WHOLES AND PARTS (ALL PUNS INTENDED): THE MEREOLOGICAL VISION OF RICHARD OUTRAM'S POETIC SEQUENCES

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The Mereological Vision of Richard Outram's Poetic Sequences

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Abstract

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The work of poet Richard Outram (1930-2005) evinces an ongoing concern with part-whole relationships: those broadly classed, in philosophical terms, as "mereological." This thesis explores these relationships in three of Outram's poetic sequences: *Hiram and Jenny* (1988), *Mogul Recollected* (1993), and *Benedict Abroad* (1998). Each sequence elaborates a vision of unity-in-diversity, in which the qualities of wholeness and partness are not opposed but interdependent. The boundaries demarcating parts and wholes, temporal and spatial, are simultaneously maintained and made permeable. This "mereological" reading of Outram's work casts into relief various resonances between theme and form of which these sequences take constant account: the poetic sequence, like the world it depicts, exists in a state of unity-in-diversity. At the same time, this reading shows that Outram's mereological concerns are mortal concerns: deeply involved with a sense of the boundedness of human life, but also with a sense of its connectedness.

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A Note on Reference Style

Reference style follows current practice of the Modern Language Association; I have made a few exceptions, however, in the interests of readability. Richard Outram's poems are cited by line numbers, except where I have quoted the text of a poem in full; in those cases, I have given page numbers instead. Block quotations from poems are single-spaced, to retain the visual effect of the original on the page. All parenthetical citations of Peter Sanger's work are to his study *'Her Kindled Shadow ...': An Introduction to the Work of Richard Outram* (2nd, rev. ed.), unless otherwise noted.

Introduction

"Part" and "whole" are germinal concepts; they are intimately tied to our sense of ourselves, both as wholes comprising many "parts" (organs, but also roles), and as parts of various larger wholes: partnerships, communities, ecosystems, divinities, a cosmos. Questions about the boundaries and relations between and among parts and wholes are perennial. A persistent model for these boundaries and relations, in their complexity, involves the notion of a whole somehow greater than, or richer than, or irreducible to, the sum of its parts. This notion appears in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: "... in anything which has many parts and whose totality is not just a heap but is some whole besides just the parts, there is some cause ... of unity.... What is it, then, that makes a man one, and why is he one and not many?" (143-44).

The idea of the whole that is "not just a heap" has been reiterated in many times and in many contexts; it is at the centre of some of the most influential intellectual movements of the last century: Gestalt theory, Saussurean linguistics, cybernetics, ecology, holisms both sacred and secular. A colloquium held at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1963 gives a sense of the cross-disciplinary relevance of whole-part relations. The colloquium, titled *Parts and Wholes*, was the third in a series of explorations "among classic problems of scientific concept and method set in a contemporary research framework" (Lerner viii); its predecessors were *Evidence and Inference* and *Quantity and Quality*. The assembled speakers, all leading thinkers in their fields, were a sociologist (Daniel Lerner), a physicist (Edward Purcell), a political economist (Simon Kuznets), a systems-design engineer (Simon Ramo), an anthropologist (Clyde Kluckhohn), a philosopher (Ernest Nagel), a linguist (Roman Jakobson), and a literary critic (I. A. Richards). Richards' paper was entitled "How Does a Poem Know When It Is Finished?": a reminder that "mereological" concerns — wholes and parts, their

boundaries and relations — are also fundamental in literary studies.

Philosophers have used the word "mereology," from the Greek μεροσ, part, to describe "any formal theory of part-whole and associated concepts" (Simons 5). In the *Harper Dictionary of Modern Thought*, A. C. Grayling defines the word in layman's terms which recall, specifically, the Aristotelian notion of the whole that is "not just a heap." "In philosophy," Grayling writes, mereology is:

> the theory of part-whole relationships, prompted by such questions as 'is a whole something more than the sum of its parts, or not?' Answers depend upon what kinds of entity the whole and its parts are. The chief puzzle is that many wholes are indeed something more than the sum of their parts, in that they have properties the nature of which is not deducible from knowledge of the parts alone. (520)

The word "mereology" has had few outings in literary studies; but poets are preoccupied with matters mereological, and have rung the changes on the words "part" and "whole," reverently and irreverently. "Parting is all we know of heaven, / And all we need of hell," writes Emily Dickinson. W. B. Yeats' poem "Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop" concludes, "For nothing can be sole or whole / That has not been rent."

