante’s *Inferno*. In addition, Geddes designed Lawson’s expressionistic jazz-themed labor play, *Processional* (1924), as well as Odets’s *Night Music* (1940). For Gorelik, “the significance of his work has not dawned fully on our theatre, which is inclined to be overly lyrical. When the theatre turns to a new mood its scenic artists will find that Gorelik has preceded them” (308).

Geddes applied his knowledge of theatrical craftsmanship to identify, and later to shape, the public’s taste for technological progress, and thus re-invented himself as a professional industrial designer. “In 1927,” he writes, “I decided that I would no longer devote myself exclusively to the theater, but would experiment in designing motor cars, ships, factories, railways – sources more vitally akin to life today than the theater” (*Miracle* 5). Geddes noted that the early automobile, or “horseless carriage,” resembled its predecessor, in form, just as the early radios were based upon the designs for delicate wooden cabinets used for the storage of sheet music. Powered flight, on the other hand, demanded a completely new form, since the body of an airplane must minimize atmospheric drag. The streamlined airplane looked like nothing that had gone before it, and so created a new “style” that worked its way into the consciousness of the public (as Sophie
Treadwell illustrates in the Young Woman’s fixation upon the image of the airplane). Just as Geddes had streamlined playing spaces by eliminating the footlights, he applied the same principles to the improvement of countless ordinary household and office products, in order to make them appear more “modern” (and hence, desirable to the consumer). “By popularizing streamlining when only a few engineers were considering its functional use, he made possible the design style of the thirties” (Meilke 48). While many of his ideas were outlandish and impossible to implement, his exaggeration meant that a curious and supportive public could readily grasp his design statements.

According to Geddes, “It is as absurd to condemn an artist of today for applying his ability to industry as it is to condemn Phidias, or Giotto or Michelangelo for applying theirs towards religion” (Meilke 39). These sentiments echo Lee Simonson’s evangelical praise of Dynamo, or Pound’s praise of Antheil. In general, the first practitioners of “art in industry” felt that projecting the desires of the human spirit through the production of more aesthetically appealing commodities and appliances would bring harmony and beauty to an otherwise dehumanizing machine age. As one of few who successfully made the transition from artist to technologist, Geddes found that imprinting his name on a machine casing immediately supplied the machine with cultural cachet; further, his General Motors “Futurama” showcase for the 1939 World’s Fair is regularly cited as an important inspiration for America’s interstate highway system. Although World War II scuttled Geddes’s plans to pack his exhibit into a touring blimp, his technological optimism never wavered:

In the perspective of fifty years hence, the historian will detect in the decade of 1930-1940 a period of tremendous significance. He
will see it as a period of criticism, unrest, and dissatisfaction to the point of disillusion — when new aims were being sought and new beginnings were astir. Doubtless he will ponder that, in the midst of a world-wide melancholy owing to an economic depression, a new age dawned with invigorating conceptions and the horizon lifted. (Geddes, *Horizons* 3)

His sincere and lofty optimism helped him sell products to a public eager for the prosperity they glimpsed, in FDR’s terms, “just around the corner.” His solutions to high-profile aesthetic and functional problems were ingenious, if not always practical. For example, in detailed designs for an ultra-streamlined luxury liner, Geddes presents what looks like a long, thin armadillo with a retractable upper shell. In order to preserve an unbroken surface (and hence the public’s ability to identify the ship as a “streamlined” vessel), the design necessarily reduced the amount of open deck space available to passengers, since each upper floor was slightly smaller than the one below it. The designers of the Titanic, when faced with a perceived shortage of deck space, solved the problem in a single stroke by eliminating a row of ugly lifeboats — with infamous results. Geddes comes up with a solution to both problems: the lifeboats would be tucked out of the way in the hull, accessible by a pop-out deck to be unfolded when needed. Much like Ferris’s plan for penthouse cathedrals, Geddes’s insight is a seamless blending of the aesthetic and the technological, much like what one might expect to find in a Hart Crane poem.

In the imagination of Geddes and his fellow urban visionaries, the city of the future teems with people; however, these urban visionaries never examine the effect of city life upon the particular individual. Alluding to an image found in Lang’s *Metropolis,*
Ferris complains that “popular fancy usually adds something remarkable in the way of overhead traffic avenues” (64) a hundred or more feet above street level, yet Ferris himself goes no further than to recognize the office worker's desire to “escape” from “the noise, the rush and the atmosphere of traffic.” While Elmer Rice and Sophie Treadwell build upon the urban experience in order to present its horror, Ferris examines no inner anxieties that might personalize his intellectual, aesthetic appraisal. In general, the utopian architecture presents a God's-eye view of the city; we see detailed designs for a floating airport off the tip of Manhattan, a “flying wing” airplane, human excursions into space — all sponsored by technological utopias that have freed the human mind from mundane worries. Yet never in these optimistic speculations are we asked to confront the prospect of a Willy Loman of the future, fretting about how to come up with the next payment on a magnetic-suspension tube or personal dirigible — that sort of personalized, individual contact with technology is left to the playwrights. In addition to Waiting for Lefty, the Federal Theatre Project’s Altars of Steel and Clare Booth Luce’s unproduced script for O! Pyramids examine clashes between labor and management from a range of political viewpoints, all of which acknowledge the inescapable, necessary, and even laudable role of modern industrialism in American life.

**Odets’s Underhanded Appeal to the Family Unit in Waiting for Lefty**

Waiting for Lefty, the most successful Marxist-themed play on the American stage, supports its thesis (an argument for worker dignity through a labor strike) upon its interpretation of two fundamental human arenas of action: the social and the individual. According to a scheme encoded within the play, the social element is most directly fulfilled by eco-
conomic conditions, and the individual is most naturally influenced by the domestic environment. Although Odets softened the message for public consumption (so that the lingering dramatic message is an argument for unionism rather than revolution), the structure of the play illustrates the Marxist argument that worker solidarity is the preeminent human bond. By presenting a series of “episodes” which relate the individual ideological epiphanies of a half dozen or so representative workers – each of whom participates in a technological society by virtue of his membership in or rejection of consumer culture – the play illustrates the Marxist position that worker rebellion is a natural (though often latent) stage in social evolution. In this light, the play’s social comments are easily comprehended; but the primary targets – the blue collar worker who has not yet been awakened to the Marxist view of his exploitation by the capitalist system in which he struggles to succeed – needed to be drawn gently into socialism. The uncommitted blue-collar workers would typically have been family men, less interested in fomenting a worker’s rebellion than in emulating the life and leisure of the middle class; yet it is precisely this civilized view of family life that the Communist Manifesto sentences to extinction, on grounds of its hypocrisy and economic obsolescence:

On what foundation is the present family, the bourgeois family, based? On capital, on private gain. In its completely developed form, this family exists only among the bourgeoisie. But this state of things finds its complement in the practical absence of the family among proletarians, and in public prostitution.
The bourgeois family will vanish as a matter of course when its complement vanishes, and both will vanish with the vanishing of capital. (Marx and Engels 26-27)

But the two most overtly domestic scenes in Waiting for Lefty, together with the consistent domestic references throughout the other episodes, complicate the play’s message about the family unit. In his efforts to reach the working-class audience, Odets strikes pro-family notes that continue to resonate even after the ideological motion of the play has tried to dampen them. As the play progresses, the episodes refer with steadily increasing hostility to this ideal family picture, eventually exposing it as inadmissibly hollow. Nevertheless, the play is one of the few of its kind that remain critically and theatrically relevant, once removed from the immediate social conditions that inspired it.

The play’s collusion of socioeconomic themes and domestic slice-of-life realism creates a symbiotic environment within which we can both explore the American response to technology and examine an emerging stagecraft that encouraged more ensemble dramas, and which would eventually lend itself more agreeably to method acting. Waiting for Lefty provided the Group Theatre with an excellent opportunity to exercise its founding principles, which not only included radical politics, but also, as the organization’s name suggests, a theatre that revolved around a collective performance, rather than the star system.

The stereotyped, almost cliché themes that most social dramatists were dealing with during the Depression — the plight of the working man, pacifism, the decadence of American society, the evils of capitalism — often controlled the playwrights who were developing these themes; Odets,
unlike most of the others, controlled the themes and wove them into the fabric of quality drama, producing as he did so a gallery of memorable and believable characters placed in easily identifiable and credible situations.

(Shuman 41)

The cast included Odets, Elia Kazan (whose direction of Marlon Brando in *A Streetcar Named Desire* [1947] was an important cultural touchstone in the American theatre) and Lee J. Cobb (whose creation of the role of Willy Loman, again under the direction of Elia Kazan, was nearly as important). Conroy sees Kazan’s devotion to the Method as an artistic rejection of his Group Theatre days, just as his testimony before the HUAC hearings rejected the politics for which the Group Theatre stood (256). It is indeed difficult to imagine Stanley Kowalski or Willy Loman emerging from a stagecraft that involves the mass-chant and meta-theatricality of *Waiting for Lefty*; yet Odets shows us some important features of the greatest critical successes of O’Neill, Miller, and Williams. Odets’s play calls for a strong ensemble. While the fist-shaking speeches which close each successive episode are far from realistic, instead of presenting the revolution on a national or ideological scale, Odets carefully applies his political message to the domestic lives of the ordinary people he hoped to reach. Further, instead of concentrating on the display of Marxist spectacle, Odets builds upon short, realistic scenes that highlight the psychological turmoil of the central, unenlightened character. Each of these features represents a gesture towards greater psychological realism in an examination of the individual as defined by his or her experiences within a psychologically complex environment.

The play’s final scene, with the actors inciting the audience to “Strike! Strike! Strike!”, was rousing theatre. Yet Odets would soon go to work in the Hollywood he had
openly derided; Kazan would later name the names of his former Communist associates, and, according to Miller, Cobb was all along a cheerfully apolitical lemming (Timebends, 393). Speaking from the distance of a few decades, and with fuller knowledge of what Soviet Communism would truly mean for the people of Eastern Europe, Miller is suspect in his poised naïveté – artists typically see themselves as leaders in the field of human ideas, and Miller is no exception. Despite what in retrospect appears to be political indifference on the part of the performers, the theatrical effectiveness of the play persists.

Odets ascribes great power to the idea of domestic bliss, at least in the collective psyche of the unenlightened (that is, pre-Marxist) American working class. Hence, Krutch praises Odets’s singular ability to “suggest the essential loneliness of men and women. . . and the powerlessness of any one of them to help the other” (“Apocalypse” 552). If O’Neill’s artistic struggle represents a search to replace his lost faith, then perhaps Odets was seeking a replacement for a lost family. It is this, and his emotional attraction to the fervent idealism of Marxists, which drives his drama – but not any informed, sustained intellectual interest in Marxist philosophy. Gassner wrote that labor strikes were intended as “dress rehearsals for the revolution” (Himelstein xiii); it was not the ideological content but rather the “over-all dramatic rhythm and imaginative dramaturgy of the play and the vibrancy of life in its individual episodes” (xiv) that made Waiting for Lefty such effective drama. According to Shuman, he “will probably be longest remembered for his biting and credible dialogue sometimes verging on the poetic, from which such later writers as Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller and William Inge learned profitable lessons” (46).
As didactic theatre, the medieval morality play and the Marxist diatribe have much in common. Socially conservative theatre aims to celebrate, preserve, or possibly recapture a pre-existing order, rather than subvert an existing order; but the medieval moralities used much of the same dramaturgical vocabulary. In *The Castle of Perseverance*, the holy (good) characters are ceremonial, dignified, talky, and above all, stationary; they throw rose petals and platitudes when the titular (symbolic) castle is attacked. The aggressors (devils, representational sinners, and abstracted temptations) run around the playing spaces, interacting with the audience and each other. While the pageantry and ceremony was designed to instruct the faithful and prepare them for the afterlife, medieval drama was not without serious, even subversive political commentary. For example, *Everyman* includes a bitter invective against sinful priests who mislead the faithful. In the well-known “Second Shepherd’s Play” of the *Wakefield Cycle*, three shepherds of Bethlehem criticize the behavior of the absentee landlords of medieval England. In the same play, the thief Mak hides a sheep in a cradle; the action sets up some predictable comedy involving the ugliness of the “baby,” but at the same time the scene emphasizes Mak’s understandable desire to provide for his family. While the antics of Mak were no doubt crowd-pleasers, the medieval morality is a comedy, and the subversive forces are carefully contained – either through punishment or conversion – so that the audience identifies with the comforting social stasis represented by the “good” characters. The shepherds teach the audience a lesson about mercy when they decline to call in the authorities – instead, they merely toss Mak in a sheet and let him go. Such a commonplace morality lesson would not make an ideal subject for a stained-glass window; neverthe-
less, after the comic climax, the traditional angels deliver their message to these merciful shepherds, and the adoration of the Christ child sanctifies the denouement.

In a post-Christian society, political iconography replaces the religious, but the communal icons still serve the same dramatic purpose. George M. Cohan puts it far more cynically: "Many a bum show has been saved by the flag." Marxist drama has its own iconography, as presented in Waiting for Lefty (a copy of the Communist Manifesto and the Communist salute, as well as the metatheatrical invocation of a labor hall setting), but the force of Odets's arguments are diluted by his desire to retain the good will of his audience. Just as Mak felt that his poverty justified his theft, and his fellow shepherds to some extent legitimized his actions (by not turning him in), Waiting for Lefty taps and legitimizes the domestic frustration felt by the lower classes. Technology in the hands of capitalists is unquestionably evil (much as technology itself was in the early experimental drama), but the real enemies are ignorance, complacency and passivity; the unenlightened workers who maintain the status quo are really slaves who strengthen and legitimize the actions of their oppressors. Using ordinary domestic concerns to establish an emotional toehold, the play applies value statements to mechanistic culture to leverage a much greater social message about political change — much as the Wakefield author presented a profane family (Max, his wife, and the sheep) to comment upon the sacred one. Ultimately, Waiting for Lefty is more successful in its comments upon the profane family (and more specifically, the connection between manliness and economic productivity) than it is in its message about the ideal human community (the worker's government).

The specific argument of the play, that New York cabbies should strike, is not nearly as important to the play's lasting critical value as is Odets's representation of the
moment of each central character's social enlightenment. The sudden conversions, mass chant, and personal testimony have much in common with the atmosphere of a religious tent meeting. The “highly gratifying results” (53) which Odets promises to those who effectively use Fatt’s static menace during the flashbacks, together with contributions from the chorus and from “plants” in the auditorium, ritualizes the union hall. The jagged edges of theatrical conventions are earnest if not subtle; the play is admirable for the zeal and artistic economy of its political appeal. The message itself is straightforward and unremarkable: Capitalism, caricatured in the cigar-chomping insolence of Harry Fatt, has infiltrated the unions, which are weak because the workers are complacent. Activism secures a victory for labor (and perhaps somewhere down the road, revolution), and presents the Marxist argument as inevitable and universal. The play contrasts the plight of selected workers against the domestic life idealized in the picket-fence American Dream — a semi-urbanized form of Jeffersonian agrarianism, valuing independence, leisure, and at least some measure of material prosperity.

Within several of the flashbacks, the emotional power of domestic scenes and family obligations is the chief force which propels the protagonists towards Marxist notions; conversely, the framing scenes regularly employ that same domestic imagery to ridicule bourgeois tendencies in the uncommitted public. The stage directions identify the corrupt Fatt as “hot” during his opening speech, but, lest his passion be mistaken for admirable conviction, Odets carefully explains Fatt is “not too hot.” By contrast, the thematically-integrated word play and witty ripostes of the socialist mouthpieces establish them as much more attractive characters. For example, Agate, his shirt torn by thugs, invokes the image of people too poor to wear shirts at all, and suggests that the powerful
want to turn the poor into a nudist colony. Similarly, Edna uses word-play to indict Joe’s economic and moral failure, invoking an image of mechanical helplessness: “we’re stalled like a flivver in the snow” (10). When the post-conversion Joe contends that the downtrodden workers are not red and yellow, but rather black and blue, he foregrounds one of the play’s most notable characteristics: the Marxist raisonneurs all skirt the stigma of the label “red,” while the play urges the audience to embrace a broad array of ideological connections lurking beneath the label. For example, Edna claims she doesn’t know what the word “red” means, but her domestic troubles spur her to articulate a well-digested, comprehensive Marxist labor theory. Her conviction comes from common sense and suffering, rather than informed study and intellectual analysis; the dialogue suggests she improvises her words on the spot. In a similar manner, Agate refers to Communists in the third person – thus distancing himself from the stigma associated with the label – while at the same time invoking a powerful Communist icon: “…if we’re reds because we wanna strike, then we take over their salute, too! Know how they do it? Makes Communist Salute. What is it? An uppercut!” (50) Odets here locates Agate’s conviction in the cornered animal’s instinctive fight reflex, rather than a deliberate, willing acceptance of revolutionary political thought.

Since the framing action takes place at a union meeting, on one level the setting is realistic. Characters who directly address the audience and actors planted among the spectators shatter the fourth wall, and make the spectators into participants. With a few words of dialogue and a lighting change, the space framed by the half-circle of union representatives becomes Joe and Edna’s bare apartment. Rather than interrupt the action for a scene change, Odets explains the bareness of the stage by having Edna announce that
all the furniture has been repossessed. The later scenes do call for some presumably realistic props (for example, Sid puts a record on a “small portable phonograph” and leads Florrie to a “couch”, while Dr. Barnes uses a telephone, and the medical intern scene involves a telephone, a bar and laboratory equipment), but for the first episode, the bareness of the set-within-a-set allows for a nearly instantaneous transition. The sparseness of the apartment underscores Joe’s failure as a provider, and hence, as a man; yet at the same time, that emptiness universalizes and ritualizing the playing space. Visible through all the episodes is the chorus of union representatives, who comment upon the action. Meanwhile, Fatt’s immobile presence is vital to the play’s emotional power – in his own bulky, static person, he symbolizes the well-fortified stronghold that must be stormed.

The action of the play promotes unionism as a means to attaining the bourgeois American Dream. Odets confidently refers to domestic prosperity as a reliable index to social health. In fact, the play depends fully upon the fact that the audience values the domestic order threatened by the economic injustices the play depicts. Mendelsohn describes Odets as rejecting the family in his early plays but gradually growing to embrace it, especially in The Country Girl (1951) and The Flowering Peach (1954). Scanlan, citing Hennie’s decision to leave and Ralph’s decision to remain with the family in Awake and Sing! (1935), prefers to see “a mix of two contrary attitudes – yearning and rejection” throughout Odets’s career (186). Nevertheless, in Waiting for Lefty, the various episodes advance the pro-Marxist argument by referring directly to the protagonist’s family obligations (except for one, which focuses instead on anti-Semitism). In the later scenes, the images of family life become less sentimental and more harsh. In those later scenes,
the stenographer describes the starving actor as "[r]ipated in" by marriage (21), and a man in the audience exposes his own brother as an anti-union spy. Despite these depictions of rebellion against the family, the essentially bucolic source of the workers' rage remains unchallenged. As such, the play openly blames Capitalism for destroying the family; somewhat disingenuously, Odets does not however refer to the Communist Manifesto's argument that the family is an inefficient and outmoded economic institution. Odets faces the same risk Upton Sinclair encountered when he used gruesome details of the unsanitary meat-packing industry in order to advance the cause of Socialism: his novel The Jungle (1906) indeed shocked the public, but instead of demanding a revolution, American consumers were satisfied with legislating improvements in the quality of the meat products. In a similar way, Waiting for Lefty's critique of labor policies, intended to recruit men away from their families and into a more meaningful organization (that is, the labor union), appears instead to advocate unionism as a pragmatic, self-contained method for reducing domestic stress.

By adapting his Socialist message to meet the needs of the general, non-revolutionary working man, Odets weakens the message. For example, Edna's threat to leave is not directly motivated by her husband's weak ideology; in fact she offers no reason to prefer her old boyfriend, except the inference that he has a better income. While she claims ignorance of what it means to be "red," her indictment of Joe seems to stem from Marx's assumptions about the alienated laborer, who does not benefit from his own efforts as a wage slave.

The result, therefore, is that the human being (the laborer) does not feel himself to be free except in his animal functions: eating, drink-
ing, and reproducing, at his best in his dwelling or in his clothing, etc., and in his human functions he is no more than an animal. The animal becomes human and the human becomes animal. ("The Estrangement of Labor" Sect. XXII)

While standing in what the dialogue tells us to be a bare apartment, Joe seems to want to use sex to help him accept the harsh economic reality. His actions are consistent with those of Marx’s estranged laborer, whose empowerment is limited to indulgence in his animal nature. As an enlightened (if home-grown) Socialist, Edna sacrifices marital intimacy; at the same time, however, she uses Joe’s love (or at least his desire for sex) in order to motivate his labor action. If the job makes the man, it follows that a better job makes a better man. By extension, then, Fatt, who presumably makes the best living in the union hall, should be the best man out of all of them. Such a conclusion runs against the play’s overall pro-labor message. Nevertheless, Edna, arguing that Joe’s lack of conviction decreases his value to her, threatens to negotiate a better deal for herself on the free market. Odets is content to illustrate narrowly pragmatic, rather than selflessly ideological, reasons for adopting socialism; however, due to their specificity, these reasons are only likely to influence a workman whose wife has a well-off socialist lover. At this point in the text, the stage directions specify the supporting actions of the chorus, who comment on the validity of Edna’s position. While Odets suggests that the chorus be used in this manner throughout the play, he specifies their actions only at this point in the text. Their scripted support of Edna’s positions emphasizes how strongly the overall message of the play relies upon the audience’s proper interpretation of her message. Joe’s counteroffer (his promise to join the union) is motivated not by any change in his own politi-
cal conviction, but rather by his desire to preserve a favorable domestic arrangement. When Joe tries to distract his wife by charming her, she replies: "Do it in the movies, Joe -- they pay Clark Gable big money for it" (9). Edna here suggests that romance is capital that compounds only in Hollywood.

The other explicitly domestic scene shows a couple dissolving their courtship due to economic hardship. Irv wants to keep his sister's income under his own roof; this is why he disapproves of her relationship with Sid, not out of any ideological objection. Sid does not want the responsibility of having to support Florrie's family as well as his own. Just as Edna's instinct for self-preservation made her willing to leave Joe, Irv is willing to sacrifice his sister's happiness in order to fulfill his own duty as a breadwinner. The combined effect of these two domestic scenes is an argument that membership in a union will help the individual worker to ensure that his own family unit prospers, and so assure him of a comfortable place in bourgeois society. In each of these domestic scenes, the agitator claims that domestic problems and the economic concerns of the outside world are closely related; in each scene, the unenlightened protagonist insists the two areas are separate. Each domestic scene contains the following brief interchange: "Don't change the subject [i.e., from domestic issues to economic ones]," "This is the subject" (15, and again on 25). Nevertheless, the action of the later episodes clearly separate the issues, in order to steer the audience away from complacency towards Marxist enlightenment. Subtle but significant efforts to undermine the icon of the family increase in intensity as the climax approaches, suggesting that Odets knew he had to dethrone the family in order to prepare for the finale, even at the risk of alienating those family men he needed to recruit.
The lab assistant’s rejection of a well-paying job making poison gas means that he must sacrifice the middle-class comfort of his present family. Odets is gradually conditioning the audience to accept the premise that one’s obligations extend beyond the nuclear family, but the technician is, at this point, only being true to the memory of his own past family—a mother, brother and cousins, all savaged by war. But equally important is the lab assistant’s rejection of Hollywood luxury (akin to Edna’s rejection of Hollywood romance). Although the military industrialist rhapsodizes about Hollywood’s power to shape the desires of “Mrs. Consumer,” he admits its actual effect on productivity is minimal. Odets here offers a brief but insightful comment on the tremendous, and here-tofore underexamined, power of industrial design. In 1934, theatre designer Lee Simonson collaborated with Raymond Loewy in the creation of an idealized “mock-up of an industrial designer’s office” as part of the 13th “Contemporary American Industrial Art Exhibit.” Standing in the display, which resembled a hospital operating room, with white walls and tubular metal furniture, Loewy “seemed a skilled technician who could with a few pen strokes restore a corporation’s economic health” (Meilke 84). The lab assistant rejects a similarly lavish office, the likes of which he had never seen “outside the movies” (17). The dialogue does not describe it in any detail, and the production would certainly not have superimposed such a set onto the union hall stage, but Odets confidently assumes that the audience already had sufficient exposure to the notion of a high-tech modern workspace, such that he could fix it firmly in their minds with only a reference to the movies.

Sid and Florrie further articulate Hollywood’s myth-making power when they play-act a romantic scene “like in the movies” (25), during which Sid puts his thumb to
his nose and cranks his other hand to indicate a movie camera. The image of Sid making a “nose camera”, which involves “thumbing his nose” with one hand and cranking with the other – together with maudlin dancing (a sentimental slow dance and a soft-shoe “Pat Rooney imitation”) links domestic bliss to pathetic, commercially-produced illusions. Is the attack on Hollywood idealism an indictment of the manipulative and sentimental trappings of escapism? Yes, but only because Odets sees Hollywood as part of the myth supporting a corrupt value system.11 In his production notes, Odets calls attention to the “emotional, political, musical” possibilities of the chorus, advising that “music... is very valuable in emotionally stirring an audience.”(54) The unemployed actor recalls the advice his father gave him: “Know what buttons to push... and you’ll go far” (37). In order to convey his social message, Odets pushes the same buttons that Hollywood pushes.

The archetypal power of the idea of prosperous home and hearth is another way of reaching the (as yet) uncommitted blue-collar members of his audience.

Odets’s Marxism is not purely pragmatic, then, since in the theatre he will use elements of fantasy to promote his cause. Odets may have included the actor episode as an in-joke for the cast members and theatre professionals who would see the show. The character’s apparent unfamiliarity with the term “casting couch” marks him either as impossibly naïve or absurdly awkward in the presence of the stenographer. Even after his encounter with the enlightened stenographer, he shows little sign of ideological comprehension or understanding in his scene. Unlike the doctor and the lab assistant, he does

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11 John Vassos (the co-creator of Contempo and Ultimo) criticized the movie industry “for providing ‘every demi-monde and every kept woman’ in films ‘with a modern interior,’ while ‘all the virtuous girls were surrounded with Colonial homes’” (Meilke 170).
not announce his plan to give up his profession; yet neither does he announce the intention to start up an agit-prop group. The theatre producer’s stenographer poses a larger critical question. Her wit and ideological confidence make her character instantly attractive, but her initial abruptness (even rudeness) toward the starving actor and the apparently sentimental roots of her eccentric kindness undercut her convictions. Ultimately, the play makes no effort to explain the domestic and social issues that would cause such an articulate and dogmatically confident woman to waste her time taking dictation from a cartoon Capitalist. The boss’s plan to castrate his Russian Wolfhound offers more proletarian humor to enliven the scene, but in this male-dominated play, the stenographer might have been a triumphant Saint Joan of the Stockyards or Major Barbara; yet her function is limited to delivering her speeches and promoting sales of the Communist Manifesto. Nevertheless, the feminine gender of the most dogmatically sound characters (Edna and stenographer) heaps further shame upon the naïve resistance of the men.

The last two episodes, which involve anti-Semitism and Agate’s final speech, contain only negative images of the family. Beyond Dr. Benjamin’s identification of himself as a Jew, and therefore part of an extended tribe, the concept of the family appears only in the nepotism with which a senator favors his incompetent nephew. Following the castration of the Russian Wolfhound and the botched hysterectomy, Agate’s concluding speech presents additional images that critique or belittle family relationships. He labels the uncommitted cab drivers “ladies,” and uses a curious domestic reference to justify his right to speak: “maybe I fell outta the cradle when I was a kid and ain’t been right since” (49). Sneering at the paternal pride of the elite (“Poppa’s got a daughter she’s gotta get her picture in the papers.”), he dismisses criticisms against communists
with yet another domestic image: “That’s a new one for the kids -- the reds is bogeymen!” (51) Agate’s speech suggests that only the uncommitted “ladies” and scared children are swayed by Capitalist counter-arguments and bourgeois values. Further, to place the family above the good of the proletariat is unmanly – a viewpoint significantly evolved from that of the early domestic episodes, which heap shame upon the male who cannot play the role of the traditional breadwinner.

As already noted, Odets’s intellectual commitment to Socialism was limited; yet, theatrically speaking, Waiting for Lefty is a machine designed to atomize proletarian souls – separating them from their familial bonds, and refining them into the fuel for political action. The taxi drivers, incited to action by the news of Lefty’s murder, resist an unjust system, and so perhaps they escape the uncomprehending brutishness which blinds Yank to his fate; perhaps they overcome the fundamental nullity which dooms Zero to oblivion. In order to regain their souls from an unjust mechanized society, they must feed those souls into the great labor engine; fueled by their membership, each successive “strike” is the force of a piston that drives the revolution. Odets presents one vision of a mechanized world that could be hospitable to the human soul.

The Fragile Balance of Technological Regionalism in Hall-Rogers’s Altars of Steel

Hallie Flanagan credits the Atlanta production of Altars of Steel (1937) with establishing the Federal Theatre Project in the south. Contemporary commentators agreed that the production – featuring a huge gear-shaped stage platform, the sound of machinery running constantly in the background, and a proscenium fitted with great iron doors instead of curtains – was outstanding, but the play’s qualified support for industrialism
created some controversy. The staging, the impassioned radical speeches, and the cartoon Capitalist recall the common devices of proletarian drama, but the play’s dominant message is regional pride: “If those Yankee iron masters can make steel out of Southern ore, so can I. And by God, I’m going to do it!” (3.4). Fatherly industrialist John Worth must contend with two threats to the smooth operation of his steel mill: a dangerous radical agitator and an evil Northern industrialist. Whether praising the play as a paean to fading agrarian values, attacking it as the incendiary work of a malcontent, or welcoming it as an indictment of corporate greed, audiences and critics responded strongly. In Atlanta and later in Miami, “They praised the play. They blamed the play. They fought over the play” (Flanagan 89).

Under Worth’s guidance, the steel mill is filled with productive and happy workers. Invading this ordered society, Draper the agitator reviles the workers as slaves: “You’re not [skilled] — your machine is skilled; it produces, you’re just there to drop oil, or turn a screw all your days.” (1.4) Appropriating religious language, he presents his interpretation of the Capitalist’s creed: “I believe in STEEL, the Father Almighty, maker of millions in bonus, and in Jung, his only son, our chairman, who was conceived by wars and rumors of war, born of the blood of mankind; he suffered unto Herbert Hoover, was crucified in ’29.” (1.6) This passage parodies the Apostle’s Creed (“I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only son, our Lord. . .”), and its blasphemy shocks the on-stage workers as much as it probably shocked Bible-belt audiences. Nevertheless, Draper’s religious rhetoric makes his diatribes vibrant and effective — in his own mind, he is the would-be liberator of all the Mr. Zeroes of the world:
I'll be satisfied if I open the eyes of one poor deluded fool who
slaves his life away for a system which uses men to feed the ma-
chines for profits to the employer. . . . After a life-time of toil dis-
card him to die broken in body and spirit – a poverty stricken
wretch, the garbage of your machine age. (2.2)

Worth responds to Draper's attacks with kindness, on the grounds that "He's so young!"
... And he's a sick man – sick in his mind." (2.3) Since Worth's fatherly approach has
worked for him and for his community, he sees no reason to modernize. Draper too
harshly interprets Worth's weakness as a sign of complicity, yet he is right about Worth's
inability to resist the evils of Northern industrialism. In this respect, Draper has the
clearest and most accurate vision in the play, except perhaps for Jung, his Capitalist dop-
pelganger, who poses an entirely different threat. Jung is in every respect a cartoon Cap-
talist, further demonized by his Northern origin and his foreign name. In the tradition of
early Southern melodramas, he is the evil displacer of the sympathetic but absent master.
By paying his men in "clacker" redeemable only at company stores, by preferring to buy
machines rather than hire men, and by disbanding the safety department in the name of
economy, Jung fulfills Draper's direst predictions. Although not a dramatically interest-
ing character, the position he represents is vital important to the play's dynamic: his ice
complements Draper's fire. In the middle is Worth.

Seeking what is good for family and community, Worth considers his workmen
"as much a part of the company as myself" (4.6). As God sends Christ to take on human
form, so Worth sends his son Jack to take on the form of a worker. Just as Satan tries to
use Christ’s human weaknesses against him, so Jung uses Jack’s ambition and impatience to lure him to fame and fortune in New York. A minor character, Jack is actually more of a prodigal son than a Christ figure, but his victimization casts Jung in an appropriately Satanic light. The play is implicitly critical of the federal government as well – it gives no indication that a legal challenge to Jung’s shady seizure of the mill would have made any difference; but Worth’s regionalist pledge “to work from within to protect ourselves and the community” (4.4) proves ineffective as well. The pledge is, nevertheless, sincere – motivated by his short-sighted belief that the region will benefit from Jung’s infusion of money.

Despite his ultimate ineffectiveness, Worth watches out for the welfare of his employees; the men are likewise “right fond of the old man” (1.5), at least initially. Enticed by the steady work and expansion offered by Jung, however, the fickle men sing: “I don’t give a damn who the boss may be, / So long as he does the right thing by me” (8.1). Eventually Worth declares that “[t]here comes a time when I cease being an industrialist and begin to be a citizen” (11.3), and resigns; a stand which seems too little and too late since his executives have already done so in order to protest Jung’s actions. Although the play does present the anguish of the workers and their families, the central victim is clearly Worth; one of the two adversaries claims his livelihood, and the other claims his life. He and the other (“good”) local characters may be said to populate an undeveloped regional melodrama, which has been grafted on top of a traditional proletarian formula.

While the staging and production values were almost universally praised, the dialogue for Worth and his executives is frequently wooden, as when someone observes:

\[12\] In German, the word is jung – the name of the play’s other villain.
"What damn fools these big corporations are. Don’t they know their methods will eventually destroy them?" (4.1) Worth’s trite climactic speech before an angry proletarian mob is little better: “Why destroy everything we have in common? Listen to reason, men! Stop this bloodshed!” (14.5) According to the stage directions, Worth’s trite speech must be sufficient to leave both a squad of armed guards and a mob of rioters “spellbound,” yet there is little in those lines to impress a critical reader. Draper’s fiery rhetoric, on the other hand, is theatrically effective, as has been noted above. Also notable are several instances of proletarian wit in the factory riot scenes: one grieving widow, faced with the threat of tear gas, retorts: “Tear gas, is it? Do you think it’d have any effect on these eyes? They’ve done cried themselves out” (15.1).

Studies of the Federal Theatre Project frequently reproduce photographs of the ambitious mechanistic set. Its towering gear-shaped platform is an expressionistic element that, in the Twenties, or perhaps in a Living Newspaper production, might invite a critique of the ominous power held by management; however, like the titular figure of the altar, Altars of Steel celebrates the power of technology, and sounds notes of alarm only when Jung or Draper threaten the status quo. The dramatic function of the “Inspection Choreography” (a pantomime tour of the factory shortly after Jung’s arrival) is not described in detail in the script, but its function is almost certainly to showcase the harmonious workings of the factory under Worth’s paternal stewardship. The huge gear-shaped altar is a monument to the tremendous power the South stands to lose when Jung seizes the steel mill. Despite Jung’s attack, that altar remains an image of strength, and possibly even comfort – a refuge against Communism on the one hand and Northern aggression on the other. Yet, because the sympathetic characters are so static, the message of the radi-
cal drifter appears to be more central to the play's dramatic effect. As noted above, the "good" characters in medieval religious drama are typically stately and confident, although precisely these qualities make them appear stiff and uninteresting to modern tastes. The "bad" characters, by contrast, are full of subversive theatrical action. Perhaps influenced by the many effective proletarian staging elements, Goldstein mistakenly identifies *Altars of Steel* as a pro-labor play (*The Political Stage* 254), even though any sensible analysis of the action will note that the labor activist murders the protagonist. Draper is of course not the only villain; the names "Draper" and "Jung" are complementary, suggesting both literal and psychological concealment; in fact, both villains carry concealed guns. Meanwhile, the "Worth" of the protagonist endures, despite his financial ruin and his death. The allegorical quality of the names, effective spectacle, and obvious religious subtext, further align the effectiveness of the play with the achievements of medieval morality plays.

The only substantial scholarly treatment of *Altars of Steel* so far examines it as one of four representative labor plays. While questioning its literary merit, Susan Duffy praises *Altars* as a spectacle of technological and regional pride: "Technology, the play argues, is safe in the hands of southern industrialists who understand and value the land and its people" (106). She notes that, shortly before the play was submitted to the FTP office, Alabama newspaper editor John Temple Graves implored an assembly of regional Federal Theatre officials to increase awareness of 1) the evils of absentee ownership, 2) the necessity for developing and assimilating the Negro, and 3) the growing Southern interest in steel. A few weeks later, the script, credited to Thomas Hall-Rogers, was already at FTP headquarters in New York – an occurrence which Duffy is unwilling to
dismiss as coincidence. Reading between the lines of Flanagan’s brief account of the play’s history, Duffy entertains the theory that Graves himself had already written (or had at least read) the very play he was describing to the FTP officials. In truth, however, Al-tars only satisfies two of the three criteria Graves mentions: it is clearly about absentee ownership and Southern steel, but Duffy has to stretch to make the play address race relations. The play does present workers of diverse ethnic backgrounds uniting against injustice, but the Alabama editor had specified “the Negro.” The few scenes featuring black workers are little more than exposition and comic relief, and their specific racial identity is unimportant to the play’s message. Duffy attempts to bolster the play’s connection to Graves by reporting her own unsuccessful effort to search public records for information about the playwright, to whom she refers as “Rogers”; however, in FTP records the name is consistently “Hall-Rogers.” While this apparent discrepancy may or may not explain her lack of results, the Northern newspapers did identify the name as a pseudonym, in the wake of a minor controversy involving allegations that the FTP was deliberately shielding the identity of a dangerous and cowardly radical (83).

Records from the Broadway offices of the Project’s playreading department (the purpose of which was to solicit and review proposals for FTP-sponsored works) suggest that the Northern bias of FTP’s staff members led some first to dismiss the play, and then later to ridicule its achievements. Playreader Louis Solomon calls it “Too naive to merit consideration,” while John Rimassa judges it “Very bad! This play isn’t geared for emotional or character appeal.” M. Portner[?] suggests that “an intelligent director might

13 The name “Thomas Hall-Rogers” is clearly given on the title page of the script, in the FTP playreader reports, in Flanagan’s discussion of the play in Arena, and else-
prune it a bit and make a halfway decent production out of it.” John Wexley admits in principle that “the situation of the well-meaning employer is intensely interesting,” but charges that “it is comparatively a minor problem and one that should be subordinated to the major one.” His report predicts that “Federal Theatre audiences would find the play, in its present state, very uninteresting and in many places ludicrously unreal.” Wexley, whose contemporary labor play Steel (1937) was well-received by labor-Left audiences,\(^{14}\) attacks Altars of Steel for failing to adhere to “common knowledge of contemporary actualities in the steel industry,” which suggests that at least some of Wexley’s criticism may have been defending his own artistic depiction of a similar setting. Hiram Metherwell gathered clippings from a glowing Atlanta review, and routed copies to “all who enjoy a good laugh.”

Wexley suggests that the play should instead have been a novel, yet Francis Bosworth (with perhaps a trace of condescension) argues that “the staging makes it worth doing,” and that it “may be easily accepted in the South as it stands.” Looking back, FTP Director Flanagan rejects the notion that the play succeeds simply because of its staging. She cites as evidence a nearly contemporary Atlanta production of The Adding Machine, which, although superbly produced, failed to attract audiences -- because, in her analysis, its producers simply transplanted the Theatre Guild production to Atlanta, without taking the time to get to know the special interests of the region (90-91). Here, she argues strongly against the kind of bias evident in the playreaders’ responses to Altars of Steel.

where in the FTP archives.

\(^{14}\) Malcolm Goldstein calls Steel “the most militant labor-management play of the early Thirties” (135).
Recognizing that regional theatregoers reflect regional tastes, Flanagan rejoiced in the notion that some of the plays’ detractors were Northern liberals. A public debate which accused a Federal Theatre presentation of being too conservative would help deflate allegations that the project was merely a vehicle for Communist agitation.

The agrarian content in *Altars of Steel*, delivered via experimental, mechanized staging techniques, provides a strong regional spin on the anti-industrial, anti-urban message of *The Adding Machine*. While some of the Southern play’s melodramatic elements (such as idealized and vilified characters, spectacle, and a strong moral argument) are staples of proletarian theatre, Draper seems as much a response to Mr. Zero as he is a spokesman for labor. Unlike *The Adding Machine*, however, *Altars* does not concern itself directly with the isolated individual, but rather with the community. That community is not completely egalitarian, for Worth’s nepotism clearly privileges Jack. Worth has no wife to mourn him, and Jack has no mother to comfort him – but the agrarian sense of family relationship extends through the workers and includes the very machines themselves. The strongest feminine presence in the play is, in a possible allusion to *Dynamo*, furnace Number Four, whom the workers feed and nurture, and whom the executives try to protect. Jung’s appropriation of the plant violates this image of domestic harmony, a disruption which the laborers interpret sexually: “Mr. Jung’s old hussy is just as greedy as when she belonged to Old Man Worth” (8.2-3). The play analyzes the destruction (by Jung and Draper) of a civilized industry depending upon paternalistic local management and filial (non-unionized) labor. Jack returns from New York with his agrarian sensibilities intact: “I’m sorry you had to resign, Dad. . . . Say! Let’s go fishing and forget it” (12.3). An educated young man who has seen only disappointment in the
big city, Jack advocates a more relaxed, even selfish response to the local political pressures, contrasted with Worth's enlightened interest in the community.

While praising Worth's humanity, and the humane industrial community he initially built, the play indicts his lack of action when Northern aggression backs him into a corner. That weakness has at its source the mollifying regional sense of inferiority that the Agrarians wished to challenge. Hall-Rogers argues that the South must fight Northern industrialization, not by embracing anti-technological Agrarianism, but rather by ensuring that the South remains in control of the means of production — not only the natural resources to be mined and the machines to process them, but also the workers who run the machines, and the capable, morally just men who pay their wages. Within the contexts of a regionally-biased but otherwise politically moderate play, Draper is a rhetorically effective agitator, whose fiery radicalism is a symbiosis of Luddism and anarchism; however, Duffy appears unwilling to accept him as the dangerous threat the script requires him to be. Duffy refers to Draper's pamphlets as "union literature" and implies that he has been done an injustice when he is "quickly labeled a 'communist'" for carrying it (87). Yet the "Hand Property Plot" filed along with script in the FTP records specifies "bundle of papers (communist literature) for Draper." Further, they are titled "WORKERS, UNITE, FIGHT," and Draper conceals them in his jacket along with a gun. These details should be sufficient to establish that his motives do in fact go far beyond simple reform. While Draper never applies any labels to himself, his apocalyptic rhetoric and his final actions are clearly those of a revolutionary — especially when he incites the mob at the factory gates, crying: "tear down the walls of capitalism and march in here a united band of comrades" (15.3). The issue is not, as Duffy argues, that the play
associates the unions with violence, but rather that the play associates unions with communism. By focusing too strongly on Draper’s voice, Duffy skewes the central message of the play and the meaning of his death. She even argues that “Draper’s role is that of a martyr” (92). Glossing over the fact that in the end Draper actually kills Worth, she prefers to see the two men on the same side, with Worth “a benefactor who upholds the very values Draper sees being eroded in modern business practices” (87). As a drifter, a newcomer, an agitator, and eventually a murderer, Draper is not a sympathetic character—despite Duffy’s claim that “[h]is perceptions parallel that of the audience” (92).

Worth may be at fault for dismissing Draper’s warnings too quickly, at great cost to himself; but in the final analysis Atlanta audiences would certainly have preferred the protagonist’s sanguine humanity to Draper’s choleric activism. To Hall-Rogers, industrialism is bad when it is controlled by Northern greed; it is good when it is guided by regional pride. Just as Waiting for Lefty presents a possible vision of a mechanistic society that benefits the soul, provided that the workers control the machinery, Altars of Steel sympathetically presents the collapse of Worth’s industrial heritage, while celebrating his humanity.

**Testing the Moral Excellence of Capitalism in Luce’s O! Pyramids.**

In a decade when most playwrights who dealt with the conflict between labor and management were interested less in inciting intelligent debate than in launching polemics against Capitalists, Clare Booth Luce turned the tables. In O, Pyramids! (1933), the Capitalist’s office is “modern, dignified, and efficient... cheerful and sane” (1.2), and the chief spokesman for the working class is a Falstaffian loafer. Luce is sympathetic but
satirical, “attacking (while at the same time admiring) images of America’s ruling class as being, on the one hand, uselessly preoccupied with a self-destructive cleverness and, on the other hand, subject to a pretended innocence” (Fearnow, *American Stage* 81). The unpublished and (to my knowledge) unproduced script, written under the pseudonym “John Grace,” dramatizes a labor dispute sparked when a noted Capitalist commissions a notoriously radical artist to paint a mural for one of his buildings. Luce constructs her own dramatic narrative, recasting key elements of a real-life struggle between industrialist Nelson Rockefeller and artist Diego Rivera.

In 1932, Rockefeller sought a mural to grace the lobby of the RCA building in Radio City; the theme was to be “Man at the Crossroads Looking with Hope and High Vision to the Choosing of a New and Better Future.” He invited Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso and Diego Rivera to enter into a competition for the commission; only Rivera accepted, submitting a sketch for a sprawling display that included, in one small section, an unobtrusive figure joining the hands of a worker, a peasant, and a soldier. After Rivera actually began the mural in early 1933, he provided this unifying leader with the face of Lenin. To mollify the scandalized Rockefeller, Rivera offered to add a new vignette celebrating Lincoln and other heroes of the Emancipation, but as for removing Lenin, he wrote that “rather than mutilate the conception, I should prefer the physical destruction of the conception in its entirety” (326). Rockefeller’s patronage of what many considered to be communist propaganda was, to say the least, embarrassing; his decision to take Rivera’s rejection literally, paying him off and destroying the unfinished work was, again to say the least, controversial (see Wolfe 324-334).
Rivera himself was no stranger to scandal; in fact, he had come to New York fresh from causing one at the Detroit Institute of Art. Instead of providing the industrial *nouveau-riche* of Detroit with glamorous work to increase the city’s cultural cachet, Rivera produced multiple panels celebrating “only working-men and women, engineers, chemists; even Edsel Ford, donor of the fresco, appears in it only to be put at work on the design of an automobile” (Wolfe 311). To a witty cultural observer like Luce, the spectacle was ripe for satire. In a rather startling twist on the polemical *anagnorisis* of typical labor plays, Boomer is a heroic capitalist who, at the climactic moment, rebels against the falsehood and injustice of the New Deal, and especially the National Recovery Administration (NRA), whose price-setting and wage-control regulations force Boomer to lay off a few hundred skilled workers and hire them back at minimum wage. “NRA or no NRA, unions or no unions, government or no government, depression or recovery, I’m going to build trucks and make money out of this lousy country yet” (3.2.10).

Although off-stage agitators reportedly rile the workers, we never actually hear their speeches; in fact, the play reveals Boomer’s fatal flaw to be his willingness to develop a social conscience, manifested in his foolish efforts to purchase the men’s loyalty by flattering them with his donation of a labor-themed meeting hall. When the dispute escalates, threatening the jobs of the thousands of workers in the originally happy minority – Luce presents a “fireside chat” radio address in Boomer’s living room, during which the president’s voice testifies to “faith and belief in the fairmindedness of the American people,” even as explosions sound in the distance and a rock flies through the window (3.1.18). Within Luce’s scheme, both labor and management are to blame for allowing Roosevelt’s economic reforms to drive them into self-destructive opposition. Along the
way, she also lampoons the cultural pretensions of the provincial elite, chastises the herd mentality of the proletariat, and ponders the fate of the younger generation, standing, as it were, “at the crossroads.”

Luce, whose deep-cutting satire The Women (1936) ran for 657 performances on Broadway and secured her a reputation as a pioneering feminist social critic, launched her literary career (so the story goes) by planting herself at an empty desk in the office of Vanity Fair, and churning out witty photo captions. Before long, the pay envelopes started arriving. She developed professional and social connections that brought her into close contact with the Roosevelt administration, so that she called herself the “scullery maid in his kitchen cabinet” (Sheed 65). She owes much of her theatrical successes to her wisecracking dialogue and her fondness for skewering the idle rich, but she considered many of her plays to have deeper messages. Like many who initially welcomed FDR to the White House, she soon compared his sweeping government reforms to the fascist policies being enforced across the Atlantic. Her Kiss the Boys Goodbye (1938) satirizes the national casting call for the role of Scarlett O'Hara, but her preface calls it a cautionary tale about how Fascism might charm its way into the United States. Her Margin for Error (1940) is on one level a clever but ordinary murder-mystery-satire, yet its central character and victim is an official of the American Nazi party. Current events made the play seem brilliantly relevant. Her attention to politics also provided her with ample material for O, Pyramids!, the idea for which germinated during her brief tenure on an NRA advisory panel (Shadegg 76). Driven in part by her disappointment with Roosevelt, and in part by her experience as a war correspondent (which convinced her that a powerful global presence was necessary to preserve the American people from the de-
struction and human misery she witnessed in Europe), she would eventually emerge as both a stately conservative and a staunch feminist.\(^{15}\) Although her political career overshadowed her literary one, in *O, Pyramids!* Luce celebrates industrial excellence in a society that she felt was being conditioned to mediocrity and failure.

According to Greenfield, the 1937 play *Tide Rising*, by George Brewer, is an attempt to "'balance the coverage' of labor disputes by contemporary dramatists who had been overwhelmingly left-wing and antibusiness in their biases" (79). In the introduction to that play, Brewer writes, "I know of no labor play yet written which treats the problem from a point of view sympathetic toward the noble industrialist victimized by unconscionable labor agitators and sit-down strikers, though that way is wide open for some ambitious playwright." While Luce's play is indeed all that Brewer seems to have requested, it is also a social satire. Primarily, it depicts an industrialist's awakened (but misguided) morality, and the labor crisis which helps him to put his social conscience comfortably back to sleep. An additional point of contention in *O, Pyramids!* is Boomer's kindness towards Pat Sullivan, the Falstaffian loafer who remains on the payroll only because he and Boomer were workmates years ago. Although he thinks himself noble for honoring an old promise of friendship and being "more in spirit with the times"

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\(^{15}\) Although her biographers regularly note her tendency to embellish her own life story, she, with her husband Henry Luce, presided over a media empire that included *Time* and *Life* magazines. She later served as a Republican congresswoman from Connecticut, ambassador to Italy under Eisenhower, and diplomatic envoy for Reagan. A darling of the intellectual right, she remained something of a maverick, who bristled whenever she felt victimized by male chauvinism – whether the perpetrator was Franklin D. Roosevelt or William F. Buckley. During the birth of modern feminism, she wrote "A Doll's House 1970," a one-act polemic, published in *Life*, in which a housewife serves her dim-witted, reactionary husband with a bill for ten years of domestic services and a reading list including Betty Freidan and Simone de Beauvoir.
than his less-charitable managers, Boomer eventually regrets his charitable actions, for they serve as another rallying cry for the agitators. The chief engineer, Horn, resigns as the workers start asserting themselves: "A man doesn’t know whether you are bossing the cattle out there, or whether they are bossing you." (1.25) Seeing the boss attacked on all sides, a loyal executive argues that “the President of the United States made [the situation] different, not Mr. Boomer here” (1.28).