Wholes and parts, and their temporal and spatial relations, are central concerns in the work of the poet and printer Richard Outram. In this thesis I will examine these relations, in theme and form, in three of his poetic sequences: *Hiram and Jenny* (1988), *Mogul Recollected* (1993), and *Benedict Abroad* (1998). My aim is threefold: first, to identify the vocabulary and image-patterns Outram recurrently uses to address whole-part relations in his poetry, and to show how these words and patterns characteristically work; second, to discuss the poetic sequence — a form to which Outram returned, repeatedly, over the course of his career — as a formal allegory for his poetic mereology; third, to venture a

theory about the nature of this mereology, which I take to be a vision of "the world in its inexhaustible singular creaturehood" — what Robert Denham calls "unity-in-diversity" (135), or what Outram, in a more vernacular register, calls "the whole kit and caboodle" ("Countenance" 19) — a vision inseparable from the "inexhaustible singular" language of the poems themselves.

The phrase I've used to describe Outram's poetics, "inexhaustible singular creaturehood," is one I've borrowed from the cover text he provided for his 1984 *Selected Poems*. Like all of the cover texts he wrote, it is representative not only of the collection's content, but also, in its riddling diction, of the collection's form:

> These poems were written from the conviction that the poet is a celebrant, or he is nothing. They were written for the love of God, of man, of a woman, of the world in its inexhaustible singular creaturehood. For our language may become us; it may be our genesis, our true delight or our consolation, the sheer verge of our silence. (n. pag.)

There are many complexities at play here, but I will focus on that phrase "inexhaustible singular creaturehood." These carefully-chosen words describe Outram's poetic universe in terms applicable to both theme and form. In one sense, Outram's theme is "creaturehood": a word that recalls not only the theological context of divine creation, but an ecological context in which the human being is one creature among many (a part of the creaturely whole). It also recalls an artistic context, however, insofar as the poet is a creator; thus "the world in its inexhaustible singular creaturehood" becomes the *word* in its inexhaustible singular creaturehood. Language, so defined, is the medium — the form — in which Outram works. I read "inexhaustible" and "singular" in mereological terms: "inexhaustible" connotes a particulate vision, privileging the multifarious, the diverse; "singular" connotes a holistic vision, privileging the integrated, the unified. Outram's

pairing of the terms implies that for him, these visions are not opposed but complementary, even symbiotic.

Outram's poems do not just tell us about this symbiosis; they enact it. "For our language may become us," he writes: in his work, the sense this phrase expresses, of an analogical and mutually affective relationship existing between the universe at large and the universe of words, is always at play.[1] His poems are wrought in language which mirrors the mereological relationships — the symbioses between whole and part, unity and diversity — that he saw in the world around him. They evince, and hold in balance, two competing impulses: one, a convergent impulse, in which language swims upstream toward a germinal point at which all words are one Word, an original unity; the other, a divergent impulse, in which language moves with the currents of time and talk, partaking of the generative flow in which divisions multiply, begetting words on words until there is a linguistic diversity corresponding to the biodiversity of the natural world.

In Outram's work, mereological concerns are always mortal concerns. Human beings walk a line between unity and diversity: diversely taken, we are wholes unto ourselves; at the same time, we are parts of various larger unities. Outram's mereological poetics, working always to elaborate and uphold a vision of unity-in-diversity, provided him with a sophisticated system of forms and figures with which to address this double sense of the nature of human experience. Having established the "opposed" categories of unity and diversity as simultaneously true, he was able to explore the simultaneous truth of other "opposed" pairs. Thus human beings are simultaneously mortal and immortal in his poems; creaturedom is simultaneously one and many.