Stating a position that closely resembles Andrew Carnegie’s definition of the “duty of the man of wealth,” Boomer describes himself and his fellow Capitalists as “custodians” who “charge a fair interest for handling and increasing, and eventually returning” the wealth of the community (1.20). Betraying a Quixotic industrial idealism, he swears that “I’d still build good trucks, if nobody wanted them” (1.34). Inspired by the national mood of self-sacrifice and solidarity, he uses his own private funds to build a social hall for his men, and, like the industrialists who in real life hired Diego Rivera, he hires a dashing nihilist named Dirk Holiday to paint murals depicting “The Engineering Genius of Man Through the Ages.” Optimistically assuming that his workers are capable, as employees, of developing the same personal attachment to the factory that he himself feels, yet prevented by the NRA from paying them the higher wages he feels a free market would support, Boomer hopes his sponsorship of cultural events and artifacts will inspire in the men the same work ethic that has made him a millionaire. Instead, agitators (whose speeches we do not hear directly) complain that “this big capitalist here... gives

16 Carnegie called it “the duty of the man of wealth... to consider all surplus revenues which come to him simply as trust funds, which he is called upon to administer... the man of wealth becoming the mere trustee and agent of his poorer brethren, bringing to their service his superior wisdom, experience, and ability to administer, doing for them
you twenty-thousand dollars worth of arty-pictures when you want an extra nickle [sic] to go to the movies.” Holiday, moreover, expresses no allegiances to anything but his own artistic vision; his mural insults both labor and capital, and Holiday himself bitterly attacks the workers for their unwillingness to do anything but “stuff your bellies and ease your loins, and grab a little sleep” (2.18-19). Despite the artist’s disdain, Sullivan rallies when he recognizes his own face as one of the abused slaves in the mural: “It’s my blood and bones and sweat that’s been cilin’ [selling] Boomer’s trucks these many years!” (2.20). In the parallel recognition scene in The Hairy Ape, Yank signals his symbolic rejection of his worker status by throwing his coal-shovel at Mildred; here, however, Sullivan throws a cake at Boomer, and then falls drunkenly on top of him, dislodging a keg of beer, which throws a pair of debaters into each other, eventually setting off a general riot. Far from being the inevitable and heroic class war foretold by Marx, then, the battle between labor and capital is here presented as a Rube Goldberg device – a preposterous construction of unrelated elements linked by random events. Boomer’s daughter Angela likens the disruption to an epic historical disaster (“The Field of the Cloth of Gold”\textsuperscript{17}) and describes “such a confusion of motives, with everybody pushing and shoving and rolling about, not sure of what they were mad about or why they hated everybody else” (2.24).

Playing Prince Hal to Sullivan’s Falstaff, Boomer eventually disowns his former friend: “I got out by my own brains to be his boss, he stayed in by his own drunken better than they would or could do for themselves” (90).

\textsuperscript{17} The Field of the Cloth of Gold, near Guisnes, was a lavish chivalric display of power attended by the French and English monarchs in 1520. Francis I humiliated Henry VIII in a wrestling match, preventing any chance of uniting the two countries against the threat of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V.
dumbness to be my hireling” (3.1.12). Wilder embeds a similar note of benevolent social Darwinism, when the Stage Manager replies to an audience member’s question about social injustice: “Well, we’re ready to listen to everybody’s suggestion as to how you can see that the diligent and sensible’ll rise to the top and the lazy and quarrelsome sink to the bottom. We’ll listen to anybody.” (31) Boomer has apparently listened to the wrong people. His anagnorisis occurs when he reclaims the power he had abdicated wrongly, in the name of social conscience. In this rejection of charity, we can once again detect signs of Carnegie’s philosophy: “He is the only true reformer who is as careful and as anxious not to aid the unworthy as he is to aid the worthy, and, perhaps even more so, for in almsgiving more injury is probably done by rewarding vice than by relieving virtue” (91). The play indicts Boomer for dallying in the world of society, and for patronizing Holiday when he should have instead been working to preserve his plant (and the livelihood of his employees) from agitators on the one side and from the federal government on the other. Far from glorifying the industrial nouveau-riche, Luce satirizes the cultural pretension of this provincial industry town by having Boomer practice a speech on his paternalistic industrial philosophy while his socialite wife interrupts with inane chatter about the seating chart. The hall (with mahogany doors, a billiard table, and shelves of books) is nominally for the workers, but only a handful are invited to the unveiling, and only as a conciliatory afterthought (although Luce may of course have been mindful of the cost of filling that scene with even more extras). She also pointedly critiques the easy reception FDR’s supporters receive in the media by showing provincial matrons billing and cooing over a fashionably liberal columnist – a pandering dandy significantly named “Crockman.” When social tension erupts, these society figures are the first to flee.
By wavering from his true calling (the pursuit of the economic prosperity implied by his name), and mistakenly placing the future of his company in the hands of charity, government policies, and radical artists, Boomer has erased the boundaries between individual conscience (which is called to be "diligent and sensible") and social conscience (as constructed and applied by the New Deal). Representing opposing forces which compete for Boomer’s attention, Holiday the radical artist and Horn the pragmatic engineer are like the good and bad angels of a medieval morality play. The two are also rivals for Angela’s affection, and developments within the love triangle mirror Boomer’s political attitudes. Luce fails to endow Horn with much of a personality, so the romance seems contrived; still he saves Boomer from Sullivan’s drunken attack, and his concern for the survival of the business is admirable within the context of the play. By contrast, even before he has any competition for her affection, Holiday berates Angela as provincial, demeans her intelligence, and disapproves of her decidedly un-radical desire to raise a family. Luce carefully constructs the dynamic of the play such that it is not the workers, but the ideological artist who represents the greatest threat. Luce does not need to present counter-arguments to all of Holiday’s Nietzschean arguments in dialogue; instead, a fussy economist named Whippletree knocks him cold with a single punch. Luce provides a more serious cautionary tale in the death of Feis, the antithesis of Odets’s Harry Fatt. Feis is a company union man who comes under the influence of agitators, thereby forcing Boomer’s hand. The riot leaves the pink-tinged labor leader dead, and the radical artist exposed as a solipsistic fool. Luce thereby identifies radicalism and agitation as false so-
lutions, and draws upon her talents for social critique blesses instead a more harmonious match between the ingénue and the engineer.

Although the play provides a unique perspective on the timely theme of labor-management tension, and although it provides moments of sharp dialogue and biting satire worthy of the author of *The Women* (1936), it failed to catch the interest of producers—perhaps because the NRA policies that had inspired Luce to draft her play in 1933 were soon found unconstitutional and discontinued. In 1937, she sent her play to George S. Kaufman, jotting on the title page a promise to “Leave out the NRA of course—the idea is still valid?” Kaufman, while admitting that “there’s a lot of good stuff in this,” concluded that there would not be “enough interest in the whole general scheme of it to make it worthwhile.” Whether he blamed the play’s Shavian talkiness, its conservative political stance, or simply its datedness, he saw no future in it, and his note trailed off with “So—”.

Operating with a liberal, rather than conservative, agenda, Odets employs a similar rhetorical twist when he invokes the form of Communist art and even the words of the Communist manifesto to argue for stronger labor unions. Instead of speaking for the working class, however, Luce indicts it, chiefly through the drunken antics of her stage Irishman, but also by contrasting its internal discord (by which the demands of a small number of elite workers threatens the jobs of the happy majority) with the solidarity of the executives, who back each other throughout the play. Yet Luce and Odets both seem to agree, on the surface, about the inefficacy of art. Luce’s laborers are too pragmatic to be swayed by Boomer’s intellectual and artistic bribery, yet too dense to be enraged by Holiday’s corresponding sneers. Odets’s actor gives up the stage for a role as a labor activist, and the other references to Hollywood glamour emphasize the tawdry and shallow
life that the average American lives under the tyranny of Capitalism. Like the fired Jewish professional and the pacifist scientist, the actor is drawn to the union hall by ideological forces that extend beyond a simple pay raise or better working conditions. By making the working class life into an intellectual choice, Odets attempts to legitimize the socialist ideology.

If Kaufmann had encouraged Luce to update her play, incorporating the changes to the political climate at home and abroad, perhaps she would have had to make Boomer a munitions maker, and make pacifism the chief obstacle to his success. Although war seemed remote when she wrote the play in 1933, and was hardly considered unavoidable when Kaufmann reviewed it in 1937, it was largely the war effort that resuscitated the global economy. Boomer’s creed of capitalism must therefore align him with the motto of Andrew Undershift in Major Barbara – both industrialists are ultimately “Unashamed” of their wealth, and of their roles in making their respective nations great. Cusins, the student of Greek who abandons his education to inherit Undershift’s business, notes of England that “We are the wickedest nation on earth; and our success is a moral horror” (303). In a similar vein, Boomer’s curtain line identifies social justice as “one luxury that rich and ambitious people cannot afford” (3.2.11). Holiday’s mural of “Engineering Genius of Man Throughout the Ages,” with its images of servitude and oppression, shocking and agitating as it is within the context of the play, turns out to be completely accurate. Confronted with the ultimate truth of his radical vision, Holiday is “really very dejected to be agreed with so thoroughly” (3.1.8). Here, Luce wields the Machiavellian vision of the play’s most radical character, in order to subvert the genre of the labor play. Had it ever been performed, O, Pyramids! would have been one of the few political plays
of the 1930s to celebrate, rather than censure, the free-market industrial values that made America a world power.
5. Balancing the Nuclear and the Greater Human Family:

The Skin of Our Teeth (1942) and All My Sons (1947)

With the arrival of the Forties, three trends in playwriting became clear. First, the debate surrounding Socialism disappears as a central issue. Certainly the demise of the Federal Theatre Project and the rise of Hollywood sharply reduced the number of new plays (experimental or otherwise) opening in New York each year. Even before war broke out in Europe, the perceived need for vigilance had a unifying effect on American culture, which in turn altered the content of the “serious” social message plays. The Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939 did little to legitimize the radical Left in the eyes of mainstream Americans, and the demand for soldiers, and for homefront workers to take their places, provided opportunities for millions of alienated working-class citizens, many of whom had previously dallied with Communism. The class issues that loomed so strongly in the drama of the Thirties seemed less pressing.

It is a good time to be writing because the audience is sick of the old formulations. It is no longer believed — and we may be thankful for it — that the poor are necessarily virtuous or the rich necessarily decayed. Nor is it believed that, as some writers would put it, the rich are necessarily not decayed and the poor necessarily the carriers of vulgarity. . . On the stage social rank tells next to nothing about the man any more. The decks are cleared. (Miller, “On Social Plays” 62)
Whether class issues had ever been as relevant to American drama as to its European counterparts might be a thesis in and of itself; however, social revolution seemed less attractive to the masses, and less likely to its would-be leaders.

Second, the family emerges as the community which “tells [something] about the man,” including how he handles technology. In a sense, the canonical plays of the Forties combine the Twenties’ interest in the drama of the individual, with the Thirties interest in meaningful group identity. The plays to be considered in this chapter reflect the nation’s interest in the nuclear family as a stabilizing social force, with a formidable power to include and exclude individuals. Both Thornton Wilder and Arthur Miller force the audience to confront the extremes of savagery and nobility which exist just beneath the civilized veneer of middle-class domesticity. The expressionism of Our Town (1938) transforms action which might otherwise have formed a simple sentimental tragedy, linking daily family life to the greater scheme of human events, ennobling and even sanctifying it, without glossing over its painful and bitter aspects. Michael L. Counts sees in the last act of The Skin of Our Teeth and one of two nested plots in All My Sons elements of the “homecomer play,” a dramatic sub-genre that deals with the soldier’s return to civilian life. Each drama centers upon a father-son conflict tied closely to a technological theme: in Wilder, the invention of the wheel leads to the showdown between Henry and Antrobus; in Miller, the family factory becomes the focal point for two father-son con-

\[18\] "The greatest and most successful drive to expand the audience beyond the small, compact class represented on Broadway was the WPA Federal Theater Project. Government-supported and aimed primarily at giving employment to actors and other theater people hit by the Depression, it also hoped to reclaim the audience the talkies had drawn away. . . . When WPA died, the threat of the masses entering the theater receded.” (Miller, "Broadway, From O'Neill to Now" 349)
frontations (one via a suicide letter, and the other face-to-face). Antrobus overcomes his distaste for and despair over his imperfect family in order to save it from ice; he later overcomes his lust for another woman to save his family from flood; and he ultimately overcomes his hatred of his wartime enemy to convince humanity to take nothing for granted. Antrobus must learn to acknowledge the family close at hand as the concrete motivation for the philosophical struggle that continues outward to the rest of humanity and the cosmos. This devotion to the pursuit of great ideals is precisely what qualifies Antrobus to lead the greater human family.

Third, the canonical playwrights of the Forties seem to accept industrialism and technology as an integral part of American life. Wilder, Miller, and Tennessee Williams are typically honored for their representations of domestic drama, not for their overt social commentary. While Miller acknowledged the American tendencies towards materialism, he finds that other nations are not unaffected by that same sin: "My own belief, at any rate, is that America has merely arrived first at the condition that awaits every country that takes her economic road without enforcing upon every development of industrial technique certain quite arbitrary standards of value" (Miller, "On Social Plays" 59). Of American industry, Miller writes:

The question must begin to be asked; not whether a new thing will work or pay, not whether it is more efficient than its predecessor, more popular, and more easily accepted; but what it will do to human beings. The first invention of man to create that response in all nations was the atomic bomb. It is the first "improvement" to
have dramatized for even the numbest mind the question of value.

(62)

The family is the arena in which we observe the effects of everyday technology on the human being; hence, the family is an appropriate focus for a thesis examining the effects of technology. Canonical drama of the Forties regularly invokes technological images, not to critique them, but in order to incorporate them seamlessly into a matrix of domestic and social threads. While technology still represents a threatening, inhuman urban environment, as it did in the Twenties, technology has also become a medium to extend the implications of the domestic drama to a society that had become irrevocably urbanized. Gleaming chrome toasters and new refrigerators are as prominent in America’s emerging postwar identity as Freud is to America’s understanding of family dynamics. The canonical dramas of the Forties are an index to the technological transformation of the home. But we can also note that these technological items are “evocative” props that participate in the drama, rather than threatening emblems of external forces.

Striving for a Universal Perspective in Our Town and The Skin of Our Teeth

Our Town, which in 1938 won Wilder his second Pulitzer, employs the formal experimentalism and the didacticism of agit-prop drama, yet its content is universal and personal, rather than specific and social. When the play was first produced, Europe was mobilizing against Hitler; yet the Stage Manager looks dispassionately back at the previous world war, which appears far more remote than the image of the newspaper boy on the stage: “What business he had picking a quarrel with the Germans we can’t make out to this day, but it all seemed perfectly clear to us at the time” (7). As in Waiting for Lefty, the setting is sparse; the on-stage performers interact with “plants” in the audience.
(and one of them even demands social action). The Stage Manager is a benevolent version of Harry Fatt, commenting on, orchestrating, and occasionally participating in the action; and where Odets brought a copy of the Communist Manifesto onto the stage, Wilder brings “a copy of this play,” that is, Our Town (25). Wilder’s metatheatrical elements transform what might otherwise have been a sentimental romance into a bittersweet affirmation of the eternity of the human soul — even though the play is not without its sarcasm (such as the inclusion of Shakespeare in a time capsule intended to record the essence of life there), invective (such as the post-mortem tirade of Simon Stimson, an artist driven to drink and ruin by the monotony of his surroundings), and irony (such as the newspaper boy with an engineering scholarship who died during World War I: “All that education for nothing” [10]). The play takes place in the first years of the Twentieth Century, before the transition to a fully technological society. Mr. Morgan reacts with alarm at the idea of automobiles coming to Grover’s Corners: “best thing to do is just stay home” (53). The observation invites us to look at the ubiquity of automobiles with a newly critical eye; yet by placing the complaint in the mouth of a comic old-timer (played by the Stage Manager wearing an apron), Wilder assures us that technological progress is no real cause for concern.

Our Town has been popularly revered as a hymn to Puritan America’s veneration of the family unit, but in the graveyard scene, the Stage Manager says “mother ‘n daughter – husband ‘n wife – enemy ‘n enemy – money ‘n miser – all those terribly important things kinda grow pale around here” (68). Only in the afterlife does Emily learn to regret the misplaced values that keep the living from “realiz[ing] life while they live it” (83). Unlike O’Neill, who drew artistic inspiration from his own family, Wilder “was too
deeply absorbed with the American family as representative of the human family to particularize in his plays about any specific family he knew” (Goldstone 184). The playgoer, distanced by time and space from the ritualized depiction of small-town life in the first years of the 20th century, is likewise emotionally distanced from the final image of George lying in despair before Emily's grave. Wilder here “reaches for a universal perspective which will neutralise its own sentimentalities” (Bigsby 260).

In an appreciation of James Joyce, Wilder described his own balanced approach to grief, advocating the classical virtue of moderation:

The other centuries knew that many people had lived and died a long while ago, and they knew there were many people living on the earth. But the invention of the printing press (its consequences are still unfolding) had made these realizations far more actual. Now everybody knows them, not as something you learn in school and recite to one another, but – “in their bones” – that millions and billions have lived and died, and that probably billions and billions (let us not despair of the human race) will live and die.

You have lost some husband, brother, or parent in the war. Your grief is very real to you. Yet now we know as never before that a great many died in this war and in the wars of Carthage and Troy and Ur, and in the Thirty Years War – what end is there to any human thing in which you are not also companion to billions? It does not diminish your grief, but it orients it to a larger field of reference. (Gallup, AC 175)
The cited passage makes two points. First, the technology of printing press has brought us into closer contact with human suffering in past ages and distant places; second, the knowledge so gained makes our own individual suffering no greater than, or no less than, the suffering that humans have endured for millennia, yet it provides additional context, within which we may – perhaps unwittingly, and perhaps unwillingly – find meaning: in “any human thing,” the modern individual is “companion to billions.” The Stage Manager, “with a warm smile that removes any sense of cynicism,” makes a comparable comment about officiating at weddings: “Once in a thousand times it’s interesting” (78). Miller, for his part, finds such a situation alienating: “from O’Neill’s [plays] to the best of Anderson, Sidney Howard, and the rest, the underlying log jam, so to speak, the unsolvable paradox, is that, try as he will, the individual is doomed to frustration once he gains a consciousness of his own identity” (“On Social Plays” 54-5). To Wilder, on the other hand, such recognition elevates our human experiences to Platonic ideals; any passion or emotion we feel now is merely an instance of the eternal experience that makes up the history of human relationships. Wilder quotes the following passage from Plato:

Then tell me, O Critias, how will a man choose the ruler that shall rule over him? Will he not choose a man who has first established order in himself, knowing that any decision that has its spring in anger or pride or vanity can be multiplied a thousand fold in its effects upon the citizens?

(249)

As Mr. Antrobus of The Skin of Our Teeth highly values his books, which preserve wisdom of the past, Wilder wants us, too, to embrace the knowledge that puts our experience
into a vast historical perspective, and prevents us from acting too strongly on our pas-
sions.

In *The Skin of Our Teeth*, Wilder suggests that Antrobus (Gk. *anthropos*, “man”) is essentially a visionary. He can simultaneously be an ice-age patriarch intoxicated by his own discoveries of the wheel and the alphabet, and also a middle-class commuter in danger of suffocating under his own Enlightenment confidence that ideas alone can make the world perfect — that, due to the advancement of human knowledge, “[t]here’s not much more to be done” (137). By contrast, Mrs. Antrobus is pragmatic; she tolerates her husband’s unstable idealism because, when properly channeled, it empowers him to pro-
tect the family. Except for brief moments of panic and insecurity, she is aware that to-
gether, they represent a healthy human whole. In order to protect this idealism, she con-
ceals the equally representative human excesses of her children: Gladys must keep her
dress down and conceal the marks of womanhood, for “your father’d go crazy if he saw
that paint on your face” (132), and Henry’s hair must cover the Biblical mark of the first
murderer, Cain, for “when your father sees it he loses all control over himself” (130). By
marking the children with signs of subversive sexuality and violence, Wilder may seek to
moderate two of humanity’s most unruly passions. In this family drama, we can see the
sins of the father visited upon the children.

Antrobus has his own personal history of both sex and violence, as Mrs. Antrobus
establishes when she reminds Sabina of the time “Mr. Antrobus raped you home from
your Sabine hills” (119). Brought by violence into the house, Sabina is a bad influence,
as when Gladys’s purchase of red stockings (to match Sabina’s) foreshadows her later
appearance as mother to an apparently fatherless child. But even Sabina, in her opening
monologue, identifies Gladys as an impractical dreamer, like her father: “She’ll make some good man a good wife some day, if he’ll just come down off the movie screen and ask her” (113). Like the son, the daughter is also “marked” – her red makeup prefigures the marks of Sabina’s kisses on Antrobus’s face. If Gladys dreams as Sabina dreams (both enjoy attending movies), and starts to dress as Sabina dresses, she may adopt Sabina’s creed: “I’ll take every man away from his wife. I’ll turn the whole earth upside down” (170). While the action does not focus on Gladys, Mrs. Antrobus does respond to the threat of Sabina’s sexuality by making a suffragist-style speech in veneration of “the ring”. If Mrs. Antrobus here speaks for Wilder, he does not permit her to state her case completely, perhaps because he fears he could not do it justice; instead, he coyly opts to have her throw an invisible bottle into the ocean: “And in the bottle’s a letter. And in the letter is written all the things that a woman knows.... We’re not what the books and plays say we are. . . . We’re not what you’re all told and we’re not what you think we are: We’re ourselves.” Sabina’s eventual return to the kitchen in the household she tried to break up does not entirely undermine her claim that “It’s girls like I that inspire the multiplication table,” but her eventual return to the kitchen testifies to the upper hand Mrs. Antrobus wields in the first act: “Reading and writing and counting on your fingers is all very well in their way, – but I keep the home going” (120). The wife’s down-to-earth womanly perspective counters the sultry servant’s vision of supreme feminine disorder.

Sabina’s sexuality threatens the home’s social fabric; but Antrobus’s tendency towards violence – depicted as a predominantly male failing – is also a problem. His violent tendencies color our perception of him from the very beginning, when the off-stage announcer identifies him as “a veteran of foreign wars, [who] bears a number of scars,
front and back”(111). This violence is more clearly represented at Antrobus’s entrance: “She-bitch of a goat’s gizzard, I’ll break every bone in your body. Let me in or I’ll tear the whole house down” (133). While his “joyous roar” and “face of a Keystone Comedy Cop” (134) counterbalance his violent language, he does slap Henry in order to make him acknowledge the wheel. When the boy shows an interest in the invention, Antrobus dismisses him: “Any booby can fool with it now, – but I thought of it first” (138). Henry mimics both his father’s violence and his possessiveness when he stones a neighbor boy because he “was going to take the wheel away” (153). Antrobus may be the “creator” of the wheel, but by hypothesizing a chair upon a wheel, superimposing a pragmatic goal upon a geometrical principle, his son is the first engineer. Antrobus takes Henry’s creative act to be a mere echo of his own; because Henry would sooner kill than share (he later stones one of the “chair pushers” who are actually employing his invention on the Atlantic City boardwalk), and because he delights in this destruction, Henry’s constructive impulses are easily overlooked in the first two acts; yet the effect of Henry’s violence on his father draws extended attention from Wilder in the final act, where we see that Henry’s childhood conditioned him perfectly for military leadership, for as Sabina reports, “the enemy is Henry. Henry is the enemy”(227).

Wilder specifies that Henry (whose name once used to be Cain) should be played not as a misunderstood child, but as pure evil (235) – an interpretation to which Tallulah Bankhead (the original Sabina) alluded when she attacked her producer in a bitter letter: “You are Henry – Henry is YOU!” (Burns and Dydo 392). Talking in his sleep, Henry incites his followers to demolish everything in their path – but not merely for the sake of destruction: “Tear everything down. I don’t care what you smash. We’ll begin again and
we’ll show ‘em” (235). Likewise, Genesis tells us that Cain, the first murderer, began again in the land east of Eden, where he founded the first city. Beneath Henry’s violence, then, is the potentially praiseworthy urge to build something of his own, to “show ‘em” the extent of his capabilities. Henry’s desire to build is a manifestation of the sinful pride of the builders of the Tower of Babel, whom God punished for their desire to ascend to divine heights. But the play shows that Antrobus must take the same desire – one man’s wish to glorify himself – and apply it to the common good. Disputing Henry’s selfish and destructive notion of liberty, Antrobus ultimately declares his devotion to sharing his ideals and his creations with the rest of humanity, not hoarding them for himself: “You and I want the same thing; but until you think of it as something that everyone has a right to, you are my deadly enemy and I will destroy you” (237). With the war over, Antrobus finds his deals wavering; without a clear course of action, Antrobus loses something even more valuable than survival: “The desire to begin again, to start building” (242). His encounter with Henry rejuvenates his desire to apply his knowledge to the solution of human problems. Henry’s capacity for action is a necessary component of Antrobus’s ability to fulfill his obligations to the civitas.

Violence also underlies Henry’s much closer relationship with his mother. As the storm approaches Atlantic City, Henry's first reaction is unalloyed delight in the contemplation of potential destruction: "I hope it comes zzzzzz everything before it” (185). After his mother suggests a boat for safety, it is Henry who locates one. The storm, and the ark that will weather it, is a point of connection for mother and son, here when the ark is first discovered, and also later, when she refuses to board the boat without him. Her action produces surprise and perhaps even reluctant gratitude in Henry, who appears
touched by the fact that his mother finally calls out to him using his original name, Cain: "I didn't think you wanted me" (209). According to Haberman, the tribal instinct which directs Mrs. Antrobus to save the life of her detestable son, despite all the evil he represents, "suggests an aspect in man almost too private and sinister to be presented in any way but fictionally, if it is not to be too sentimental or false" (60). Sabina puts it another way: "if it would be any benefit to her children, she'd see the rest of us stretched out dead at her feet" (113). It is this fiercely protective streak, with its implicit violent potential, that enables Mrs. Antrobus to connect with Henry. For instance, when the domestic fire is in danger of running out, Mrs. Antrobus instructs Henry to “go upstairs and bring down the chairs and start breaking up the beds” (156). By calling upon Henry to indulge in the destruction that so thrills him, she succeeds in taming (at least temporarily) that destructive force, and using it to help preserve the family unit; yet here (as in All My Sons, A Streetcar Named Desire, and even Death of a Salesman), a pragmatic mother’s tribal short-sightedness blinds her to long-term danger.

Despite Miss Sommerset's pronouncement that "We're all just as wicked as we can be, and that's the God's truth” (240), Wilder ultimately holds out for us the same hope that kept the Antrobus families going during the war – that those who have been forced to achieve greatness will retain that stature in order to make a better life for all when the crisis has passed. Greatness, in the final analysis, is not merely something Antrobus earns by being an inventor, or by being elected President. His greatest quality is his willingness to live with Henry, even after the boy has completely revealed his evil nature. Just as the metatheatrical emergence of Miss Sommerset (supposedly the actress playing Sabina) interrupts the attempt by Lily Fairweather (another incarnation of Sabina) to seduce
Antrobus, a similar phenomenon interrupts the final confrontation between father and son. The personas of the actors playing Antrobus and Henry emerge briefly, in order to unburden themselves of their own specific psychological problems, and so the details of the meeting between Antrobus and Henry (leading to more violence? partial reconciliation? compromise?) remain unspecified and unresolved. Wilder's message seems to be that these are not meant to be psychologically specific details, just as Lily's attempted seduction of Antrobus is not meant to be explained by specific character flaws. In the end, Henry may fall asleep eating his potato, but he wakes with characteristic vengeance; Sabina may obediently return to her kitchen duties, but she still attends a victory bonfire (an image of excess which contrasts sharply with the utilitarian function of fire in the first act). The disruptive potentials of the violent Henry and the sensual Sabina are, therefore, still present at the end of the play, but they are (for the time being at least) contained. By extension, we, all of us, have more unresolved dissatisfaction and ugliness within us than we care to admit.

Fortunately, human beings also demonstrate some capacity to change for the better. Faced with limited resources and an uncertain future, Mrs. Antrobus's matriarchal territorialism causes her to reject the refugees (street people named Homer, Moses, etc.), who collectively personify a greater cultural good. Whereas she is alarmed by the fact that the refugees are "all over the front yard," Mr. Antrobus asks each of them to "pull up a stake of the fence. We'll need them for the fireplace." In contrast to his wife's defensiveness, Antrobus is willing to sacrifice the physical boundary that separates him from the outside world, in order to preserve the moral and cultural framework that teach him to value the very family structure endangered by his inaction. For instance, when it appears
that Antrobus will lose all hope without the ideas from his books, it is Mrs. Antrobus who decides that baby dinosaur and the mammoth must go in order to make room for the refugees – and this only after her husband has offered evidence that the tramps will be “useful” (144). When her husband again appears to have lost all hope, she shrewdly appeals to these “useful” qualities: “Can’t some of you sing? It’s your business in life to sing, isn’t it?” (154). She can make use of their effect on her husband to accomplish her own goals; by exchanging them with the dinosaur and mammoth, she exchanges one menagerie for another. Her decision, dramatizing the evolution of humanity, preserves boundaries without prohibiting change.

Wilder’s attempt to render an objective portrait of universal human nature, in a particularly clever metatheatrical style, was bound to elicit strong and varied critical reactions. “Within hours of its opening, The Skin of Our Teeth became the most talked about production of the season; it had chic; it had flair, it had style, and no one with pretensions to sophistication or taste could afford to miss it” (Goldstone 170). Also, shortly after the play’s successful, Pulitzer-winning run, McCarthy wrote of her dissatisfaction with theatre fare “[s]ince the collapse of the proletarian theatre as an art-form eight years ago” (68). She is impatient with a play that asserts that, even without making any radical changes in our ideology, we humans are likely to continue evading disaster “by the skin of our teeth.” For McCarthy, the play “affirms the eternity of capitalism” (53) and offers a “curious view of life” that is a “a kind of bowdlerized version” of Christian morality, “such as might have been imparted to a class of taxpayer’s children by a New England Sunday School teacher forty years ago.” The nostalgia for home and hearth “lurks there as an impediment both to action and to thought, for at the end of each act the play hits the
suburban family group, stumbles over it, and comes to a halt” (55). One the one hand, McCarthy may have meant that the average suburban family was unworthy of a nostalgic portrait; on the other, she may have meant that the average playgoer did not understand the play, which thus shattered its attempted nobility.

If the latter were the case, McCarthy perhaps targets one particular scene, in which Wilder’s stagecraft seems to falter. The concluding pageant of abstract virtues puts the eternal words of the philosophers into the mouths of stand-ins. By suggesting that perhaps only the marginal figure of Hester the costume girl understands the true meaning of these words, Wilder once again softens the edges of his rhetoric, removing his dogmatic barbs, and inviting inward contemplation rather than immediate action. Yet McCarthy was not the only critic to take offense. According to Ferguson, “Wilder’s extraordinary freedom and virtuosity in the theatre is gained through eluding rather than solving the problem which most playwrights feel as basic: that of embodying form and meaning in character and language” (561-2). McCarthy found Wilder’s technique “to put it frankly, fraudulent, an illusionist’s trick; an elaborate system of mystification... installed in the theatre in order to persuade the audience that it is witnessing a complex and difficult play” (56). Atkinson reports that audience members regularly walked out in confusion after the first act, and agrees with McCarthy that the quotations from Spinoza and Plato are “an academic joke.” Although most critics were more generous than she in their acknowledgment of Wilder’s talents, many shared the same surprise at the play’s success. Atkinson does, however, observe that “[Wilder] and Robert Sherwood in There Shall be no Night, were the last of the optimists among serious theatre writers” (The Lively Years, 170). Though crediting Wilder for not “sentimentally suggesting that hu-
man beings are good and therefore deserve life," Haberman notes that "Like Sabina... Wilder does not 'think the theatre is a place where people's feelings ought to be hurt'" (81). A wartime American audience might well appreciate an upbeat play, but such sentimental optimism does not account for the play's international reception. Wilder later obliquely addressed such ideological complaints to his work, confidently reasserting the universality of the good and evil depicted by his most celebrated works:

You know, the Russians have banned my work. They banned Our Town because they were campaigning against the family at the time and it is a family story. And they banned The Skin of Our Teeth because they said: it equated war with flood and the ice age as natural catastrophes, when every good Marxist knows war is only the work of the capitalists. (Lewis 93)

Lang refutes the contention that the Soviets campaigned against the family, saying the idea "probably stems from Cold War propaganda by the Americans" (46), but the idea more likely stems from those passages in The Communist Manifesto which condemn the bourgeois family (26-27). According to Wilder's sister Isabel, Our Town "was the first foreign play to be done in Berlin shortly after the occupation. The Russian authorities stopped it in three days. Rumor gave the reason that it was 'unsuitable for the Germans so soon - too democratic'" (Amos Wilder 82). Lang dismisses this story as one of "many legends" that developed after this early period of experimental post-war cooperation between Soviet and Western powers in Germany.

According to Wilder's brother Amos, The Skin of Our Teeth's attention to the practical details of postwar life spoke strongly to the audiences in occupied Germany af-
ter the war, where the taste of grass soup was familiar. Although East Germany banned productions of *Our Town* and *The Skin of Our Teeth* in September, 1947 – an occasion seized upon by the West German press as examples of Soviet tyranny – the West temporarily banned *All My Sons* due to its harsh and apparently anti-Capitalistic critique of American society (Lang 44). Lang concludes that by the time *Mother Courage* was performed in Berlin in 1949, the significance of the epic theatre was more widely accepted (50), and that in both sides of occupied Germany, there was no need to censor work, because critical discussions of the relationship between form and content could and did recognize dramatic talent despite ideological differences.

The epic stage techniques elevated strictly bourgeois concerns to the level of universal humanity; to McCarthy, this was all part of an “anachronistic joke” making the play appear to be more daring than it really is. To McCarthy, Wilder’s “spoof on history ... insists that the Roman in his toga is simply a bourgeois citizen wearing a sheet, and that Neanderthal man with his bear-skin and club is at heart an insurance salesman at a fancy dress ball” (53). She further detects an apologia in the scripted emergency that supposedly incapacitates a large number of actors, so that the finale must be rehearsed and explained for the audience in advance: “Mr. Wilder, being a professor, wants to have it both ways: he wants to sponsor the philosophers, but at the same time he does not want the audience to think that he is an ass” (54). Yet the metatheatrical elements, akin to Pirandello's much less political *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (which Wilder had seen during his stay in Rome in the Twenties), highlight the dramatist’s inability to articulate his particular vision using conventional theatrical forms. But Wilder does not
advocate the primacy of ideals over actions; in the preface to Three Plays, Wilder associates his work with the practical concerns of its European audiences:

It has been often charged with being a bookish fantasia about history, full of rather bloodless schoolmasterish jokes. But to have seen it in Germany soon after the war, in the shattered churches and beerhalls that were serving as theaters, with audiences whose price of admission meant the loss of a meal and for whom it was of absorbing interest that there was a “recipe for grass soup that did not cause the diarrhea,” was an experience that was not so cool.

(110)

In fact, in 1947, a debate in the Göttinger Universität-Zeitung had to remind the German audiences – whose awareness of suffering had led them to take The Skin of Our Teeth with deadly seriousness – that in America the play’s formal experimentalism had led the play to be interpreted as a parody (Lang 54).

The message is that Wilder’s wartime audience – the one that “came through the depression by the skin of our teeth” (114) – is now facing another iteration of the same, constant, eternal struggle for survival. Antrobus must learn to see the family close at hand as the reason for the struggle that continues outward to the rest of humanity and the cosmos, and not neglect his family in order to pursue those goals – important and life-giving as they are. With the pragmatic influence of his wife, who reminds him that books alone will not fend off the ice, Antrobus manages to apply his ideals to practical matters: “If you do come through this –” he asks his children, “what’ll you be able to do? What do you know?” (157). In answering his own question, he directs Henry’s attention to the
wheel, and coaches him (with the aid of more blows) in his multiplication tables; meanwhile, Gladys studies literature and the Bible. All the characters learn to compromise; even Henry's willingness to accept a potato suggests his admission that he is not self-sufficient. Mr. Antrobus's altruistic invention of nutritious grass soup, his willingness to try to live with Henry, and his flexibility in granting Sabina one beef cube for entertainment shows that he is successfully applying the lessons of the great philosophers to his governing policies.

Technology Undermines the Selfish Family in All My Sons

All My Sons has not aged as well as Miller's other major works; its defeat of O'Neill's The Iceman Cometh for the Drama Critics' Circle Award in 1947 attests perhaps to the timeliness, rather than timelessness, of its themes. During the war, the United States government waged a successful homefront propaganda effort, partly geared towards stoking public hatred of Germany and Japan, but also geared towards such domestic matters as gathering public support for the employment of women in factory jobs and the promotion of scrap metal recycling projects. A daily familiarity with technology thus became part of American life, and the psychological connection between the homefront and the front lines was never stronger. But Miller was skeptical: "At a time when all public voices were announcing the arrival of that great day when industry and labor were one, my personal experience was daily demonstrating that beneath the slogans very little has changed" ("Introduction to the Collected Plays" 134).

Keller, a man whose world view is informed by his ritualistic reading of want ads, uses the cultural artifacts of his environment in order to form an ethical framework.
Unlike Miller's more famous dime-a-dozen drone, Keller is at home in the *urbs*. The factory, itself the play's most obvious technological artifact, used to make airplane parts, but now makes parts for a kitchen appliance. The change at the factory mirrors the change in society, which has turned its attention to building up families to populate those kitchens. Keller's alertness to the significance of everyday technological items provides us with several early plot points. First of all, when George makes a long-distance phone call rather than a telegram, and when he takes an airplane rather than a train, these relatively extravagant and expensive new technologies suggest not only that George, now a lawyer, has climbed the social scale a notch or two, but also that he is treating the situation as an emergency. This leads Keller to deduce (correctly) that George suspects the truth. Further, Keller's legal defense involved refusing to admit to making a telephone call, thus sending his innocent partner to jail. In addition, Keller is at his most creative when he connects 1) Jim's hopes for medical research, 2) Frank's fortunate escape of the draft and 3) his own self-destructive pragmatism: he observes that a doctor could make a fortune inventing a way to bring boys into the world without trigger-fingers (208). The statement, little more than a quip, succinctly illuminates Keller's myopic fastidiousness as well as his faith in technology. Significantly, he does not here contemplate world peace, or ponder the morality of the atomic bomb; instead, he imagines a boy's finger to be a moral appendix: pay someone to remove it, and other men's sons will face the ethical decisions. This brief exchange alludes to the resentment that Keller feels for those young men who never went. Miller's ability to draw such complex moral issues out of an uneducated character's everyday conversation (something O'Neil found more difficult) of-
fers one of the first subtle warnings about the consequences of Keller's devotion to the family ideal.

Similar connotations surround the physical house. *The Skin of Our Teeth* and *All My Sons* both examine the carefully delineated domestic spaces (a house surrounded by a picket fence in the first and third acts of *The Skin of Our Teeth*; a back yard surrounded by a row of hedges in *All My Sons*) which surround and support the inhabitants of the work-a-day world. A newsreel announcer describes the Antrobus residence in an “attractive suburban residence district” as a “commodious seven room house” (110). The stage directions identify the setting as "the backyard of the Keller home in the outskirts of an American town... The house is two stories high and has seven rooms," and each family also has a maid. 19 While Wilder uses metatheatrical elements to depict “the events of our homely daily life – this time the family life – . . . against the vast dimensions of time and place” (“Preface,” *Three Plays*), in *All My Sons*, Keller is damned for his failure to acknowledge this very relationship. Miller recognizes the family not as a philosophical concept, but a matter of primal fact: “We – all of us – have a role anteceding all others: we are first sons, daughters, sisters, brothers. No play can possibly alter this given role” (Martin, “Family” 81). Yet a home is both *urbs* and *civitas*. For Antrobus, keeping the home fires burning is the way to keep civilization going; he must learn to lower his eyes from the horizon from time to time; he must not be so wrapped up in his vision of human greatness that he, like the futurist architects Vassos and Ferris, sees only the grand physi-

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19 This could be coincidence, or perhaps seven rooms and a maid establish a certain social status, much as in Victorian times a family needed to keep both a maid and a cook in order to retain the bare minimum of social respectability (and to ensure that the guests would not taste laundry soap in their food).
cal structures and not the individual lives of the people who populate them. Antrobus’s ability to expand his definition of family to include society as a whole allows him to preserve both during a crisis.

Keller is unable to think in such abstract terms. To him, the war was just another business opportunity. Like Mother Courage dashing in front of enemy artillery in order to find buyers for her spoiling bread, and putting her children into harm’s path as a result, Keller has used the war to serve his own ends. Keller recalls an incident in which Deever was responsible for an infraction that Keller covered up by firing several innocent workers. Keller brings up this anecdote in order to strike down the suggestion that he treated Deever unfairly; within the plot, the story’s function is to demonstrate, in rather obvious terms, that Keller has no moral qualms about behaving unjustly towards his employees. While Kerr praises the protagonist as a realistic, well-constructed characterization, he complains that “you never quite believe that Joe Keller has done it, or at least not because he wanted to; he has done it because Arthur Miller wanted him to” (55). Other critics have also noted Miller’s mechanistic plot, hinging too neatly on Kate’s unfortunate Freudian slip and on the contents of Larry’s letter. But Kerr seems to be saying that a believable, well-constructed character cannot, of his own free will, be capable of such actions. If so, Keller is a more humanized type of the robotic bosses of The Adding Machine or Machinal; these are all plot devices rather than characters. As extensions of the mechanized society that oppresses the hapless protagonist, they do not require the dramatist to delve into their motivations or personal philosophies. But Keller did not send out defective parts because he was \textit{(a priori)} a heartless boss; he did it because he cannot bear the thought of losing the factory, which is the one thing of value he wanted to pass on to his
sons. The play is not told from the point of view of the innocent employees who lost their jobs; rather, it focuses on how Keller’s moral lapse at the factory underscores the misuse of his technological obligation, and its effects on the family he strove to protect.

In All My Sons, despite the obviously naturalistic stagecraft, technology is rich with cultural and psychological meaning. This meaning will be even more evident in the stage descriptions for Death of a Salesman, where, for instance, a transparent wall reveals the red glow of the basement heater (the modern hearth). In the basement, an underground space where substructures are revealed and truth emerges, the young Biff revealed his disillusionment by burning his “University of Virginia” shoes; there, too, Linda finds the gas hose and puts it back each day because she is afraid of confronting Willy’s suicidal intentions. In All My Sons, the basement serves a similar function, as the locus of the family’s collective subconscious. Keller swears to the neighborhood children that “on my word of honor there’s a jail in the basement” (210). The exchange affords Miller a Chekhovian opportunity to establish the presence of the gun (which Keller has apparently shown the children in the past in order to back up his story), while subtly casting doubt on the value of Keller’s word of honor. Perhaps most significant, the action and the setting reinforce the notion that the Keller household figuratively and literally is upheld by lies.

The Kellers share the demographics of the Biblical first family: father, mother, and two sons, one of whom dies. Each family member – including the absent son – contributes to the drama’s moral message. With the war over, the Kellers in their suburban retreat lack an outside moral reference point against which to judge their conduct. While Keller reads only want ads, Chris reads book reviews, suggesting that he has at least a passing familiarity with the issues; nevertheless, neither has access to the cultural knowl-
edge that helped focus Antrobus’s belief in eternal human values that are more important than merely surviving adversity. Chris, on some level aware of the family’s moral lapse, tells himself that he cannot bear to put his own name on the family business because he feels guilty for having survived the war while so many of his men did not. He is equally reluctant to accept Ann’s affection, believing that doing so would be looting the dead. A neighbor woman says that Chris makes people want to become better than they really are, and resents living next door to “the holy family.” According to her, Chris’s idealism makes her doctor husband want to perform research that benefits mankind, rather than take money from lonely hypochondriacs in order to support their comfortable lifestyle.

George was actually idealistic to a fault—his knee-jerk patriotism led him to disown his innocent father. Nevertheless, for all the idealism he inspires in the doctor, Chris himself articulates a desire for little beyond a comfortable middle-class life: “The business doesn’t inspire me. . . . If I have to grub for money all day long at least at evening I want it beautiful. I want a family, I want some kids. I want to build something I can give myself to.” Even his expression of love rises to no poetic heights beyond the earnest promise, “I’m going to make a fortune for you,” yet he does claim that a family will be an inspiration to him. As a young veteran, his moral framework is informed and enlarged by his experiences with selfless wartime camaraderie. Miller’s wartime reportage had exposed him to soldiers who knew that society at large does not always put into practice the ideals its soldiers die to defend.

No man has ever felt identity with a group more deeply and intimately than a soldier in battle. But. . . the usual veteran returning to his city or town on the usual day finds no common goal at all.
He finds every group in town excluding the proximate group. . . .

Now he must live unto himself, for his selfish welfare. (Situation Normal 156-57)

While Keller would prefer Chris to devote himself to the good of the family as selflessly as he (Chris) had devoted himself to the good of his men, Keller’s guilt tarnishes the family ideal. Unwilling to reject his father (and so lose the factory) or accept the factory (at the expense of his ideals), Chris permits his parents to continue their life-sustaining lies.

While Keller’s cowardice is reprehensible in the play’s moral scheme, George and Ann are also criticized for rejecting their father. Upon learning how completely Ann and George have disowned their father, Keller cannot help but defend the man he himself framed, for he fears being rejected the same way. In “Tragedy and the Common Man,” Miller writes: “The flaw, or crack in his character, is really nothing — and need be nothing — but his inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status” (4). Where Antrobus fights the evil within himself in order to preserve those ideals which teach him to protect and honor the family, Keller wielded the family as a shop tool, using it to cover over the “crack in his character,” just as he ordered his subordinate to cover over the cracks in the cylinder heads. Although Kate knows that “it don’t excuse it that you did it for the family” (279), Keller, in resorting to criminal acts in order to
keep from losing his business, wishes to see himself as the heroic defender of the family. Confronting the fault in his own head proves too much to bear: he relieves the pressure with a suicidal gunshot.

The two sets of neighbors who visit the Keller home, although they are themselves minor characters, are significant models, commenting on the moral isolation of the family unit, and playing out the domestic issues the Keller boys might have faced, had the war not intervened. Jim, the frustrated idealistic doctor, is aware that his moral integrity is weakening, which leaves him unable or unwilling to change. By contrast, Frank, who managed to stay out of wartime service, and is reaping the rewards of a comfortable domestic life, looks to horoscopes to justify his own (undeserved) material success. Jim's maudlin but inert self-awareness and Frank's blissful ignorance do not represent a wide range of possibilities, but they are the two moral poles against which we see the action of the Keller family. Frank's wife, Lydia, is also an opportunist - she did not wait for Chris to come home from the war, although they were apparently involved with each other; instead, she married a wartime slacker. The awkward tone of her invitation for Chris to come see her children suggests that Lydia on some level regrets not having those children with him. Her technological ineptitude, whether genuine or affected, is a means towards legitimizing her household: by breaking up a social gathering and putting her husband to plug in the toaster for her (207), she reinforces (and enforces) his role as family provider. Frank mediates her use of the toaster, and, by extension, her role as housewife and mother. If she needs him to operate the appliances, he must be valuable; if he is valuable, then he must not have been a poor choice for a husband. If he is a good hus-
band, he must be a good man. If the family is supreme, then Frank need not apologize for managing to evade the draft and settling into a comfortable family life while other young men died in his place.

The play's inner plot, dealing with the romance between Chris and Ann, is complicated by Kate's refusal to accept the death of Larry, her favorite son and formerly Ann's boyfriend. Kate's references to God, and her tale of the storm that blows down Larry's memorial apple tree, offer glimpses of a moral reference point beyond the factory; but even then, she blurs the boundaries between the natural and technological worlds, likening the sound of the wind to the sound of Larry's airplane (by which Miller employs the naturalistic sound of an airplane to expressionistic effect). Even though the Keller factory's faulty airplane parts had nothing to do with Larry's death (the boy flew in a different kind of airplane), Miller carefully links the crime to the romance through the mother's rather complicated sequence of rationalizations: 1) for Chris to marry his brother's former girlfriend is to pronounce the brother dead; 2) if Larry has died in the war, then Keller's selfish act was not sufficient to protect his own family; 3) if the family is not preserved, then Keller is at base a cowardly man and incompetent provider; therefore, 4) as long as Kate Keller believes Larry is alive, she need not face her family's guilt: "Your brother's alive, darling, because if he's dead, your father killed him" (272). Keller himself similarly evokes the imagined loyalty of his dead son to support him when he feels beleaguered by challengers. Ann's revelation of Larry's suicide letter not only forces Kate to give up his ghost, but simultaneously forces Keller to give up his pretense, for the letter reveals that Larry found his father's actions too reprehensible to forgive.

George's new-found belief in his father's innocence (and in Keller's guilt) threatens both the romance of the inner plot and the pretense of the outer plot. An unfortunate Freudian slip of Kate's tongue exposes the lie, prompting Ann to force her hand: despite
Keller’s cowardice, she will marry Chris on the condition that Kate release Larry’s ghost. Aside from the romance, the larger issue in the inner plot is Chris’s independence, and his ability to carry on a life of his own. Aside from the mystery, the larger issue in the outer plot is the hollowness of Keller’s claim that his ends justified his means. All the younger characters, Ann, George, Chris, and even Larry, are guilty of hastily abandoning their fathers for their fatherland. Larry’s suicide letter attacks the notion that the family is the highest good, going so far as to claim that he wanted to kill his father himself, upon hearing the news. Like Kate, Keller had clung to his own idealized memory of Larry; hearing the dead son’s moral revulsion robs him of the moral center both parents had previously used in order to dismiss Chris’s tacit critiques. Chris ultimately does sound like the idealistic Antrobus when he insists: “Once and for all you can know there’s a universe of people outside and you’re responsible to it, and unless you know that, you threw away your son because that’s why he died.” While Chris expects his father to confess and go to trial, Keller enacts the fatal sentence proscribed by Larry; thus, Keller has the final word in the ongoing argument. Ever the pragmatist, Kate wastes no breath defending Keller’s final actions: “Don’t take it out on yourself,” she tells Chris. “Forget now. Live.” She is capable of adopting a new survival strategy almost immediately, which suggests that she, like Linda in Death of a Salesman, suspected this outcome, or perhaps that she is grasping at yet another straw; lacking any moral reference point outside of the domestic space that defined her existence (the stage directions identify her not as “KATE” but as “MOTHER”), she clings to her only remaining family member.