To evoke such simultaneities in his prose writing, Outram often used variations

[1] Peter Sanger writes: "For Outram, metaphor is real, not nominal. Words, or the act[s] of imagination by which words exist, are the essential structure of the universe" (*Preface* 5).

on that mereological phrase "the whole greater than the sum of its parts." A look at three of these variations gives a sense of the mortal weight Outram assigned to mereological concerns. It also establishes three important contexts in which these concerns resonated, for him: the romantic, the theological, and the literary.

In an afterword to his final collection, *Brief Immortals* (2003), he discusses his collaborative work with his wife, the artist Barbara Howard, whose recent death had prompted both this sequence and its companion work, *Nine Shiners* (2003):

> Barbara was never interested in nor would settle for mere textual illustration; it was a reciprocity, an interpenetration of word and image, which might expand the whole of creation into something greater than the sum of its parts, that was from the first her intent. (n. pag.)

Writing of similar word-and-image collaborations, two years earlier, he had used another variation on the "whole ... part" phrase:

> So loving collaboration can shape a whole greater than the sum of its partners. The cant word of today is "synergism", and most have forgotten that this term referred to (still does) "The doctrine that the human will cooperates with divine grace in the work of regeneration." (letter to the author, 11 Jun. 2001)

The phrase recurs, in yet a different form, in another of Outram's letters, where he describes the workings of a poetic sequence:

> it is the (voiced) range and *rightness* of ... cadences, rhythms, rimes, together with the rightness and *richness* of ... imagery ... [t]hat gives to the whole (richer, yet not greater than the sum of its parts for each is its own whole) the integrity of boundless possibility. (letter to the author, 26 Aug. 2004)

Each of these passages establishes a model for unity-in-diversity: for a whole "richer, yet

not greater than the sum of its parts for each is its own whole." In the first passage, that model is a true marriage, in which two become "one flesh," yet retain their individuality; for Outram and Howard, this personal marriage was also a marriage of word and image, celebrated in their lifelong collaborative work, in which autonomous poem and image combined to make a whole "richer, yet not greater than the sum of its parts." In the second passage, the model for unity-in-diversity is theological: the collaborators who make a whole "greater than the sum of its partners" are God and Creation (a multiplicity born of and participating in an original unity). In the third passage, the model for unity-in-diversity is a poetic sequence (an integrated whole made up of lyric parts, each of which is also a whole unto itself). Each of these models becomes, in Outram's work, a way of transcending the finitude of the isolated individual — an individual person, or creature, or poem — while at the same time preserving and celebrating individuality, upholding the integrity of the part within the whole.

Romantic, theological, and literary models are metaphorically related to one another in Outram's poems: the relations between whole and part in a true marriage may be compared to those in divine Creation, or in the human creation of a poetic sequence. Placed in metaphoric conjunction with one another, these models serve to clarify and complicate one another through the resonance or dissonance between them. For metaphor is predicated on the interplay of unity and diversity. The verb on which metaphor is fulcrumed — "to be" — suggests, on the one hand, that any entity can "be" any other entity. On the other hand, it draws our attention to distinction: to the gap between vehicle and tenor (those "parts" of the metaphor's "whole"). "A typical metaphor takes the form of the statement 'A is B,'" writes Northrop Frye; at the same time, there is "an undercurrent of significance that tells us that A is obviously not B, and nobody but a fool could imagine that it was" (*Myth* 7). This simultaneous insistence on

unity and diversity makes metaphor useful to a poet who wishes to speak about the world in its inexhaustible singular creaturehood: to acknowledge the possibility of cosmic unity, without sacrificing "the things of this world" (to borrow a phrase from Richard Wilbur) in all of their variety and interest.

Outram is not the first poet to have struggled with this dilemma. Diane Kelsey McColley has written of Milton's struggle, in *Paradise Lost*, with this same tension: how to depict a universe in which "God shall be All in All," and yet in which "the distinctions that the process of creation proliferates" shall be cherished and maintained (24-25). Milton, like Outram, draws on romantic, theological, and literary models for unity-in-diversity; there is a fourth model, however, that Outram uses, which was not available to Milton — at least not in its modern form. This model is drawn from ecology.