Both Wilder and Miller agree that we each are part of something larger than our fenced-off domestic spaces – something important enough to make our lives matter. For
Wilder, the fact that the archetypal family manages to survive is evidence that, despite the crises that humans face, everything is right with the world. His ideals serve the family. Miller echoes this vision to a point: the ideals Keller expresses are false – not because the family is unimportant, but because, in fact, Keller selfishly values his own individual dignity more than the well-being of his family. If he had been capable of seeing how closely his own identity depends upon the family, then he might have, like Antrobus, been capable of serving the family of humankind as well. For Miller, however, the fact that we must make compromises in order to survive means that everything cannot be all right. In a realistic play, as in the world, balancing the needs of the nuclear family with those of all humanity proves more difficult. For Wilder, responsibility begins at the top and works down – the extraordinary have the responsibility to lead the ordinary. Miller, on the other hand, probes the depths of the sacrifices which idealism demands of even the ordinary person in a society driven by the things of the urbs, rather than the ideals of the civitas.
6. Emotionally and Thematically-Integrated Technology:

William’s *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947)

and Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* (1949)

The phenomenal success of Elia Kazan’s direction and Marlon Brando’s performance in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) struck a powerful chord on the American stage, one which was still resounding nearly two decades later when Mary McCarthy wrote,

The typical character of the so-called American realist school is a subhuman member of the lower urban middle class. This creature is housed in a living room filled with installment-plan furniture, some of which will be broken before the play is over. The sound of breakage and the sound of heavy breathing will signify “theatre.” As directed by Elia Kazan, the whip-cracking ringmaster of this school of brutes, the hero is found standing with clenched fists, yelling at some member of his family, stage right, until one of them breaks into hysterical weeping. (xvii)

Without examining in detail what objects are broken when, McCarthy complains that the Method conditions audiences and actors to expect brutish theatre. She also questions “whether a cultural style encoded with such meanings can represent American identity” (Conroy 252). Other critics trace this American stage brute to O’Neill’s *The Hairy Ape* (1922). In fact, ever since Yank, “American playwrights have been trying to find dramatic expression for the man of lower
birth — of northern urban or southern rural origin — who was denied the language and manners of his more cultured countrymen” (Brustein 8).

Following the tradition of Treadwell, Rice, and O'Neill, Williams presents a figure of the Virgin who cannot access the power of the Dynamo; but unlike those earlier playwrights, and in keeping with the work of his contemporaries Wilder and Miller, Williams does not count on his audience members to enter the theater with a preconceived notion that the machine is necessarily evil. Kazan and Brando emphasized Stanley’s attractive but dangerous sexuality; but the play also allies him favorably with technology. His ability to control machines legitimizes Stella’s decision to flee the plantation and attach herself to him; her actions appear more sensible than Blanche’s pining for the past. Even Blanche’s potential savior, Mitch, is a factory worker, and therefore a member of the industrial culture in which Stanley thrives. Recall the oft-quoted stage direction introducing Stanley:

Since earliest manhood the center of his life has been pleasure with women... Branching out from this complete and satisfying center are all the auxiliary channels of his life, such as his heartiness with men, his appreciation of rough humor, his love of good drink and food and games, his car, his radio, everything that is his, that bears his emblem of the gaudy seed-bearer. (265)

Williams specifically includes “his car, his radio, everything that is his” as parts of Stanley’s life stemming from his sexuality. Kazan’s production of A Streetcar Named Desire reduced the number of times the rushing noise of the train is heard, did without the projected lighting effects, and focused more strongly on food and emotions. As a result, the lingering sensuality of Brando’s performance seems to have obscured the importance
of the additional technological clues Williams has provided to Stanley’s character. For example, he uses the noise of a passing train to mask his exit, which carefully counterbalances Blanche’s sense of geographical displacement as she makes her entrance (she is not sure she has found the right address, and is thus “lost” in more ways than one). To Jo Mielziner, writing about his designs for Miller’s Death of a Salesman, “when an object like a hand prop, a costume, or even a light becomes very close to an actor, he feels that ‘attention must be paid’” (44). Williams likewise pays close attention to the technological items in the Kowalski household, including the radio, the telephone, and light bulbs. He carefully establishes the relationships between these items and his characters. In doing so, he calls attention to a trend also visible in O’Neill’s work; he contrasts with the threatening machines of the Twenties, and develops the integral use of technology apparent in the Forties.

O’Neill’s The Hairy Ape deals more directly with technology than A Streetcar Named Desire, but does not imbue any technological artifacts with as much theatrical intimacy. O’Neill’s ideas of industrialism are foreign to most notions of domestic space. In fact, as an institution, the domestic household has, according to one technological historian, “resisted industrialization with greater success than any other productive locale in our culture” (Cowan 299). The idea that human beings were actually expected to live in the stokers’ quarters is played for shock value (much as Blanche first reacts to her first sight of the Kowalski flat). The same division between industrial and domestic spaces informs O’Neill’s Dynamo, in which he attempts to force technology into much more intimate spaces (maternal, sexual, spiritual, etc.), once again, for shock value.
In his more mature work, however, O’Neill proved himself willing and capable of drawing on domestic technology to further his dramatic aims. The final act of *Long Day’s Journey into Night* (written 1939-40) reveals Tyrone in the living room, sitting in the dim light of a single bulb. The setting not only expresses Tyrone’s stinginess, but also articulates his impoverished psychology. While delivering a speech about being driven to the poorhouse, he drunkenly and melodramatically turns on the three lights in the living room chandelier—not only demonstrating his flair for spectacle, but also signifying the beginning of a long, “illuminating” conversation with Edmund. While concluding the story about the death of his acting genius, he douses the lights one by one. While completely within the bounds of realism (a drunk actor might very well wish to generate his own lighting effects in order to enhance the delivery of an impromptu speech), the scene also affords O’Neill an expressionistic device, which he uses to explore further the family’s psychology. Once more in the dark, Tyrone and Edmund retreat further into their alcoholic hazes, hiding from the sounds of Mary moving about upstairs. Edmund, speaking “as if he were deliberately giving way to drunkenness and seeking to hide behind a maudlin manner” (152), tells three brief anecdotes of transcendental moments during which he lost himself at sea. James interrupts the scene when he turns on the lights again. Within the realm of the play, Jamie is asserting his independence from “the old tightwad” (155), such that turning on the light bulbs become a symbol of filial rebellion; but the lights introduce yet another realistic confrontation (enhanced by the alcohol, which prompts all the characters to unusually expressive language). In a prelude to Mary’s climactic entrance, “Suddenly all five bulbs of the chandelier in the front parlor are turned on from the wall switch, and a moment later someone starts play-
ing the piano in there.” (169) The final scene, played with light streaming into the room, flushes the remaining truth out of the Tyrones.

While O’Neill’s use of the light bulb as an aid to dramaturgy does not extend through the other acts, Williams employs similar methods consistently. In “Failure of Technology in The Glass Menagerie,” Reynolds demonstrates that Williams closely ties the characters to technological items appropriate to their nature. Such connections include Amanda with the historic candelabrum, Jim with the practical light bulb and the television (his escapist pipe dream), Tom with the escapist cinema, Laura with the escapist phonograph, and the long-distance telephone with the escaped father. Perhaps the benefit of passing time, which has allowed us to observe the continued effects of technology even when it is not an overt theme in the play, prepares us more readily to see the extent to which technology shapes A Streetcar Named Desire as well.

Technology and Brutality: A Streetcar Named Desire

Integrating the Technological Themes of The Hairy Ape

After the streetcar itself, the light bulb is Williams's most obvious and most thematically integrated technological reference. Blanche has developed complex and serious relationships to certain cultural artifacts proper to her civitas. Stanley has equally emotional connections to some objects, emotions which run deeper than the pleasure in ownership and consumption – he is particularly attached to his silk pajamas, for instance; his bowling ball would also be an important personal possession, helping him to identify himself with a blue-collar culture of leisure. Yet even items such as light bulbs and radios are products of a particular society, and therefore can properly be called “cultural” as
well as “technological” artifacts. They point to Stanley’s comfortable and confident membership (however marginal, owing to his ethnicity) in the industrial-capitalist society, and to Blanche’s exclusion from it. Other, less integral industrial artifacts include the radio, the telephone and the telegraph, and Blanche’s imaginary luxury liner. Williams has interwoven the reactions of his characters to these artifacts so closely with the development of his plot and characters that we may tend to ignore the presence and potential of these items on stage. Just as a good actor makes use of the entire stage environment in order to bring meaning to a role, so too should the critic examine the whole environment Tennessee Williams envisioned in order to explore and appreciate to the fullest the author’s talent and insight.

The fact that Williams integrates technology so seamlessly, and almost invisibly, does not, however, diminish the influence of The Hairy Ape as a dramatic predecessor. Beyond the fact that a brute is a central character in both plays, A Streetcar Named Desire has significant thematic elements, including the relationship between class and technology, that echo O’Neill’s play. Stanley Kowalski’s French Quarter, like Yank’s stokers’ quarters, is a multi-ethnic pressure-cooker; Mildred’s descent below decks prefigures Blanche’s invasion of Stanley’s apartment; and the shipboard scene between Mildred and her aunt sounds the same notes of moral decay one finds in Blanche’s nautical death fantasies. Mildred’s account of her family’s rise to an industrial empire over the generations (182-83) inverts Blanche’s account of the reduction of her family fortune to a bundle of papers (284), but both stories identify the women as waste products. Both are attracted to the vitality of underclass men, although Mildred seeks excitement where Blanche seeks protection.
John Simon’s informal analysis suggests the “love-hate, and admiration-rivalry Williams must have felt for O’Neill” (Simon 556). Their artistic relationship seems to recall Ibsen’s claim that he could not write except under the hypnotic influence of Strindberg’s portrait. Both O’Neill and Williams express the nature of the alien by using immigrant stereotypes, commenting simultaneously on WASP xenophobia and on the nature of the urban "brutes" in question. In The Hairy Ape, mechanization briefly provides Yank with that which all moderns seek, and which Blanche has (with the forfeiture of Belle Reve) irretrievably lost – a place to belong. Paddy sentimentalizes and eulogizes the romantic life of a sailor, an image which contrasts with the drudgery of shoveling fuel in a closed-up compartment located well below the waterline. Blanche, too, is aware of the dissonance between her idealized visions of the Old South and the “epic fornications” of her ancestors who left her with nothing. By contrast, Stanley and the other poker players recreate the kind of rough, competitive camaraderie also enjoyed by Yank and the stokers. The stokers’ alcohol-influenced speeches, songs, and banter contrast sharply with the indifferent, bloodless sparring of Mildred and her corpulent aunt topside. Mildred’s anemic pretension confirms Yank’s scornful view of “de rich guys,” as well as Stanley’s opinion of Blanche’s pretensions: “I would like to be sincere, to touch life somewhere. [With weary bitterness] But I'm afraid I have neither the vitality nor the integrity. All that was burnt out in our stock before I was born” (182-83). The young heiress “is a girl of twenty, slender, delicate, with a pale, pretty face marred by a self-conscious expression of disdainful superiority” (180). She refers to one of the ship’s engineers as “An oaf. But a handsome, virile oaf” (186), suggesting Blanche’s early flirtation with Stanley.
Mildred, like Blanche when the stage directions first mention her, is dressed all in
white. When warned of the dirt below decks, she informs the engineer, “I have fifty
dresses like this. I will throw this one into the sea when I come back” (185). Blanche
and Mildred both blame the dissipation of their family line on the misdeeds of their an-
cestors. The difference is that Blanche represents culture without capital, while Mildred
represents capital without culture. She describes herself as a “waste product,” and ac-
cepts her aunt’s dismissal of her as a “poser.” This waste product, with a twisted aes-
thetic sense (“How the black smoke swirls black against the sky! Is it not beautiful?”
[181]) will keep up the appearance of purity for as long as her wardrobe and finances
hold out—not because she is innocent, but because she imagines herself unaffected by
life. Her grandfather was a puddler who worked his way up in the industrial world; her
journey below deck is, therefore, an attempt to witness her grandfather’s roots. Ulti-
mately Mildred cannot acknowledge the humanity she shares with an outsider, one whom
her upbringing has taught her to call “the filthy beast.” She harbors no hope of rescue,
and even cheerfully consigns herself to hell (185). She fades out of the picture, but the
story of her effect upon the “beast” continues. Williams chooses instead to expand the
confrontation between his brute and his anemic aristocrat, drawing upon their competi-
tion for space in the apartment, the affection of Stella, the attention of the poker buddies,
and, eventually, their sexuality.

The “epic fornications” of her ancestors have dissipated Blanche’s family line.
She responds to Stanley’s brutish strength, and caters to it in her first attempts to charm
him (280); she also tells Stella “maybe he’s just what we need to mix with our blood
now that we’ve lost Belle Reve” (285). Like Mildred, Blanche has a pose to maintain:
she also complains that Stanley is not a “gentleman,” and attempts to make Mitch into a beau, for whom she could comfortably play belle. Burdened by a painful personal history she would like to conceal from the world, Blanche imagines herself “sewn up in a clean white sack and dropped overboard.” Her financial and social capital spent, and her sexual capital fading, as the men gamble around the poker table, she gambols in the bedroom, trading her blanche for a pink bra and then a “deep red” bathrobe. When Stanley’s intervention turns Mitch away from her, and as yet another door closes upon her, and as her mental health further deteriorates, the content of Blanche’s fantasies reveal that her faith in the Old South has truly been shaken. While she continues to respond to the values of the southern gentry, in her last desperate stage, she actually draws away from the Southern gentry – her imaginary savior Shep Huntleigh is not a planter, but an oil millionaire.

Yank, O’Neill’s alpha male, was modeled after a tough Irish stoker named Driscoll, whom the playwright had befriended during his seafaring youth, and who had committed suicide at sea (Cole 234). O’Neill eventually removed all specific references to Yank’s ethnicity, but left an undeniable ethnic aftertaste. Williams uses the question of specific ethnicity to align both Stella and Blanche against Stanley, thus temporarily tipping audience sympathy in his favor:

Stella: Stanley is Polish, you know.
Blanche: Oh, yes. They’re something like Irish, aren’t they?
Stella: Well –

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20 Yank calls the unseen workmaster a “brass-buttoned, Belfast bum” and a “yellow mut of a Catholic-moiderin’ bastard” (191), perhaps remarks left over from Yank’s earlier Irish incarnation.
Blanche: Only not so – highbrow? *[They both laugh again in the same way]* I brought some nice clothes to meet all your lovely friends in.

Stella: I'm afraid you won't think they are lovely.

Blanche: What are they like?

Stella: They're Stanley's friends.

Blanche: Polacks?

Stella: They're a mixed lot, Blanche.

Blanche: Heterogeneous – types?

Stella: Oh, yes. Yes, types is right! (256-7)

Although Blanche brands Stanley as a newcomer, he, a World War II Army veteran, claims the right to identify himself as "a one-hundred-percent American, born and raised in the greatest country on Earth and proud as hell of it" (374). He has forged an identity for himself within his high-pressure, urban, mongrel environment – an achievement that marks him as successful and upwardly-mobile, which makes him immediately attractive to Blanche.

While Stanley can easily defend his status as an American, Blanche seizes upon the bestial elements of his behavior in order to challenge his identity as a human. While Blanche expresses outward disappointment at her sister's living arrangements and, by extraction, her choice of the man who provides them, she is equally concerned about whether Stanley will accept her; having lost her own home, she needs his approval:

"Well, I never cared for wishy-washy people. That was why, when you walked in here last night, I said to myself – 'My sister has married a man!'" (279-80). His status as a
“man” is never questioned; yet after she learns that traditional female tactics such as charm and flattery are ineffective, Blanche expresses her doubts that Stanley is a human:

He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits! Eats like one, moves like one, talks like one! . . . . Maybe he'll strike you or maybe grunt and kiss you! That is, if kisses have been discovered yet! Night falls and the other apes gather! There in the front of the cave, all grunting like him, and swilling and gnawing and hulking!

Blanche concludes her warning by imploring her sister, “In this dark march toward whatever it is we're approaching. . . . Don't — don't hang back with the brutes!” (323) Yet, as she articulates the problem, the only alternative to “hang[ing] back with the brutes” would seem to be continuing the “march,” which she describes as “dark” and directed towards the unknown. Her confused language displays her internal disorder, even as she attempts to play the “big sister” role. Despite the ineffectiveness of her words, she is the most articulate character in the play — even when she loses her mind.

Brustein notes O'Neill's largely unsuccessful struggle to express similarly deep emotions with inarticulate characters (8). In 1924 O'Neill himself wrote an analysis that seems applicable to the struggles of both Yank and Blanche:

The Hairy Ape was propaganda in the sense that it was a symbol of man, who has lost his old harmony with nature, the harmony which he used to have as an animal and has not yet acquired in a spiritual way. Thus, not being able to find it on earth nor in heaven, he's in the middle, trying to make peace, taking the “woist punches from
This idea was expressed in Yank's speech. The public saw just the stoker, not the symbol, and the symbol makes the play either important or just another play. Yank can't go forward, and so he tried to go back. This is what his shaking hands with the gorilla meant. But he can't go back to "belonging" either. (Cole 237)

Yank lives only in a world of things – a series of confining physical spaces and material structures (the stoker's bunks, furnaces, jail cells, etc.). Paddy ridicules Yank's desire to base his personal identity upon his own environment – "Is it a flesh and blood wheel of the engines you'd be?" (175). Enraged at the notion that Mildred called him an ape (although she in fact called him "the filthy beast"), Yank announces his plans to find her and attack her, hollering, "I'll show her who's a ape!" (201) Williams sets up a similar potential conflict, when Stanley overhears Blanche’s attempt to turn Stella against him. His entrance masked by a passing train, Stanley does not charge, but rather makes a tactical retreat, skillfully using the features of his natural environment to lie in wait for the proper opportunity. Unlike Yank, therefore, Stanley demonstrates not only animal strength, but also cunning, which allows him to go on the offensive (i.e., calling in favors to help him expose Blanche's past).

Blanche is not without animal associations, yet her fundamental nature is different. Although her seduction of the young man identifies her as a predator of sorts, she lacks the corresponding strength that makes Stanley a threat. As Yank is stuck between heaven and earth, Blanche is stuck between her fears of continuing the march and hanging back. Blanche also finds herself confined and hemmed in, not so much by the physical space of the Kowalski flat (which she does find distasteful), as by several things Yank
almost completely lacks – a personal history, a family history, and her belief that the world should be a place in which charm and beauty bring automatic happiness. She is entirely a creature of the civitas, the philosophical community of ideas and values – or so she wishes to believe; the collapse of Belle Reve has forced her out into the harsh reality of the physical urbs. Just as she physically claps her hands over her ears on several occasions when the truth hurts too much, so too she tries to keep from listening to the sounds within her head. Those noises become progressively louder, and are presented through powerful expressionistic elements (distorted projections, memory sound-effects) as the progress of the play unravels Blanche’s increasingly desperate attempts to “go back,” symbolically, from her nightmareish reality to the belle reve of her ideals.

Like Yank, Stella may also be said to be caught “in the middle,” sharing her sister’s cultural upbringing yet also influenced by Stanley’s brutality. Her position at the end of the play is not particularly admirable, but nevertheless, she starts and finishes better off than Blanche. The opening stage business in which Stella first “cries out in protest” when Stanley throws a package of meat to her, and then “laughs breathlessly” neatly foreshadows the Kowalskis’ violent and somewhat ritualistic foreplay. Leonard Quirino (66) observes that Stella’s medial position between reality and ideals is not one of consciously ordered balance nor of deliberate pragmatism, but rather the surrendering of her soul to a “narcotized” existence; she is stunned into acquiescence by sexual pleasure, by feminine dependency and by masculine mastery. Nevertheless, like the pragmatic matriarchs of Miller’s plays, Stella emerges as capable of the sacrifice and compromise demanded for a life which mediates between the present of the urban Quarter and the past of Belle Reve.
Yank, for his part, repeatedly fails to find any synthesis whatsoever (Zapf 37). Each time he recognizes his victimization by the physical surroundings he had mistaken for his philosophical "place" (i.e., each time he mistakes his urbs for a civitas), he re-evaluates his lot in life – an event explicitly marked by his assumption of the pose of Rodin's "The Thinker." The statue, originally intended to preside over a representation of Dante's Inferno, depicts a hulking figure crouching forward, supporting his head with one fist, while the elbow of the supporting arm rests on the opposite knee – thus creating a tension in the figure's back and leg. The awkward pose suggests that the human animal thinks only with effort. Such a figure applies to Stanley as well; he never questions his egocentric world view, nor the joy of living that he (like Yank when we first meet him) shares with his peers. According to Stella, Stanley has a bright economic future, and in the end he does get what he wants (i.e., rid of Blanche). If, in the final scene, Stella's lack of response to his sexual overtures suggests lingering effects of the encounter with Blanche, we can say with confidence that he is not hanging back with the other (less-prosperous) brutes. A product of the modern city, and therefore perfectly suited to it, he thrives in urban spaces, within a vibrant mix of cultures, from whence his strengths emerge.

To the Marxist purist, Stanley's labor in a capitalist society defines him as a victim; nevertheless, Williams has carefully set up the environment so that this stage brute is not, like Yank, a victim, but rather a rising master of industrial-capitalist society. In the November 19, 1924 New York Herald Tribune, O'Neill complained that his audiences “. . .don't understand that the whole play is expressionistic. Yank is really yourself, and myself. He is every human being. But, apparently, very few people seem to get this . . .
no one has said, "I am Yank! Yank is my own self!" (Cole 235). Instead, Yank ends up as "other," or, perhaps, at best, as the potential Neanderthal in us, something that we might be better off without. The fact that Yank, with so few redeeming qualities, nevertheless plays so sympathetically argues strongly for O'Neill's theatrical genius, even if audiences did not see themselves through the stagecraft. While Yank may be too alien for real identification, the audience is attracted to Stanley precisely because he belongs so fully and completely to the environment which most Americans know very well. Marxist critics frequently view Stanley's struggle with Blanche as a clear-cut conflict over property:

Streetcar illustrates precisely those changes that were taking place in the once-agrarian South and makes us conscious, perhaps more than any single piece of literature, of the futility of romanticizing and clinging to those days of cavaliers and cotton fields. (Bray 188)

Bray here identifies Blanche with the former slave-holding aristocracy which, according to the Marxist view of history, evolved into the merchant/middle class; Stanley, then, becomes the oppressed proletarian who strikes back against tyranny. "Williams does seem to be conscious of at least an abstract notion of Marxist dialectics in first choosing such obvious class opposites in Blanche and Stanley" (Bray 193). Stanley is not, however, a "worker" in the ordinary socialist sense. He sees himself not as a member of a socially-exploited working class, but rather as "a one hundred percent American" (110). He is "on the road a great deal" (24) — in exactly what capacity, we do not know, but in Stella's opinion, "Stanley's the only one of his crowd that's likely to get anywhere" (50).
Williams had even at one point used *The Poker Night* as the play’s working title, suggesting that he wished to foreground this image of working men who use their own private resources to struggle among themselves for the sake of personal gain — a true image of capitalism.

Irene Shaland notes that for the Soviet newspaper *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, *A Streetcar Named Desire* was a play about capitalism and decadence (2), suggesting that Soviet intellectuals did not identify Stanley with the proletariat. Stanley “travels” about in some (unspecified) position, which Stella clearly feels is superior; he clearly is not a Boss or an Owner, but neither is he obviously an oppressed worker. With whom, then, is the good Communist theatre-goer to sympathize? Director Andrei Goncharov solved that problem in his 1977 Moscow production (the first in the USSR) by changing the ending — at the last minute, Mitch snatches Blanche away from the Matron and the Doctor and carries her off (Shaland 19). Mitch works "on the precision bench in the spare parts department. At the plant Stanley travels for," according to Stella (49). Those who claim Stanley for the working class do so too hastily and on too little evidence. The major conflict, as the Soviets saw it, was between an unjustly materialistic economic system on the one hand, and a corrupt relic of class privilege on the other.

On the contrary, the technological props of the play — like the light bulb, more often “victimize” Blanche than Stanley. To Marshall McLuhan, the light bulb is the most elemental medium, for it carries no content of its own, yet it controls the perception of all objects it illuminates. In that respect, the medium (*i.e.* the light) is its own message. Blanche’s often-analyzed masking of the naked light bulb, then, illustrates her tendency to cover up the distasteful elements of the Kowalskis’ urban lifestyle, and also her strong
attachment to selective memories of her life at Belle Reve. Under this scheme, the light bulb becomes a point of reference from which we observe each of the main characters' reactions – it becomes both a literal device (a prop) and a literary device. Blanche’s recent employment as an English teacher and the lyrical notes within her dialogue identify her with literature. If her verbal talent may qualify her as an artist, she uses that art far oftener to evade than to create: “I know I fib a good deal. After all, a woman's charm is fifty percent illusion...” (41). Art, as represented by the paper lantern which conceals her age from Mitch, also enables her to deceive: “When people are soft – soft people have got to shimmer and glow – they've got to put on soft colors, the colors of butterfly wings, and put a – paper lantern over the light . . . . It isn’t enough to be soft. You've got to be soft and attractive. And I – I'm fading now!” (79). Mitch willingly masks the bulb for her in order to please her, but is furious when (having unmasked the light) he learns the whole truth: “I don't mind you being older than what I thought. But all the rest of it – Christ!” (117) he says, referring chiefly to her virtuous pretension. Like Mildred, she is a poser. Like Yank, Mitch was happier while deceived.