Ecology is a mereological science; it is founded on a holistic approach to the study of nature. (I define holism, in this context, as that branch of mereological thinking that privileges the whole.) In his essay "Form, Substance, and Difference," the ecological thinker Gregory Bateson counters the old mereological idea that the basic "unit of survival" is "the breeding organism, or the family line, or the society"; the "basic unit of survival" is rather a larger whole, "a flexible organism-in-its-environment":

> Now I suggest that the last hundred years have demonstrated empirically that if an organism or aggregate of organisms sets to work with a focus on its own survival and thinks that that is the way to select its adaptive moves, its "progress" ends up with a destroyed environment. If the organism ends up destroying its environment, it has in fact destroyed itself.... (457)

Bateson's "flexible organism-in-its-environment" is yet another model for a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Like Outram's romantic, theological, and artistic

models, this model is linked to mortality: the part ignores the whole — or the whole the part — at its peril; for the system is dependent on the ongoing symbiosis of part and whole. The subordination of one to the other may prove fatal.

In Outram's poems, the concern with wholes and parts is often manifested in a concern with those phenomena that define them: the temporal phenomena of continuities and discontinuities, beginnings and ends, and the spatial phenomena of unities and divisions. Thus we find recurrent images of periods (temporal units: days, years, and, pre-eminently, human lifetimes) and places (spatial units: geographical loci, built structures, and, pre-eminently, human bodies) — and a fascination with those figures and phenomena that cross their boundaries: the ferry that controls passage to and from an island, the swallow that flies in and out of a barn, the actor with her entrances and exits, the lovers with their (physical and spiritual) interpenetration. The boundaries themselves, in Outram's work, are symbols not only of division, but of connection. Broken bones, broken bread, the breaking of waves or day: these become symbols of union and communion.[2] Important, here, also, are the poetic sequence's *formal* breaking points: the spatial and temporal discontinuities that define the boundaries of individual poems, and yet also are the points of interface between and among poems.

Peter Sanger writes of "the kind of serial structure which is so common in Outram's work": "Like Blake, Outram's poetic instinct consistently has led him to contradict the isolation inherent in single lyric form" (131). All of Outram's published collections read, at least on one level, as sequences, insofar as they bear the marks of careful selection and organization; sometimes one collection comprises multiple

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[2] These symbols derive much of their allusive force, in Outram's work, from the germinal divisions of Genesis. The boundary that connects is a common motif in traditions both sacred and secular, however. "This world is the closed door. It is a barrier," writes Simone Weil; "And at the same time it is the way through" (132). This notion has its complement in Batesonian ecology, as well; Peter Harries-Jones writes: "The interleaving of ... continuous perception and discontinuous classification of the products of perception ... is fundamental to [Bateson's] science" (224).

sequences, linked or nested. The first poetic sequences to declare themselves as such by means of dramatic, as well as thematic, unities are *Satan Considered* (which gives voice to a recurrent persona across a number of poems) and *Turns* (which gives voice to a linked cast of characters across a number of poems), both in the 1975 collection *Turns and Other Poems*. These were followed by the various sequences contained within *The Promise of Light* (1979), *Man in Love* (1985), and *Dove Legend* (2001). In the interval between the publication of these last two volumes, Outram wrote and published three books, each of which reads as a sequence entire, evincing certain unities of setting, narrative, and personae; these are the foci of my study: *Hiram and Jenny*, *Mogul Recollected*, and *Benedict Abroad*.[3]

Generic discussions about the modern "poetic sequence" often overlap with generic discussions about the modern "long poem." Margaret Dickie considers the two terms to be synonymous, but discards the former as suggestive of "an order of development nowhere evident" in the long poems she considers: T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Hart Crane's *The Bridge*, William Carlos Williams' *Paterson*, Ezra Pound's *The Cantos* (6). But all poems, short or long, evince some kind of "order of development," if only because they are made from language, that fundamentally ordered medium, which unfolds in time. To my mind the more important difference between the terms "poetic sequence" and "long poem" is that the first throws the emphasis on part-whole relations within a text, while the second elides them. Because my own study focuses on these relations, I have favoured the term "poetic sequence."[4]

Critics have developed various vocabularies for talking about part-whole

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[3] Outram did write other book-length sequences: *South of North* and its associated poems (n.d.; all written in 1998), *Ms Cassie* (2000), *Lightfall* (2001), *Nine Shiners* and its complement *Brief Immortals* (2003). None of these is commercially available at this date (though all were circulated to some extent, privately, by Outram, and several appeared under Outram and Howard's Gauntlet Press imprint; a selection of poems from *South of North*, edited by Anne Corkett and Rosemary Kilbourn, is forthcoming from Porcupine's Quill). When I talk about Outram's "book-sequences" below, however, I am referring to the commercially-published trio.