Stanley, on the other hand, works systematically to expose the truth about Blanche, and so remove the threat she poses, with little regard for her feelings. He punctuates his final victory by tearing down the lantern, at which Blanche “cries out as if the lantern was herself” (140). However, Stanley and light bulbs have an even more explicit past:

Stella: ... Stanley's always smashed things. Why, on our wedding night – soon as we came in here – he
snatched off one of my slippers and rushed about the
place smashing the light bulbs with it.

Blanche: He did — what?

Stella: He smashed all the light bulbs with the heel of my
slipper.

[She laughs.]

Blanche: And you — you let him? Didn't run, didn't

scream?

Stella: I was — sort of — thrilled by it. (64)

Blanche’s horror may be a virtuous pretension, or a genuine recognition of what Stella
does not discuss. The light bulb and Stanley’s vigorous, even violent, sexuality are
clearly connected; Stella gleefully recounts how her slipper participated in the destruction
of the light bulb, just as she happily participates in the repetition of the act by which
Stanley “smashed” her virginity. Stanley says he is looking forward to “when we can
make noise in the night the way we used to and get the colored lights going with no-
body’s sister behind the curtain to hear us” (109). Much as Blanche resorts to a paper
lantern to soften the harsh light of reality, Stella depends upon the “noise” and “colored
lights” to obscure the worst facts about Stanley’s nature.

For her part, Blanche is keenly aware of sexuality as a potentially dangerous ele-
ment. From her ancestors’ “epic fornications” to the nymphomania that cost her a re-
spectable teaching job, Blanche is haunted by sexuality. Her fear that she sexually failed
her homosexual husband predisposes her to question Stella’s enthusiastic (and apparently
wholesome) integration of love and sexuality:
Blanche: What you are talking about is brutal desire—just—Desire!—the name of that rattle-trap street-car that bangs through the Quarter, up one old narrow street and down another...

Stella: Haven't you ever ridden on that street-car? (70)

Stella here uses the technological image of the streetcar in word-play that latches onto her sister's hypocrisy: Blanche has indeed taken too many rides. We have already seen that Stanley uses the noise of a passing train to his own tactical advantage. The train motif returns one more time, in order to illustrate the effect of an environment that has grown still more terrible to Blanche. While she tells Mitch the story of her husband's suicide, "A locomotive is heard approaching outside. She claps her hand to her ears and crouches over" (95), a realistic and yet evocatively symbolic gesture, prefiguring her reaction to Stanley's violent confrontation. At one point, Williams had pondered ending the play with Blanche hurling herself in front of a train. This is, in fact, how Elmer Rice ended the life of his heroine in The Subway; the heroine of Machinal and the hero of Dynamo each suffer fatal encounters with titular machines. While Williams does suggestively raise Shep Huntleigh's ocean liner as a vehicle for Blanche's death fantasy, he spares us such obvious stagecraft, in favor of a subtler approach.

The music we hear on stage not only provides "slice of life" ambiance; it also highlights and evokes the emotions being portrayed on stage. For instance, the audience hears the wild "blue piano" during Blanche's encounter with the Young Man, emphasizing the passion and decadence behind Blanche's crumbling facade. Kazan's production changed the piano to a jazz ensemble: "The jazz band played somewhat raucous, sexy tunes to emphasize the present reality while the weird sound off the 'Varsouviania' played..."
on the Novachord signified Blanche’s subjectivity” (Murphy 29). When the polka tune haunts Blanche’s memory of her husband’s suicide, the music allows us inside Blanche’s head, as the music changes key and volume to punctuate her narrative. The lyrics to “Paper Moon,” which Blanche sings as Stanley exposes her life story to Stella, apply directly to Blanche’s fantasy-nourished search for a savior: “It’s a Barnum and Bailey world, / Just as phony as it can be – / But it wouldn’t be make-believe / If you’d believe in me!” Murphy discusses these elements in detail, and considers as well the musical quality of the voices of the street vendors in Kazan’s production (29-31).

The radio is, of course, another source of music, less commented upon by the critics. By now a familiar domestic appliance, in the 40s it would likely have been an important symbol of middle-class aspirations. During the first poker night, Blanche, wearing “her pink silk brassiere and white skirt in the light through the portieres” (50) catches Mitch’s attention, “rises and crosses leisurely to a small white radio and turns it on” (51). At the sound of the sensual music and the sight of Blanche, Mitch “rises,” in an important interplay which highlights his repressed passion. Later, in order to entertain Mitch, Blanche “turns the knobs on the radio and it begins to play ’Wien, Wien, nur du Allein.’” (“Vienna, Vienna, just you alone”). Blanche, here, uses the radio the same way she used the light falling through the portieres, to highlight her charms. She first uses a sensual rumba to attract Mitch’s attention, but then uses the waltz (and the song’s allusion to Austrian nobility) to play the lady. Presumably, her actions are also distracting the players from their game, so that, after she repeatedly defies his efforts to control her, Stanley feels it its time to put her in her place, throwing the radio out the window in a chest-thumping demonstration of power. This action invokes Stella’s only real outburst against
her husband—"Drunk–drunk–animal thing, you!" (57) and initiates the famous fight-and-make-up scene.

The next morning, Stanley has "gone out to get the car greased" (63) and "taken the radio to get it fixed" (64)—further examples of his control over the physical items in his possession. As far as Stella is concerned, Stanley's repentance, his physical attention to her, his reaffirmation of his need for her, and the fact that the radio "didn't land on the pavement so only one tube was smashed" makes up for Stanley's misbehavior. Her reaction to the radio incident identifies her as a yielding person, who is able to live with imperfection, weighing the advantages and disadvantages without being crushed by them, and provisionally concluding, "People have got to tolerate other people's habits, I guess" (65). The radio, then, not only provides a realistic means for introducing music onto the stage, but serves as one component of the territory Stanley must defend from Blanche. Stanley presumably purchased the radio in order to listen to it, and as such it represents a possible link to the world outside the Quarter. Here, however, he treats it merely as a convenient vehicle for his rage, perhaps expressing jealousy at Blanche's exhibitionism, or repressing his own sexual feelings aroused by her exhibitionism, just as he smashed light bulbs in order to express his sexual feelings for Stella.

The reverse is true, as well; Williams highlights Blanche's inability to articulate her internal failings by making her inept at using the telephone, as well as pen and paper. Whether she is truly as inept with technology as it appears, or whether she is subconsciously foiling her own efforts to reach Huntleigh (so that she may continue to cling to her lifeline), her actions are both comical and pathetic.

Blanche: I can't dial, I'm too—
Stella: Just dial 0.

Blanche: O?

Stella: Yes, "O" for Operator! [Blanche considers a moment; then she puts the phone down.]

Blanche: Give me a pencil. Where is a slip of paper? I've got to write it down first – the message, I mean...

[She goes to the dressing table, and grabs up a sheet of Kleenex and an eyebrow pencil for writing equipment.] (67-68)

By having Blanche try to write with articles from her toilette, Williams makes a farce out of her failing efforts to use her feminine charms in order to help her to survive in the world.21 Blanche has in fact written a letter by the beginning of the next scene, but we never know whether she mails it. She does manage to use the phone in order to call Mitch the night of her birthday party (108), but succeeds only in leaving a message for him (apparently with his mother), and afterwards, “remains by the phone with a lost, frightened look.” Williams is clearly using her technological ineptitude to emphasize her helpless isolation. By contrast, when Stanley fails in his attempt to use the telephone in order to get Stella back ("Eunice! I'll keep on ringin' until I talk with my baby!" [59]), he does not stand idly, but rather “hurls phone to floor”, as if it were responsible for keeping him from Stella. Eunice’s apparent refusal to pass the telephone to her interrupts his line of communication, but shortly after Stanley brushes technology aside in favor of physiology: with his powerful lungs, unassisted by technology, he wins Stella back easily – even

21 If the actress playing Stella responds the right way, Blanche’s defensive “the message, I mean” comes across as if Stella thinks Blanche must write down “‘O’ for Op-
if his drunken cries are barely coherent. Blanche, for her part, struggles to articulate her rescue fantasy, and fails repeatedly. To act on her strategy would expose its falsehood, and remove the life-lie which sustains her. What began as a comic technological ineptitude becomes a terrifying paralysis in the climactic confrontation:

[....She gasps and backs away from the phone. He stares at her for a count of ten. Then a clicking becomes audible from the telephone, steady and rasp[ing.]

Stanley: You left th' phone off th' hook (129).

Once again, a technological artifact bears witness to Stanley’s control and Blanche’s weakness.

The tension between Stanley and Blanche is repeatedly stoked by the fact that an artifact may mean one thing to one character and a totally different thing to another. The Kowalski’s bathroom, for instance, is Blanche’s spiritual oasis, yet the same room holds a very different meaning for Stanley: "It's not my soul, it's my kidneys I'm worried about" (102). Another conflict deals with Blanche’s trunk, containing love letters that she values more than the legal papers, and costumes which Stanley mistakes for expensive finery. His response to the furs recalls the detail that O’Neill included in order to incite Yank to violence – the “hairy ape” is enraged by a sale on monkey fur. The fact that Blanche’s furs are fake does not, however, detract from the sentimental value which she has attached to them. When Stanley grabs her stack of letters, for instance, Blanche blurts out, "The touch of your hands insults them" and "Now that you've touched them, I'll burn them... Everyone has something he won't let others touch because of their – intimate

erator,” which adds to the farcical nature of the scene.
nature. . ." (42). Immediately afterwards, however, when the subject is the Belle Reve legal papers, she reacts very differently towards those same hands:

Here all of them are, all papers! I hereby endow you with them!

Take them, peruse them – commit them to memory, even! I think that it’s wonderfully fitting that Belle Reve should finally be this bunch of old papers in your big, capable hands. (48)

Such papers hold no romance for her. In fact, they are painful reminders that the Belle Reve of the past no longer exists. Now that they have been reduced from a “beautiful dream” to merely the legal remains of the old ideal, she has no interest in them. Even though she still hopes for the oil millionaire to rescue her, only in terms of a sea voyage to her death can she permit herself to leave the cotton fields. These small details point to a consistent pattern: Stanley values (or abuses) property for its immediate utility; Blanche clings to the emotion behind the item. The unfortunate reality for Blanche is that the myth of the Old South cannot sustain her any longer, and the harsh realities of the modern world, as represented by the technological artifacts on stage, expose and destroy the meaning behind the objects Blanche treasures.

Stanley’s claim, “We’ve had this date with each other from the beginning,” (402), intended to pass partial responsibility for the rape to its victim (at that time a widely-held, unexamined cultural assumption), implicates the audience as well. The lingering effect of Brando’s display of animal magnetism virtually assures that for the first two thirds of the play, we will allow ourselves, like Stella, to be “narcotized” by the brutal forces that destroy Blanche. The absence of Huntleigh, the sympathetic emissary from the industrial world, suggests that the urbs offers only imaginary benevolence. The final image of
Blanche’s dependence upon the kindness of strangers (both figuratively and literally, as she leans on the doctor for support) marks her, like the Hairy Ape, as a prisoner – in the proverbial padded cell as well as in her own imaginary civitas.

The Cultural Messages of Everyday Gadgets:

Integrated Technology in the Staging of *Death of a Salesman* (1949)

Although early reviews hailed *Death of a Salesman* as an expression of American life, the play concerns itself only obliquely with the recent events of American history. When asked what Biff was doing during World War II, Miller once replied that he “would have been in one of the services just as his brother would be,” yet the only textual support is Happy’s passing reference to “that recipe I brought you from overseas” (99). Biff recalls with frustration the “twenty or thirty different kinds of jobs since I left home before the war,” but no references to wartime service appear in Willy’s litanies of Biff’s potential for greatness, nor in his lamentations on Biff’s failures; neither do we glimpse either Willy or Linda’s feelings about having sent their boys off to war. Since Willy is 63, he himself would have been of draft age during World War I, when Biff was a toddler – about the same age as Willy when his own father left him – yet no reference to this possibility appears in the play. For a work that held so much intellectual weight in post-war America, the omission of any reference to either war is mildly provocative, at least in retrospect. Perhaps the original audiences were so steeped in their own personal wartime memories that they inferred that Biff and Happy had much the same wartime

experience as everyone else. Although Wilder presumably found some comfort in the idea that humans are united in grief, Miller may have seen no need to revisit the emotional ground he had trod in *All My Sons* (1947). Instead, warfare and its technological echoes give way to a wholly domestic technology—the machines, inventions, and ideas populating everyday life. These technological elements are so fully integrated into the play’s settings, characters and themes, and they are at the same time so accurately representative of an important component of modern American life, that they sometimes escape critical notice.

While the war experience does not specifically characterize *Death of a Salesman*, it nevertheless significantly changed the dramatic landscape of the Forties, mostly by overturning many of the specific political conditions that had informed the artistic conscience of dramatists such as Odets in the Thirties. While the artists of the left put their zeal onto the stage, politicians of the right put theirs into the routing of Communists and their fellow-travelers— the result being the demise of the Federal Theatre Project before the war, and the rise of the HUAC hearings after it. Kermit Bloomgarden, who produced *Death of a Salesman*, Elia Kazan, who directed *Death of a Salesman*, and Lee Cobb, who created the role of Willy Loman, had all belonged to the Group Theatre, whose 1935 *Waiting for Lefty* is probably the most artistically successful of the leftist agit-props. Both Kazan and Cobb later named names before the HUAC hearings. Miller treats Cobb with some pity: “as political as my foot, [Cobb] was simply one more dust speck swept up in the thirties idealization of the Soviets, which the Depression’s disillusionment had brought on all over the West” (*Timebends* 393). As Miller sees it, Cobb remained a speck of dust in the Fifties as well. By contrast, Kazan’s cooperation with the govern-
ment earned him the lasting ire of many in the entertainment industry. Not content to identify himself with the misled masses, Kazan attached to his testimony an articulate, pre-emptive defense, arguing that silence served the Communists, and that it was his patriotic duty to inform. He supported this reactionary position in On the Waterfront (1954), just as Miller shored up his contrary opinion in The Crucible (1953).

Yet, even before theHUAC incidents, when Miller, Bloomgarden, Cobb and Kazan came together, some critics, mindful of their pink-tinged past, searched for an overtly political “message.” Bloomgarden is perhaps best remembered for his suggestion that Miller change the title to the more optimistic-sounding Free and Clear (echoing Linda’s final speech) – suggesting that Bloomgarden, having put his Group Theatre days behind him, was now more interested in selling tickets than making a shocking theatrical statements. For his part, Miller dismisses “social drama” as an Ibsenian mode adopted by radicals “whose primary interest was the exposure of capitalism for the implied benefit of socialism or communism,” and professes to finds the concept “tired and narrow... its worst effect has been to confuse a whole generation of playwrights, audiences, and theatre workers” (Martin 53). Eric Bentley, one of the play’s few harsh critics, complained that the work’s seemingly divided aspirations towards tragedy and social commentary canceled each other out. “[T]he theme of this social drama, as of most others, is the little man as victim. The theme arouses pity but no terror... The tragic catharsis reconciles us to, or persuades us to disregard, precisely those material conditions which the social drama calls our attention to” (Koon 18).

When Death of a Salesman enjoyed a successful New York revival at 50, commentators regularly reflected on the play’s status as an icon of American culture. Like-
wise, the first reviews and commentary on *Death of a Salesman* saw it as an expression of a particularly American experience (Miller, "The Playwright and the Atomic World" 34). Miller himself, however, reports that performances around the world are greeted with "instantaneous familiarity" and "an almost disappointing similarity of reaction," because audiences everywhere share the same general anxieties:

> What ultimate point can there be for a human life? What satisfaction really exists in the ideal of a comfortable life surrounded by the gadgets we strive so hard to buy? . . . Where, in all the profusion of materiality we have created around us, is the cup where the spirit may reside? (34)

American commentators did not expect his works to reflect upon these points because Americans in general "have no consciousness of art even as it has changed our tastes in furniture, in the houses we buy, in the cars we want. Only as it is transformed into things of daily use have we the least awareness of its vital functioning among us" (34). Even though he curses their unreliability, Willy puts tremendous effort into the purchase and maintenance of his own domestic arsenal. These are the values of any urbs, not just those in America; but in America, which Miller felt lacks the cultural wisdom to examine its own relationship to consumerism, the urbs is ascendant. Miller refers to the American preference for useful art in order to support his larger thesis, that American cold war policy (which offered postwar reconstruction on the condition that the receiving countries pledge political and ideological allegiance) may very well have been capable of resolving the question of material want, but it ignores fundamental questions about human spirituality — the kind of questions that he felt attracted global audiences to his work. In the case of abstract art, for example, "its impact upon our linoleum designs, our
case of abstract art, for example, “its impact upon our linoleum designs, our upholsteries, our drapes, our women’s dresses, our buildings, our packages, our advertising – these uses are quickly accepted without a thought” (35).

A theater designer such as Mielziner was quick to pick up on the examples of Geddes, Simonson, and other theater designers whose work advanced the industrial design profession; Mielziner’s design and Eliza Kazan’s direction took full advantage of the encoded cultural messages that the average citizen rarely notices. Industry leaders of the previous decades had found it harder to wield these same cultural forces to their advantage, although market conditions eventually forced them to recognize them (by employing industrial designers to make products more appealing to consumers). The history of the automobile, as invoked by the play, is a case in point. Willy’s realization that “the windshields don’t open on the new cars,” despite his having claimed to open it during his abortive business trip, sparks his first reverie, reminding him of “Nineteen-twenty-eight... when I had that red Chevy” (19). Chevrolet is a division of General Motors, which in 1924 first introduced color cars (Meilke 13). Biff and his high school girl-friends were certainly aware of the attractive power of a stylish car: (“The girls pay for you? Boy you must really be makin’ a hit. I been wondering why you polish the car so careful” [28]), yet auto lore records Henry Ford as saying “They can have any color they want so long as it’s black.” During the time when Eugene O’Neill and Elmer Rice were writing about the sensual lure of technology, Ford’s bias for pure function remained unshaken. He resented and did not understand the public’s growing interest in superfluities unrelated to performance. The unadorned Model T had been good enough to ward off any real competition for many years; however, as the auto market approached saturation,
and replacement buyers dumped used Model T's on the market, Ford lost market shares to his flashier competitors, and was soon forced to produce color models. Yielding to the demands of his more artistically-minded son Edsel, the elder Ford, who once reportedly said he would not “give five cents for all the art the world has produced,” halted production of the Model T in 1927, and later that year rolled out the new Model A to great public fanfare. Mechanically and functionally, the new car was virtually a copy of the old one, in part because “[c]ustomers now assumed that all makes of cars had reached a common level of mechanical efficiency” (Meilke 14). Yet Henry Ford learned from GM and other, more stylish, automakers, what observers called “the most expensive art lesson in history.” Ford’s eroding market share taught him that, to paraphrase Blanche Dubois, “It isn’t enough to be useful. You've got to be useful and attractive,” like the more stylish Model A.

We might trace the origin of Death of a Salesman to the author’s encounter with a particular aesthetic, and at the same time, technological cinematic experience. Miller traces the name “Loman” to Fritz Lang’s The Testament of Dr. Mabuse (1933; American release, 1943), a movie that features mechanistic cinematography and a technological plot twist in the form of a hypnotic phonograph recording that which conditions innocent people for acts of violence. A detective who discovers the phonograph in action tries to telephone the inspector, but some unseen terror interrupts him; we next see the detective in an asylum, his hands posed as if still clutching the handset, repeating the inspector’s name: “Lohmann? Lohmann? Lohmann?” To Miller, recalling this scene, the name “Loman” invokes the image of a “a terror-stricken man calling into the void for help that will never come” (Timebends 178-9). Miller claims to have latched onto the name with-
out being fully aware of its source; upon seeing the film again at a later date, "[m]y spine iced as I realized where I had gotten the name that had lodged so deep in me." If a name from this movie resonated so deeply with Miller, perhaps some of the technological details from this movie affected him as well. His autobiography devotes a half page to describing the scenes leading up to the detective’s madness, with commentary emphasizing the film’s mechanistic elements: he mentions a chase that leads “into a great printing plant,” notes that “the detective moves around the massive printing machines in the darkness,” and observes that the suspect opens “a steel door” and “goes down a flight of steel stairs.” In order for mass-hypnosis plot device to work, we must recognize that the villain’s voice is capable of working evil even when mediated by the phonograph; the recording re-embodies the absent speaker. By the same token, the detective, in his madness, locates “Lohmann” within his phantom appliance. Miller calls tragedy “the most accurately balanced portrayal of the human being in his struggle for happiness” (“Nature of Tragedy,” 11), but insists that the potential for victory must be there. “Otherwise pathos reigns, and an endless, meaningless, and essentially untrue picture of man is created — man helpless under the falling piano, man wholly lost in a universe which by its very nature is too hostile to be mastered.” The telephone is not simply an amputated ear (as Marshall McLuhan would term it), but rather an emblem of the detective’s desperate hope.

In a similar manner, Willy’s helplessness before the wire recorder marks him as obsolete, yet at the same time, worth preserving. Willy’s relationship to consumer goods, both in the present and in the Depression-era reveries, offers an insightful critique of the human soul restrained by materialistic values, which, in America, happen to be those of
corporate culture. The most obvious artifact of this technological influence is of course the wire recorder in Howard’s office, yet the play also establishes Willy in relation to such domestic items as radios, automobiles, various domestic appliances, and even the train and telephone employed by Dave Singleman. Few of these technological items actually appear onstage, but all participate in a consumer culture that, from the red Chevy of happier reveries, to the “goddam maniac” Hastings refrigerator and the mysteries of its whipped cheese, fixes Willy’s identity. The staging combines theatrical expressionism with psychological depth of characterization; the expressionistic scenes relieve the stage of possible claustrophobia, expanding the events of a single day in Willy’s life into an epic vision of his whole life.

Ultimately, the purpose of the play is not to chronicle public history, but rather to present the “certain private conversations” of the subtitle. For this reason, examining the backstory of Death of a Salesman is more worthwhile than usual because we actually see (filtered through Willy’s consciousness) portions of it acted out. Technological references to the Chevy, the refrigerator and Biff’s radio course help to generate a believable timeline of Willy Loman’s life, yet they also serve to highlight differences between Willy’s subjective view of his own past, and the audience’s more objective position. On more than one occasion, Miller suggests that Willy is not a reliable source for anything other than the expression of his own emotions – consider Linda’s unhesitating acceptance of Willy’s revised figures when he modifies his own glowing report of success in Boston (35). In the play’s most objective scenes, when Linda is alone with the boys, she shows an independence and strength that Willy’s daydreams, clouded as they are by his guilt and disappointment, do not capture. In addition, the young Bernard, when seen through
the lens of Willy’s memories, is a whining “worm” next to the football star Biff, but the adult Bernard (now athletic, as evidenced by the tennis racket) reports having lasted “at least half an hour” in a fist fight with Biff (94). One suspects that the physical difference between the boys may not have been that great. Lester A. Beaurline once asked Miller why he chose the University of Virginia as Biff’s intended school (during rehearsals it was U. Penn). Miller replied that Biff was probably only a second-rate football player; only U.Va.’s team would have been mediocre enough to have wanted him. Miller establishes much the same message when Biff, surly and disheveled, comes downstage to smoke a cigarette in his pajamas, while his father’s memories bathe him in an ironic pool of golden light.

Willy makes very few references to objective, public history. As noted previously, he seems to have no cognizance of World War II. When he reports his weekly salary in 1928, he identifies it as “the year Al Smith was nominated” (82). Smith was a candidate for the Democratic presidential ticket, who was popular with the inner-city immigrant base. When Willy examines his recent memory of opening the windshield, he traces it back to 1928, “when I had that red Chevy” (19). Colored cars had only been on the market for a few years by that time; this would have been a conspicuous status symbol – undoubtedly purchased on an installment plan. The specificity of this date (it is mentioned twice, and none other is mentioned in the play) suggests that Willy feels particularly anchored to that year, perhaps because he has a beloved material object to jog

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23 Conversation with Lester A. Beaurline, University of Virginia, March 27, 1991.
24 A Catholic, Smith was viciously attacked by various Protestant groups and the KKK, as he had been when he lost the Democratic nomination in 1924. Although Smith did carry the twelve largest cities in 1928, Republican Hoover won the White House.
his memory of that year, or perhaps because he really did — at that time in his life — have prospects of success. At any rate, the events which constitute the bulk of his hallucinatory reveries actually took place about five years after that high point in his life (see Table 1).

Table 1: Chronology of events in Willy Loman's Life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Willy's Age</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Years Ago</th>
<th>Key Events</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>1948</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Willy's suicide</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>1941</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(America enters World War II)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>1938</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Biff quits Oliver (Hap: &quot;almost ten years&quot;)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 to 53</td>
<td>38-36</td>
<td>10 to 12</td>
<td>Biff quits Oliver (Willy: &quot;ten, twelve years&quot;)</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 or 51</td>
<td>1934/5</td>
<td>10 to 12</td>
<td>Biff's radio course</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>1933</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Willy begins wondering about Biff</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>1931</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Ebbets Field Game</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>1931</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Willy earns 70/ wk; a &quot;very good&quot; take</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>1931</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Lomans buy a Hastings refrigerator</td>
<td>35, 73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>1931</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>age 17, on, nothing good happens to Biff</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Charlie buys GE refrigerator</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Willy has red Chevrolet</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>1923</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Willy supposedly earned 170/ wk</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>(America enters World War I)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>1914</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Biff born</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>1914</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Willy started w/ Frank Wagner (says Willy)</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>1912</td>
<td>about 36</td>
<td>Willy started w/ Frank Wagner (says Linda)</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>1912</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Howard Wagner born</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 or 18</td>
<td>1903/4</td>
<td>44/45</td>
<td>Willy meets (?) Singleman</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>almost 4</td>
<td>1889</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Willy's father and Ben both leave</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Highlighted information is actually provided by dialogue or stage directions. Other figures are extrapolated where possible. This chronology presumes that the play takes place in 1948, the year Miller submitted his script to his production team.

Miller's chronology of Willy's life coheres fairly well. Scrutiny of the timeline reveals only minor discrepancies, each of which could plausibly be dismissed as evidence of Willy's fading mental powers. Those discrepancies involve the dates of Biff's earlier theft from Bill Oliver, the playing of the Ebbets Field game, and Willy's start at the
Wagner company. In the first case, Happy claims that Biff's run-in with Oliver was "almost ten years ago," while Willy later says Oliver hasn't seen Biff in "ten, twelve years," but the difference seems hardly worth noting. The second quibble, the placement of the events leading up to Biff's visit to Boston, is slightly more substantial. Willy tells Howard that nothing good happened to Biff from the age of 17 on; since Biff's age is given in the stage directions and in dialogue as 34, the Ebbets field game seems to have taken place about 17 years ago. In the same conversation, however, Willy says that the cause of Biff's downfall has been haunting him for 15 years. That would either put Biff's age at 32, or it would indicate a two-year gap between the onset of Biff's depression and Willy's recognition of it (psychologically plausible, but dramatically unnecessary). The third chronological discrepancy involves Willy's claim to have worked for the Wagner company for 34 years (82); Linda's figure, "thirty-six years this March" (56), is probably more reliable, for Willy seems to have been hired around the time Howard was born, and Howard's age is given as 36 in the stage directions. All three quibbles share a two-year discrepancy. It is plausible that, as he worked on the play, Miller may have advanced Biff's age to match his own, but failed to adjust all of the play's other chronological markers. But it is equally likely that Willy is consistently foggy, or deliberately fudging, about those incidents which haunt and depress him. This obfuscation, in turn, leads us to question other situations in the play more deeply.

Willy argues that Howard has a moral obligation to him, based upon Willy's former relationship with Howard's father, but casual scrutiny problematizes even this tenuous connection. When speaking to Charlie, Willy speaks unequivocally: "I named him Howard" (97). Commentators who explore this exchange typically do not challenge
Willy's assertion. Charley seems to accept, at least rhetorically, Willy's version of this event: "You named him Howard, but you can't sell that" (97). Yet Willy is much less direct when he describes the same incident to Howard: "Your father came to me the day you were born and asked me what I thought of the name of Howard" (80). Willy's approval of the name (which had already been chosen by Frank) would have been part of his ethos of likeability and not a meaningful participation in the symbolic act of naming a child. Willy nonetheless ties the naming of Howard to the "promises [that] were made across this desk," and tries to use the incident to leverage an in-house job. He further distorts the echo of this memory into the life-sustaining image of Frank putting his hand on Willy's shoulder and promising him job security (80, 82), thereby validating himself according to his own character-based moral code. Approving the name would simply have been part of his strategy for appeasing the alpha male, much like his claim that he, too, will purchase a $150 wire recorder like Howard's.

Willy's happy reveries take place during the lean years of the Depression; the timing amplifies the poignancy of Willy's hopes for Biff, after his dreams for himself are already crushed. While Willy almost certainly did not earn the $170 per week that he claims for the year 1928, circumstantial evidence suggests that Willy felt that his prospects were considerably better in the Twenties. Earlier in that decade, the apartment-dwelling, subway-riding Mr. Zero was replaced by an adding machine, yet Willy would have been riding his red Chevy to and from his house in the country. Nevertheless, a few years later, by the era of the reveries, he is an irritable "walrus" who must work 10 or 12 hour days to bring home a shrinking paycheck. Chevrolet is a division of General Motors, which in the Twenties made headway against Ford not only by designing more at-
tractive cars, but by capitalizing upon consumer impulse purchases — GM accepted purchases on credit, long before Ford did. Since Willy eventually sells his Chevrolet back to a dealer (19) (presumably trading it in for a more practical car), we can speculate that he was unable to meet his car payments. The loss of the car is, then, an important reference point that establishes Willy’s growing awareness that he will not end up living the luxurious life of Dave Singleman. This awareness leads to his increased reliance upon vicarious success through Biff. Willy’s view of Frank with his hand on his shoulder, making a benevolent promise, is precisely replicated in Biff’s initial image of Bill Oliver (26). Although Biff manages to escape from his own lies, Willy desperately clings to the image of his son under the affectionate protection of a powerful mentor: “Betcha. he threw his arm around you” (108).

Despite the lip service he plays to being “liked,” Willy’s own public behavior is rarely likeable. Even Linda notes that he “isn’t the finest character that ever lived.” Through his own actions, he teaches his boys to steal, fight, and mistreat women. He recalls with delight what appears to be a trick played against the dealer regarding the value of the Chevy (19), he approves of Biff’s petty thefts, and he even orders the boys to steal lumber in order to impress Ben. Willy ridicules Bernard, threatens Charley, claims to have punched another salesman, and gives his boys a punching bag. Hap claims to be a friend of the merchandising manager (23), but also longs to outbox him — a relationship that reflects Willy’s aggression towards his “only friend,” Charley. His actions are designed to provide his boys with defenses against other people practicing the same competitive value system he promotes; yet, ironically, these are the very people by whom he wishes so desperately to be “liked.” The dichotomy appears again in his statement to
Linda that, when out on the road, he sometimes wants to “kiss the life out of you” (38), and a little later when he “suddenly grabs [the Woman] and kisses her roughly” (39).

Although one of Biff’s most redeeming qualities is his sensitivity towards Willy’s mistreatment of Linda, the boys in general mirror their father’s behavior. In his youth, Biff had attracted women with help from Willy’s red Chevy (six or seven years old by this time), and he later mentions an attempt to seduce Oliver’s secretary. Like Oliver’s unseen secretary, Willy’s Woman is the gatekeeper to the buyers. Despite the Woman’s praise of Willy’s sense of humor, the regular supply of nylons with which he supplies her is certainly central to their relationship, for his humor is merely the stereotypical crudity of a traveling salesman (as evidenced when he slaps her rear and says “bottoms up!” [39]). Willy’s attitude towards women is reflected in the attitudes of his sons. As a teenager, Biff is “too rough with the girls” (40), while as an adult, Hap makes a habit of sleeping with his managers’ fiancées just before their weddings; although he has “what I always wanted. My own apartment, a car, plenty of women,” yet “still, goddammit, I’m lonely” (23). The boys are failures because Willy’s fathering is misguided. Willy’s personal burden, then, is not simply an awareness that the old rules of comradeship and personality no longer apply in a changing world, but rather, confronted with his own imminent failure, he must invent the good old days in order to validate his value system, hiding from the fact that the values he praises in his sons are the very values which made him a failure.

At first glance, despite the rootlessness of his sons and a work schedule that leaves him “tired to the death” (13), nothing appears extravagant or irresponsible in Willy’s desire to maintain a comfortable middle-class life. While Thornton Wilder lion-
izes Mr. Antrobus’s efforts on behalf of his personified books, Miller quietly encodes a critique of the consumer lifestyle in the appliances Willy works so hard to maintain: “They time them so when you finally paid for them, they’re used up” (73). Although he is frustrated in his efforts to support his arsenal of domestic appliances, he does not question the their innate desirability, and continues to surround himself with possessions. Like labor activists of the Thirties, he accepts technology as a potential good, so long as he can claim it for himself. Just as Williams uses interactions with ordinary technological items to expose the inner lives of his characters, Miller’s portrayal of domestic conveniences is vital to our understanding of Willy’s middle-class identity. Like Blanche, Willy is aware of his fading command of personal qualities that, according to their respective world views, should guarantee happiness. His productive and fruitful attention to the physical house contrasts with his moral incompetence as a member of a household. The house dominates the psychology of the protagonist, just as its physical representation sets the tone of the play. He mourns the loss of the country which used to surround the house, and promises Linda that they will one day retire to a rustic setting (72). Willy, in his narrow-minded efforts to compete with Charlie, and his desire to equip his boys to “lick the civilized world” (64), has expended dwindling energies paying for and maintaining a small arsenal of domestic appliances, leaving the physical structure devoid of cultural meaning. Although of solid construction, the house contains stolen materials. A physically well-built component of the urbs, it is bland and unassuming; without a continuation of the Loman family to form a civitas, the house points towards no values external to itself. By wearing his slippers into the garden, where he performs a symbolic act of regeneration, Willy expands his interior space, attempting communion with his pioneer
father; yet in order to perform the ritual, he must leave the house, just as his own father did. Willy’s handiwork preserves the house, yet his parental incompetence and his marital infidelity undermine the home; Linda predicts the boys will one day “knock on the door and there’ll be strange people here” (55). Even as Willy compliments himself for weathering a 25-year mortgage, he asks himself, “What purpose? Some stranger’ll come along, move in, and that’s that. If only Biff would take this house, and raise a family...” (74). In McLuhan’s terms, the house becomes its own message.

At the first rehearsal, designer Jo Mielziner told the assembled company that the shallow stage of the Morosco Theatre dictated the final design: “Had we a really deep stage, we might have used a turntable... or an elevator stage... But the limited resources had compelled us to create a relatively simple and — who knows? — perhaps all the more effective solution to Salesman” (Mielziner 49). The problem to which Mielziner refers involved managing the large number of locales required by the original script, including multiple rooms and an exterior, during two different time periods, as well as such ancillary spaces as a hotel room, two different offices, the back room of a restaurant, and the corner of a graveyard. Although the idea of a revolving set seems to have been an attractive possibility, Mielziner ultimately suggested that Kazan play all the city and flashback sequences on an apron, so that the action could proceed smoothly, without blackouts. The solution required some technological ingenuity. Drawing upon the lighting techniques of “the great trio of Robert Edmund Jones, Norman Bel Geddes and Lee

25 For the 1999 Broadway revival, Mark Wendland depicted the house “as moving platforms that shift into and out of focus, just as Willy himself is unable to remain fixed in an immediate reality” (Ben Brantley, NYT, February 11). These revolving elements caused some technical difficulties in the Chicago tryout, but most reviewers generally
Simonson” (34), Mielziner bathed the memory scenes in green foliage, and painted a scrim that could be back-lighted to bring up the oppressive silhouette of the apartment buildings. Mielziner had initially designed a mechanism to make a small gravestone pop out of the forestage for the requiem, but upon learning that union rules would have required them to hire a full-time stagehand who would do nothing but provide this one effect, Kazan agreed to forego it in favor of a projection of autumn leaves. When coupled with the new transition that Miller wrote (in which the funeral party moves en masse through the fourth wall and onto the forestage), the absence of the proposed gravestone changed the dynamics of the scene – instead of staring at a grave, Linda delivers her final lines into the front rows, where audience members are seated at approximately the level of Willy’s coffin.

To present a smooth transition into Willy’s first reverie, Mielziner built miniature elevators under the boys’ beds, so that actors could be invisibly lowered out from under stiffened bedcovers in time to make their appearance as teenagers. In order to facilitate other smooth transitions, Miller revised other scenes accordingly, reducing the number of props that would have to be brought on for the office scenes. Kazan’s response was “Sure, let’s cut this down to the bone” (46). As Mielziner notes, “whatever props there were would have to be highly significant in character” (36). According to Murphy, the scarcity of props “helped to foreground the few objects that did appear, encouraging the audience to perceive their symbolic significance” (Death of a Salesman 27). While the script specifies that Biff tosses around a football in Willy’s reverie, Kazan suggested that the adult Biff find a deflated football in the trunk; the actor’s physical relationship with

accepted the innovation.
the prop helped convey Biff’s disillusionment (communicated when the actor ceremoniously dumped the football back into the trunk). In a similar way, Miller had specified some business with Willy’s coat (Linda mentions sewing the lining of the coat, for example, in order to prepare him for his meeting with Howard), but Kazan considerably expanded the significance of that object. During a confrontation with Biff, Linda behaved almost as if the coat, resting on the back of a kitchen chair, was the man himself. When Biff leaned aggressively on the back of the chair, rumpling the coat, Linda smoothed it out, even caressed it, as she defended her husband against Biff’s accusations (36). Later, when Bernard offers a cigarette, “Willy took his silver cigarette case and simply looked at it, forgetting to take a cigarette, signifying simultaneously Bernard’s success and Biff’s failure, Willy’s bewilderment by both of these, and Willy’s inability to accept them as real” (43).

Willy’s eleventh-hour efforts to plant seeds suggest a motion away from machinery, and towards the pioneer wilderness he barely remembers from riding in his father’s wagon. Through the Wagner boy’s recitation of the state capitals, the wire recorder heralds the new generation of urban Wagners poised to inherit a national landscape that had once been the domain of pioneers like Willy’s father. Howard’s entrance during Linda’s telephone conversation with Biff is an expressionistic device. Further, the domestic scene played on the wire recorder mimics the effect of Hamlet’s dumb show, catching the conscience of the unkingly salesman, emphasizing Willy’s disenfranchisement. The recording offers a glimpse into Howard’s household, which echoes the Loman household in several ways, yet bests it all the same. With a boyish wink, Howard shows off the recording of himself whistling; yet Happy calls Biff immature for whistling in an elevator.
In lines recalling Willy’s habitual bullying of Linda, Howard forces his wife before the microphone; although the daughter whistled cheerfully, the wife, “shyly, beaten,” speaks little more than “Hello.” When Howard snaps off the machine and announces, “That was my wife” (78), the action recalls Willy’s desire to dominate and control Linda’s voice, even when she is complying with his wishes.

If Willy is Narcissus, entranced by his own reflection in the gleaming exterior of his red Chevy, in the hopes he projects upon Biff, and in the “smile and a shoeshine” that drives the life of a salesman, then Linda is Echo, the nymph who pines for want of Narcissus’s love. Like Echo, Linda is unable to communicate with the self-absorbed man she loves. In mythology, Echo is so weakened by her loss that she speaks only by borrowing words from her interlocutors. In Willy’s presence, Linda attempts to steer family discussions by echoing parts of conversations, often re-iterating points that she hopes will put him in a good mood. The echo motif features in other expressionistic elements such as The Woman’s laughter, the haunting depiction of Willy trying to hold down simultaneous conversations with Charlie and Ben, and the distorted echo of his memories. In the Narcissus myth, McLuhan sees a cautionary tale about mediated life; he suggests that the handsome youth would not have been so mesmerized (narcotized?) by the image in the water if he had known it was not real. By extension, then, Willy is not in love with himself (as is the popular interpretation of the Narcissus myth), but incapable of even recognizing himself, even when surrounded by reflections of his own image: “there’s more of him in that front stoop than in all the sales he ever made” (138).

26 In order to give Biff and Happy time for a costume change, “Miller expanded Willy’s monologue about polishing the car by several minutes” (Murphy, Death of a
His repetition of the crowd's cheer, "Loman! Loman! Loman!" reveals his own narcissistic love of his son (whose football trophy is in Willy's bedroom), and at the same time recalls the desperate cry of the terrified man into a non-existent telephone. Willy unwittingly banishes a real radio (the one in his car during 1948) to a similar phantom zone, when he claims that he worries about missing radio shows, but never thinks to turn on the radio.27 This mental fumble provides Howard with an opening to fire the long-time employee. When Willy attempts to bail out of his negotiations, announcing his intention to resume his old road job, Howard refuses. At this point in the action, Howard is rolling up the power cord (83). This action could appear vaguely threatening, with the coils perhaps suggesting a noose; as such, the wire recorder is implicated in the crushing of Willy's soul. Yet Howard does not see the wire recorder as any kind of threat; to him, it is a domestic amusement, even a means to display his attachment to his family. When Howard leaves Willy alone in the office, however, the relationship between man and machine changes. While Willy invokes the memory of his former boss, the chair behind the desk glows with a ghostly light, seeming to signal the beginning of another hallucinatory reverie (Miller recalls that the design team spent an entire afternoon lighting that chair [Timebends 190]). But instead of successfully conjuring up a comforting vision of Howard's father, Willy accidentally activates the monotonous voice of Howard's son, who "nasally, childishly"(83) recites the state capitals. Figuratively speaking, the boy has merged with the machine. Just as the apartment buildings intrude upon what has been Willy's rural retreat, the boy-machine delineates and codifies the very national land-

Salesman 24), which further enhanced the importance of the vehicle.

27 The first car radio, the Motorola, was invented in 1929. His lapse here is en-
scape where Willy's and his father used to roam in their pioneer wagon. It is not so much the machine, but rather Howard's preoccupation with his family as mediated by the machine, that dehumanizes both him and Willy in this scene.

The verb "record" comes from the Latin recordari, "to recollect." Its components re- and cor literally mean "to bring back to heart," which was once thought to be the seat of both emotions and thought. Willy prefers his own version of his personal history, as opposed to the harsh truth he encounters in Howard's office. Willy's hallucinations, like the overlapping, distorted sounds of an echo, are distortions of the "private conversations" of the play's subtitle; yet the wire recorder objectively preserves and repeats the "private conversations" of Howard's family, making them public, emphasizing Willy's exclusion from the bond he imagines he once enjoyed with Howard's father, as well as his exclusion from the lives of his own boys (and their nonexistent children). Willy's proud refusal to admit that his boys are failures offers Howard an opportunity to shirk moral responsibility for firing him (since a man with two fine sons cannot possibly need the job as much as Willy does). At the same time, the scene reveals that Howard is precisely the boyishly likeable (he whistles for his children and lets them play with his new toy) yet paradoxically ruthless businessman Willy had prepared his boys to become. Willy calls the wire recorder a "wonderful machine" and announces that he is "definitely going to get one" (78). These are a salesman's strategic moves to establish a rapport with his "mark," but the scene does briefly align the two men in their spoken admiration of the device.

Based on German technology plundered by the Allies, the wire recorder represented a tremendous technological advance over existing dictation machines, which had
tirely consistent – the 1928 Chevy of his hallucinations would not have had a radio.
all been based upon the Edison phonograph. By 1891, there were 1,740 office dictation machines in use (Morton 6). While American businessmen have a cultural weakness for newfangled gadgets, the Edison system had several drawbacks, not the least of which was the requirement for three separate machines. The executive’s recording machine (called a “dictator”) lacked the ability to record over mistakes (implying that the executive never made any). The secretary’s model was incapable of recording (implying that she would never say anything worth preserving).28 A third machine, typically operated by office boys, resurfaced the wax cylinders for reuse. While each machine was designed to fit the existing power structure, paradoxically, their adoption threatened that very structure.

Entrenched power and gender roles shaped the marketing of the Edison recorder during the Thirties, when salesmen offered multiple, sometimes conflicting, sales pitches to different groups within the corporate hierarchy, in order to convince them of the value of the Edison system. Efficiency-minded managers were told that dictation machines never took breaks, didn’t waste time in chit-chat, and didn’t go home promptly at 5pm. Instead of supplying every executive with a secretary, it was cheaper to supply many dictation machines, and centralize the transcription operation. While such a plan might look good to the upper-level executive whose position was already secure, “The prospect of purchasing and using a dictation machine instead of having a secretary threatened one of

28 In R.U.R., an executive dictates a complete letter to a Robot, who listens to the whole letter with her hands poised over the typewriter; when the letter is finished, the Robot types it in full. Čapek appears to be addressing one of the inefficiencies of the Edison system, which required transcribers to listen to each recording twice; once in order to estimate the length of the document (in order to center it properly on the page) and once more in order to transcribe the text. Čapek further posits a market niche for female Robots because people are used to relating to women in certain office roles. Robots were intended to free men and women for loftier tasks, but some gendered kinds of drudgery
the most visible signs of corporate success available to many men” (Morton 18). A man with a recorder on his desk was branded as not important enough to have a personal secretary; hence, rising executives had little incentive to adopt the machinery. Marketers also attempted to persuade the secretaries of the benefits of dictation systems. Such machines would, they were promised, free them from drudgery, turning them into “junior executives” (18). While recent graduates from secretarial colleges were well-equipped to handle the latest office technology, secretaries aspired to be promoted out of the dictation pools, and into a position as a personal assistant. In summary, although the machines were perfectly capable of delivering the performance that the salesmen promised, both the bosses and the secretaries preferred to work with each other.

As its name implies, the wire recorder used, not magnetic tape, but a thin metal thread. Not a very sensitive recording medium, the wire needed to move quickly past the recording head in order to store the audio signal; the result was a noisy machine. The machines were also unstable – one bump could dislodge the wire, instantly unspooling yards of it; one can imagine it turning into something like a desktop weed-whacker.\(^29\) Given all these circumstances, Willy’s terror before this particular machine appears less symbolic of his oppression by mechanized society, and more psychologically realistic. Recording machines were initially popular with some executives who felt comfortable composing documents orally; others, typically the older executives, suffered from “mi-

\(^{29}\) According to one collector’s website, “One false move and 1000 feet of this thread would fly off the take-up reel of the machine and get into a tangle closely resembling a bird’s nest. The result of this common occurrence would be a complete loss of the recording because it was impossible to untangle the mess.”

<http://intotem.buffnet.net/bhw/sounds/introduction.htm>
crophone fright,” or felt silly shouting at a box. The business recording industry aimed to “convince those in the most resistant market segment, the top managers, that the use of the dictating machine would be enjoyable, that it would enhance their jobs, and that it was the ‘modern’ way to create correspondence” (2). According to Morton, marketing campaigns “sometimes portrayed male resistance in ways that made the managers and executives of America’s largest corporations look like cowards when faced with a recording device” (35). Miller’s original audience may, then, have been used to the image of an incompetent businessman frightened by a recorder.

The appearance of several new, relatively inexpensive wire recorders created a huge demand in 1947 and 1948, around the time Miller was composing his script. Units flew off the shelves, but not into offices; instead, they went into the homes of gadget-loving consumers like Howard – thus providing Miller with a means to contrast Willy’s subjective hallucinations with an “objective” record of a scene from Howard’s enviable domestic life. As with the Edison cylinder, proper use of the wire recorder presupposes the services of a servant: “So you tell the maid to turn on the radio when Jack Benny comes on, and this automatically goes on with the radio... and you get yourself a Coke and sit down, throw the switch, and there’s Jack Benny’s program in the middle of the night!” (78). At one point Howard complains that the maid “kicked the plug out” (77) during the recording session. Recall also that Howard’s wife is barely able to say anything into the machine. Encoded within the wire recording of Howard’s family, we can perhaps glimpse some vestiges of class- and gender-based resistance to technology. As an
objective observer and preserver of information, the wire recorder indicts Willy for his complicity in the system that discards him when he is no longer productive.30

While the wire-recorder is presented as an office tool with domestic play value, one other significant technological device is the quintessence of domesticity. Although Mary McCarthy ridiculed domestic sets "filled with installment-plan furniture," Mielziner feels that "when an object like a hand prop, a costume, or even a light becomes very close to an actor, he feels that 'attention must be paid'" (44). Given the stark stage setting, "One thing in particular loomed large: the icebox" (44). Likewise, in Timebends, the caption to a photo of Mielziner's set refers to "its six-foot bedroom, tiny kitchen table, and lone appliance, the hated refrigerator."

The refrigerator was the most realistic, most prominent element of Mielziner's set.

One of the best references in my library is not a work on theatre history or the fine arts; it is a torn and tattered collection of old Sears, Roebuck catalogues. . . . I found a picture of what I had remembered as a refrigerator typical of the time — cast-iron Chippen-dale-type legs that were rather thin and ridiculous-looking, and condensation coils covered in white enamel and perched on top of

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30 In the recording, Howard’s son refers to a well-known advertising slogan, “Bulova watch time.” The Bulova Watch Co. has the distinction of producing both the first official commercial radio spot (1926) and the first official commercial television advertisement (1941). Miller fittingly features this cutting-edge company on Howard’s new machine; yet, by the time Death of a Salesman was produced, wire recorders were already being pushed onto the scrap heap of technological history, thanks to advances in magnetic tape.
the cabinet, looking for all the world like a mechanistic wedding

cake. (Mielziner 36).

The “wedding cake” refrigerator was likely the General Electric “monitor-top” refrigerator, introduced in 1926. The set as eventually built actually featured a much less distinctive model, but Mielziner’s apparent reference to the “monitor-top” is worth further examination. Such a refrigerator is clearly visible in the charcoal sketches that he describes as “First note of final idea for stage set” (Mielziner 29), as well as the more detailed watercolors (146, 147).

Nicknamed for its resemblance to the Civil War ironclad U.S.S. Monitor, the G.E. “monitor” featured a cylindrical grille which housed the condenser coils, on top of a squat cabinet resembling a porcelain bank safe. Because Mielziner found the design ridiculous, he may have included it in order to suggest that the Lomans were misguided in their purchase. Yet the monitor-top was a General Electric; in the script, it is Charlie who “bought a General Electric and it’s twenty years old and it’s still good, that son-of-a-bitch” (73). In an earlier version of the script, the topic of the refrigerator comes very close to causing Linda to attack Willy: “(angering, almost bursting out) But would you pay for a General Electric?” (Murphy, Miller 45). Murphy explains that, as Linda’s character clarified, Miller evidently decided that this glimpse into Linda’s inner turmoil was unnecessary. Of the G.E. “monitor top,” Meilke argues that “[a] more functional-looking object could not be imagined. The heavy box indicated insulation, while the condenser witnessed visually that the unit was not an icebox but a mechanical refrigerator” (103).31

31 An “icebox” is properly applied to an insulated compartment resembling a bank safe, cooled by a block of ice from a local supplier. A refrigerator was a mechanical icebox.
In an age before frozen or pre-packaged food, when daily trips to market formed the basis of the local economy, the refrigerator was a luxury item. Two-thirds of Pittsburgh households had washing machines by 1931, but only 13% had a refrigerator (Meilke 8). Although Murphy identifies the Loman refrigerator as a reproduction of a typical model from the 1929 Sears catalogue (Miller 27), during the time of Willy's first reverie, c. 1933, Willy and Linda have a "brand new" refrigerator (35). In the present day, however, Willy faces "one more payment on the refrigerator" and complains, "I told you we should have bought a well-advertised machine" (73). The Lomans would appear to be still paying off this foolish purchase (or at least the most recent repairs), fifteen or seventeen years later. If so, Willy's frustration at Charley's superior consumer sense is understandable. We have already seen how Willy was quick to buy a colored car, from a manufacturer that distinguished itself by selling on credit. Charley's pragmatism asserts itself in his purchase of the General Electric. His further successes at playing cards, running his business, and even being a good friend have been a constant source of annoyance to Willy, who sees Charlie, despite his successes, as a ridiculous figure in knickers (who might look even more ridiculous pulling food out of a "monitor-top" refrigerator). Bernard's pleading a case before the Supreme Court is, like Charlie's success at choosing the "right" refrigerator, is one more testament to Willy's inadequacy.

Mielziner's casual reference to the Loman's appliance as an "icebox" conflates the terms, defining the new technology in terms of the old, much like popular usage of transitional terms such as "electric lamp," "horseless carriage," or "wireless [radio]". Early radios, for example, inherited their particular shape from the phonographs whose function they were emulating. Victrolas featured cabinets modeled after the elaborate cases used for the storage of sheet music (Geddes, Horizons 240).
Like the refrigerator, Oliver's fountain pen is a machine with cultural meaning; Biff's theft underlines the Loman family's misunderstanding of the nature of competition. Willy does not lose his job to a machine; he loses it because he can no longer compete with his fellow salesmen. In an effort to emulate the survival instincts of his father and brother, Willy teaches his boys to steal and bully. The young Biff steals in order to court his father's approval: the football will help him be a better player, and the materials stolen from the building site will help improve the house, while the fearlessness of the action will impress Uncle Ben. Biff would have been about 24 when he stole sporting goods from Oliver – too old for a boyish prank. During his Western travels, removed from his father's immediate influence, Biff still continues his thievery, serving jail time for stealing a suit – an artifact from his father's business world.32 Howard's decision to fire Willy is, of course, informed by the very principles Willy taught to Biff. Yet the most telling evidence of Biff's confusion comes when, angered by Oliver's refusal to see him, Biff manages to repress a violent impulse, but only because he commits an impulsive theft instead: "The next thing I know, I'm in his office - paneled walls, everything. I can't explain it. I - Hap, I took his fountain pen" (104). Confirming his own earlier transgressions against Oliver's authority and property, Biff's theft dooms Happy's already far-fetched "Florida Idea." Biff later rejects this pen, waving it in Willy's face as a concrete sign of why he cannot expect Oliver's help.

32 Murphy notes that in an earlier draft of the play, Biff says that he stole a suit that is Willy's size (Miller: Death of a Salesman 50). Miller muted this rather obvious symbolism, in order to make the presentation of the rubber pipe the climax of the scene, rather than the revelation that Biff lied about his appointment with Oliver.
A few years after *Death of a Salesman* was produced, inexpensive pressurized ball-points would flood the market and become workplace staples, but in 1948, a businessman’s fountain pen, valuable not only as an office tool but also a status symbol, was as much a part of his public professional identity as his watch or his briefcase. A Biff of today might target an executive’s digital telephone or electronic organizer. As we gather from Happy’s initial response (“Geez, did he catch you?”), and Willy’s desperate lapse into another hallucination, Biff has committed an unforgivable assault – seizing the phallic totem of a man whose business is balls. Only after destroying his last hopes for a meeting with Oliver can Biff recognize his own values: “I saw the things that I love in this world. The work and the food and time to sit and smoke. And I looked at the pen and said to myself, what the hell am I grabbing this for?” (132). Yet another mark of Kazan’s brilliant direction is making Happy go back and pick the pen up off the floor before leaving the restaurant with the girls (Murphy, *Miller: Death of a Salesman* 43); the action prefigures his graveside refusal to bury the Loman dream.

The fountain pen, technologically significant for its ability to hold fast-drying ink (thus reducing pen-dipping and page-smearing) and dispense it without clotting (thus protecting expensive business clothes), was a tremendous improvement over open ink wells. Competing marketers lost no opportunity to distinguish themselves by promoting premium models, such as Oliver’s luxurious gold version. In his travels just before writing *Death of a Salesman*, Miller observed the special significance Italians attached to the (American) Parker fountain pen, specifically noting an eccentric writer who had no use for socks, underwear, or other mundane possessions, but who wrote with a Parker pen (*Timebends* 160-61). An Italian general roped Miller into a lunch date, where he seems
to have tried to secure Miller’s aid in attaining a supply of genuine Parkers, in order to
deliver Naples from a flood of cheap fakes (165). The fountain pen was one of many
consumer products that accrued cultural cachet in the Twenties. Along with disposable
razors and canned foods, the fountain pen “created a feeling of increased tempo” in
American society (Meilke 8). Even if they were sold at a relatively low profit rate, they
created a constant need for a supply of ink. In a similar way, factory-rolled cigarettes and
store-bought bread\(^{33}\) established a steady consumer demand where there was little before.

While Oliver’s pen is gold — a luxury model — Parker gained mainstream market
share in the early Twenties with the introduction of its “Big Red” fountain pen, which
was novel for its color, and signaled one of the first major efforts of manufacturers to lure
the general consumer by hyping stylistic frills rather than purely functional details. Just as
Ford followed GM’s lead in designing color cars, by 1924, rival Schaeffer pens started
appearing in a rainbow of colors. That the public would select a particular consumer item
because it was more attractive than another presupposes the notion that mechanical goods
could be, in some manner, attractive, rather than simply useful. Contrasted against the
extremely negative literary vision of machinery presented in the early American expres-
sionist plays, the very notion that a machine could be more than functional and efficient,
but could also seduce the consumer, is particularly notable.

\(^{33}\) In Willy Loman’s seminal year of 1928, Otto Frederick Rohwedder perfected a
machine to slice and wrap bread; within a few years, the phrase “the best thing since
sliced bread” was as ubiquitous as the bread slices themselves. His machine was remark-
able not simply because it sliced the bread, but because it kept the slices fresh by imme-
diately wrapping the loaf in plastic. During the war, however, the production of sliced
bread was rationed out of existence as an unproductive use of factory resources.
We should also reflect, by way of fountain pens, refrigerators, and red Chevys, on the implications of consumerism, as raised by Miller’s play. With so many essentially similar products being pushed in a saturated market, manufacturers depended upon courting public tastes, or, better yet, dictating them. The growth economy of the Twenties was fueled by an ever-increasing number of buyers; yet, as various markets approached saturation, companies were forced to find new ways to attract repeat business from established customers. Manufacturers turned to a rising group of technically-inclined artists, whose services helped the business world tap into the general public’s interest in modernity, progress, and the technical utopias of tomorrow. When faced with a choice among various competing brands of comparable quality, consumers felt lost without clues to help them decide which products are superior. Pressured by the need to find a large consumer market (made up of regular, repeat customers), manufacturers gradually trained the public to accept the modern consumer lifestyle that informs *Death of a Salesman*. Despite Willy’s moving protest, a manufacturing economy presupposes the fact that people can and will thoughtlessly “eat the orange and throw the peel away” (82). Willy is, at the same time, the unfortunate casualty of the first generation of thinking consumers—that is, demanding, selective buyers with few unmet needs.

According to Walter Kerr, the original audience reacted to the message of *Death of a Salesman* in many ways: “There were people who were outraged by it, there were people who were deeply moved by it, there was the man who was heard to mutter, in the men’s room during intermission, ‘Well, that New England territory never was any good’” (How Not to Write a Play 57). The play’s obvious social message is an economic lecture about the effects of “planned obsolescence.” On other occasions, however, Willy’s reac-
tions towards machines suggest enthusiasm, or even affection (as when he recalls Biff's correspondence courses, or simonizing the Chevy). In the form of the train and the telephone, technology also features in the mythology Willy constructs around Dave Singleman, who died “the death of a salesman” at age 84. Perhaps he died when Willy was 18 or 19, which is how old he was in the narrative which he attempts to tell Howard. Linda does, at one point, refer to Singleman in the present tense: “there’s a man eighty-four years old” (86). The idea of Singleman is, like the idea of Linda’s unflagging support, a constant within Willy’s psyche; it is therefore plausible that Singleman died before Linda had ever heard of him. While there is insufficient textual evidence to pin down the date of Singleman’s death, the earlier we place it, the more remarkable is his ability to perform his work by telephone.

Willy’s admiration for this “single man” and also for Ben (both of whom have, in death, achieved mythical proportions in Willy’s mind) diminishes the value of his own achievements, which are not in selling, but rather in the care and maintenance of his house. Recall the story of the old farmer, who seems to have no qualms about using a bucket or shovel, but who rejected the irrigation machine: “It is not that I do not know of such things; I am ashamed to use them” (McLuhan, Understanding Media 63). Inheriting his father’s inventiveness and dexterity, Willy is a “happy man with a batch of cement” (138). Like McLuhan, he sees a tool as an extension of human effort – not a replacement for it: “A man who can’t handle tools is not a man” (44). In his home environment, the jobs he performs with the help of tools turn out well, yet the machines he purchases to ease his labor fail him. Being on the road so much, he has little time to enjoy his possessions, much less tinker with them; instead, he must pay others to maintain his equipment,
which leads to additional bills and even longer work hours. Trapped in a downward spiral, he can only dream of using machines to serve him as they served Singleman. His veneration of Singleman’s green velvet slippers infuses a sense of decadent wonder to the memory of this traveling salesman who, paradoxically, never leaves his hotel room.\(^{34}\)

Willy’s pleasure at the thought of conducting his own business in this manner is akin to Howard’s delight in controlling Jack Benny with the wire recorder. Nevertheless, unlike the old farmer who sees value in work, Willy does not seek fulfillment on the land or out of doors, as his own father and his own son have done; instead, he queries the hallucinatory Ben for his “secret,” or clings to the image of his sons, “built like Adonises,” whose “personal attractiveness” is bound to emerge. Seeking the $20,000 that will finally show the world what his boys can achieve, in order to call the god forth from the machine, Willy turns once again to his car— not the lovingly simonized red Chevy of 1928, but a beat-up Studebaker—to help his sons cheat their way into the illusory *civitas* of “liked” men who rule the *urbs*.

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\(^{34}\) A recent advertising campaign for a national hotel chain featured a traveler tossing a robe to the ground and conducting his business nude, empowered by his fully-wired executive suite.
7. Conclusion

American dramatists writing between the World Wars were not the first to address issues of industrialism and technology. In England and much of northern America, the Industrial Revolution had been scrutinized in poetry, in prose, and on the stage (e.g. the Victorian factory melodrama) for most of the previous century. But technology again assumes a special cultural importance in the era from 1920-1950 — partly because two world wars showcase the machine in all its glory and horror, and partly because, during those decades, increasing human contact with technology — whether in the form of electric street lights, automobiles, factory-related labor, or domestic appliances — demystified the machine, across all classes and sectors of society, thus making technology the dominant index to the American dream. Presuming that such social change cannot take place without affecting the human soul, we look to artists to acknowledge and, when appropriate, confront that change. The plays included in this study — by O'Neill, Rice, Treadwell, Odets, Hall-Rogers, Luce, Wilder, Miller, and Williams — query the complex relationship between soul and society in a technological age. Over three decades, dramatists illustrate three distinct stages in the individual's responses to the machine: first, self-destructive hostility; second, socialized acceptance, and finally, a full, deeply intimate integration. At the end of the period under investigation, the machine's destructive power, as represented in the Twenties, remains, but the expressionistic representation of that power serves a drama that sees the machine, like property, family, faith, and labor, as just one more facet of human existence.
At the same time, the dramatic works of this era provide an index to the influence of European Expressionism, which offered timely, relevant models for American playwrights and designers. John Gassner categorizes America's experimental heritage as surreal when releasing "the free fantasy of the unconscious," as expressionistic when exploring "the disintegration of modern man and his twentieth-century society," and as futurist/constructivist when exploiting "the marvelously dynamic nature of the machine" (Form and Idea 109). Elmer Rice, referring to himself as well as O'Neill and Treadwell, identifies the mechanistic focus as the inspiration for the works he considers to be the most expressionistic (Minority Report 198); yet the areas overlap enough that Gassner can, like this thesis, refer to them all as expressionistic. Key expressionistic elements include an episodic structure, following the protagonist's battle with hostile forces (often involving technology, and/or an urban setting) and depicting his/her disintegration (usually to death), a tendency toward representative rather than realistic characters, clipped or disjointed rather than natural dialogue, and the use of abstraction, externalization, and amplification to depict the action through the interior mental state of the protagonist. Soundtracks, projections, angular and fragmented sets with little decoration and a few very significant props (again, often technological artifacts) are also frequently associated with theatrical expressionism. A surprisingly large number of these techniques—particularly the disintegrating protagonist, with soundtracks, projections, and sparingly-chosen gadget-props revealing the secrets of the mind—continue to be used covertly or selectively right up through the canonical works of Williams and Miller.

Raising discussion about the influence of German drama and film may prove an equally worthwhile outcome of this study, considering that the playwrights themselves
openly acknowledged a debt to Strindberg, but frequently neglected or denied their debt to post-WWI German works. Paul Kornfield's The Seduction (1913), Georg Kaiser's the Gas trilogy (1917-1920) and From Morn to Midnight (1916), Ernst Toller's Man and the Masses (1920), along with Czech Karel Čapek's R.U.R. (1920) – the last three brought to New York audiences in quick succession by the New York Theatre Guild – and landmark Fritz Lang films like Metropolis (1927), The Testament of Dr. Mabuse (1933) and (by virtue of his contribution to the framing narrative) The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1919), had a demonstrable impact on American drama. While Rice flatly denied any conscious effort by American playwrights to imitate the Germans, the popularity of the German form undoubtedly influenced the experimental theatre that New Yorkers saw.35 It is the tortured mind of the protagonist that dominates Kaiser and Toller, as is the case with O'Neill's The Emperor Jones (1920) and The Hairy Ape (1922). By contrast, as Gassner (Form and Idea 121) and Valgamae (40) note, in Strindberg, the author's dreaming mind prevails. While Kornfield and Strindberg both speak of beauty, release and benediction in the representation of death on the stage, Strindberg's drama evokes the bittersweet. This latter influence is perhaps more evident in O'Neill's mature works than in the experimental works with which the young playwright honed his craft. Meanwhile, the Germans drew charges of nihilism; their bleak invocation of technological power, rather than Strindberg's representations of interior mind states, set the dominant tone for American works on similar themes.

35 Recall, too, how Arthur Miller forgot, for many years, that he owes the name Loman to The Testament of Dr. Mabuse (Timebends, 178-9); the claustrophobic, mechanistic cinematic sequences may have influenced Willy's psychological makeup as well.
As demonstrated in Chapter 2, unrelenting displacement and destruction seem the sad lot of the first two protagonists in this study – Yank of O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* (1922) and Zero-of Rice's *The Adding Machine* (1923). They embody the Twenties-era resistance of the machine, which presents the technological and natural environments as inevitably opposed. While Paddy's romantic invocation of the bygone days of seafaring seems hopelessly sentimental, drunken squabbling within the bowels of a steel monster is positively horrific. Caged by steel everywhere he goes, Yank remains unable to articulate his own connection to anything in either the technological or natural world. Similarly, Zero, conditioned by lifetimes of servitude to a life of misery, is blissfully numb to the truth about his tattered soul. His mind is free to wander while he performs his mechanical tasks, and in this manner he glimpses his salvation in Daisy; yet in death, he rejects the natural, barefoot bliss of the Elysian Fields, preferring instead the comforting meaninglessness of mechanical routine. In Chapter 3, the later plays of the Twenties reflect a growing sense that machines do more than smother and crush, and that humans can smother and crush as well. Humans and machines share, or perhaps dispute over, generative, productive capacities. Something about the machine resonates in human nature; the relationship is sometimes parasitic and sometimes symbiotic, but it is undeniably intimate. Consequently, *Machinal* (1928), *The Subway* (1929), and *Dynamo* (1929) explore the shared theatrical spaces of technology, sexuality, and religion, thereby blending the roles of Creator, co-creators, creatures and creations, which interact in the biological, mechanical, and spiritual realm. The machine is no longer an enemy to be resisted at all costs; it is, in the eyes of the protagonists, a conduit of power, inspiration, and even love.
but only at the cost of one's soul. Despite the trend to sensualize and sanctify the machine, three more protagonists wind up just as dead as the first two.

Only in the Thirties do playwrights begin to negotiate the terms on which human life and human society can survive, and even accept, the machine. The overt political content of the German models such as Toller is dominant in the Federal Theatre era work that has gathered the most critical attention, but contemporaries such as Hall-Rogers and Luce voiced contrary opinions about the future of machinery in the hands of just and capable Capitalists. Machines work best when handling a continuous stream of bulk material, like the seemingly endless roll of paper flowing through a newspaper press. An office copy machine, on the other hand, works with individual pieces of paper; when machines treat pieces of paper as individuals, too often those individuals are crushed and mutilated in the process. The successes of New Deal politics and mass-communication efforts involved streamlining people to fit, en masse, into the brave new world of the machine. Chapter 4 demonstrates that, by adopting the proper socio-political outlook, the individual can gain his or her fair share of the blessings of modernity and industrialism; the individual, in short, must join a complex social construct, in order to function on the scale of the machine. For the decade of America's Great Depression, when disillusionment and hard times led many to idealize the Soviets, we might easily expect that a theatre—comprising standing groups under the direction of the Federal Theatre Project—created, funded, and sustained by the collective entity known as the federal government, would produce plays that likewise call for ensemble (collective) acting, and take various positions on the issue of collective ownership of the machinery of production.
Odets's *Waiting for Lefty* (1935) chooses strongly in favor of the socialist ideal; he initially presents unionization as a tool for emulating bourgeois success, but his new order is a machine that runs only on domestic discord. Hall-Rogers's *Altars of Steel* (1937), by contrast, rejects the violence of unionism on one hand and the greed of unbridled Northern industrialism on the other, advocating instead a regionalism that is, like the theatrical abstractions of the early Twenties, caught “in the middle.” While the protagonist’s biological family plays only a minor role in the drama, the community of executives and devoted workers, united against the twin foes that threaten to divide them, can prosper, working, living, and very nearly praying together at the altar of steel. Luce's *O! Pyramids* (1934), turning not to geography for the solution, but rather to class—more specifically, to the semi-permeable American class boundaries—similarly rejects two outside threats to the prosperous American factory: union agitation and federal regulation. Boomer strives to be a democratic capitalist of the highest order—the new incarnation of the American pioneer/founder, with a strong sense of duty and a quality-centered work ethic; however, he is slow to abandon his sentimental attachment to an unproductive working-class alcoholic, and he himself nurtures unproductive pretensions towards high society. According to Luce’s optimistic representation of the American Dream, in a healthy Capitalist society, a community of loyal managers, workers, and customers is natural and just; yet Boomer’s vain desire to be “modern” puts his own factory at risk, thereby endangering the livelihood of the thousands of men whom he presumed would benefit from his misguided benevolence. Peripherally, the automotive heiress’s preference for the trustworthy engineer over the egocentric artist encapsulates what Luce has to say about the future of the family. In retrospect, each of the protagonists from the Thir-
ties succeeds in some ways – at some cost – while negotiating different paths between idealism and pragmatism; yet all receive sympathy due to the complex and pervasive social forces working against them. In this group of plays, technology is an object of contention, inciting a battle between the protagonists and villains. The machine is no longer the enemy, or an expression of a deep psychological threat; it has, instead, become the prize.

By the Forties, as the family emerges from the periphery, the American family drama comes of age. Technology appears as an integral component of the households and psyches of the characters, and achieves prominence among the tools used by the dramatist to convey the physical and psychological lives of the characters. The internally complex protagonists of Wilder, Miller, and Williams are not silhouetted against a technological backdrop, but are instead knitted into a richly-developed technological context. Without a conventionally expressive motif such as "mechanization" or a pervasive social evil such as "Capitalism" to drive the play’s conflict, these dramatists hold the characters (and audience members) morally accountable for their own failures. If the Twenties psychologically dissected individuals, and the Thirties choreographed group identities, then the Forties employs both techniques in order to depict the family’s power, as a microcosm of society, to nurture or suffocate the soul. Chapter 5 demonstrates how Wilder and Miller, in the shadow of World War II, negotiate a balance between membership in the nuclear family and responsibility towards society at large. Miller and Williams, in post-war years, show more interest in questioning the cultural meanings of everyday gadgets and technological artifacts, to define and question the values they represent – often without our realizing it – and to depict how we rise or fall with our values. These play-
wrights, seeking to convey increasingly complex social forces, found themselves obliged to call upon the cultural meanings encoded in everyday technology, in order to assist the theatrical depiction of character and social conflict.

Having moved, over the course of the three decades examined in this thesis, from being a central issue of the theatrical debate to becoming a mainstream dramatic technique, technology remains what it always was, a human artifact — a means by which we all may extend the power of our limbs, and senses, and minds, and a means by which the creatively gifted may extend their own artistic reach. Playwrights are now free to draw upon the “results” of these technological “experiments,” employing technology as an element of stagecraft, an object of conflict, and/or the source of a new vocabulary for representing human truths (much as Shakespeare used classical mythology or Milton used the Bible). The hellish, insatiable hunger of Yank’s steamship boilers is subordinate to the manly pride of Stanley Kowalski’s power over radios, telephones and light bulbs; yet the force of the machine persists in the consumption habits of the “goddamn maniac” Hastings Refrigerator, which still manages to enslave Willy.

Recall the parable of the old farmer, who shuns the new machine, fearing it will make him “unsure in the strivings of his soul” (McLuhan, Understanding Media 63), yet has no problem with older technological innovations (including his water bucket, an unseen assortment of farming tools, and the practice of agriculture itself). Similarly, Americans of every recent decade have seen large segments of their public and private lives shaped by technology. For example, the Eighties saw spirited moral and legal debates over VCRs and answering machines, but people today hold few strong opinions of any sort about these devices, rooted as they are in the fabric of contemporary life. Recall
that a contemporary reviewer criticized O’Neill’s choice of the dynamo, which was by then a familiar object, as opposed to the still-mysterious “magnetic field from which electric generation emerges” which might have made a more fitting metaphor for the divine (Skinner 89). The passage of time has, likewise, muted one of the important technology-related points that Williams may have been making in The Glass Menagerie. In choosing Wingfield, Amanda put her faith, not in a Southern gentleman, but rather in a man of technology. Had Williams been writing today, the absent father might have been working with high-speed Internet access. By the same token, the image of a modern Laura consoling herself with an 8-track tape player would convey a completely different dramatic message. 36

This gradual muting of the effect of technology is associated with the rise of industrial design in the Thirties. The business sector, impressed with the theatre’s ability to reach the citizen of the urbs, enlisted the talents of theatrical men such as Lee Simonson and Norman Bel Geddes, in order to convince the American public to make machines a bigger part of their lives. The resulting birth of the industrial design profession ushered in what we might call the post-mechanical age - when ever bigger, louder, and more obnoxious machines began to yield to the smaller, quieter, and less obtrusive variations (these being the ones consumers actually permitted into their homes). Enough time has now passed to desensitize us to the domestic furnishings and appliances that would have spoken more directly to the original audiences. The American theatre does not envision a New Man rising, wiser and more humane, from the ruins of the civitas; even the rare op-

36 Likewise, the Nineties saw the demystification of the personal computer, but introduced in its place an explosion of activity on the Internet.
timists (such as Thornton Wilder’s Antrobus and Clare Booth Luce’s Boomer) will succeed by clinging to old values, not adopting new ones. Meanwhile, on the stage, the machine dwindles from a looming set piece, asserting its presence by consuming the protagonist’s soul in a burst of light and noise, to an emotionally-charged prop, a physical representation of human character. Given the continuing role of the machine in shaping cultural meaning, and the multifaceted presence of technology in canonical American theatre, we must conclude that, in America, the human soul endures, despite – and perhaps, in some measure, because of – the ascendence of the urbs.
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