[4] This is also a term that Outram used; thus I have preferred it to Roland Greene's term "lyric sequence," except where I am explicitly quoting or paraphrasing Greene.

relations in literature generally. These, too, have classical precedent; Aristotle's *Poetics*, like his *Metaphysics*, is pre-eminently concerned with the cause(s) of unity: "... in poetry the story, as an imitation of action, must represent one action, a complete whole, with its several incidents so closely connected that the transposal or withdrawal of any one of them will disjoin and dislocate the whole ..." (*Poetics* 25). The poetic whole, in other words, must be "not just a heap," but something greater than the sum of its parts.

The various "holistic" trends in twentieth-century thought (Gestalt theory, cybernetics, ecology, et cetera) have a literary counterpart in the New Criticism, which was centrally concerned, to quote Cleanth Brooks, "with the problem of unity — the kind of whole which the literary work forms or fails to form, and the relation of the various parts to each other in building up this whole" ("My Credo" 45). In *Understanding Poetry*, Brooks and his co-editor, Robert Penn Warren, advise teachers, "A poem should always be treated as an organic system of relationships, and the poetic quality should never be understood as inhering in one or more factors taken in isolation" (ix). The extent to which the New Critics may be seen as "holists" is up for debate. In *Laying the Ladder Down: The Emergence of Cultural Holism*, Betty Jean Craige takes them to task for isolating the individual text from the larger whole of its social context (24). But it seems to me that, by considering the part-whole relations that pertain within the "organic system" of a poem, the New Critics afford us an analogy for part-whole relations within larger organic systems. We do not need to read their insistence on the integrity of a literary work as an insistence on the isolation of a literary work. As Outram's poems repeatedly remind us, boundaries are sites of connection as well as division.

The "problem of unity" applies not just to the individual poem, but to the poetic sequence; indeed, the organicist language of the New Critics has been transposed into considerations of the sequence-form. In *The Modern Poetic Sequence* (1983), M. L. Rosenthal

and Sally M. Gall describe the form, in its modern manifestation, as "a grouping of mainly lyric poems and passages, rarely uniform in pattern, which tend to interact as an organic whole" (9). For them, the "cause of unity" in a modern sequence is not so much "narrative and dramatic," *pace* Aristotle, as "musical" and "affective" (16); indeed, a modern sequence is defined for them in large measure by its refusal to partake of narrative and dramatic unities. This shuts the door to central elements of Outram's three book-sequences, however, each of which — though far from linear in its narration — is held together by a locus, a cast of characters, the armature of myth. Keen to establish the sequence form as the particular "genius" of modern poetry (17), Rosenthal and Gall also shut the door to pre-modern sequences in the romantic and devotional traditions (Herbert's *The Temple* and Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* are merely "so-called sequences" for them), which Outram explicitly invokes as antecedents to his work.[5]

More useful for the purposes of my study is the approach of a later scholar of the poetic sequence, Roland Greene. Greene's *Post-Petrarchism* (1991) is less period-bound than is *The Modern Poetic Sequence*, and it productively entertains those "narrative and dramatic" elements that Rosenthal and Gall dismiss. Tracing the lyric sequence back to its roots in Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, Greene describes the form as primarily "a development of lyric's fictional mode" — though, like all lyric discourse, it evinces a "dialectical play of ritual and fictional phenomena" (13). Citing Hugh Kenner's contention that literary forms "remember" — that characteristic concerns accrete to certain forms, over time — Greene suggests that the lyric sequence remembers "the motif of *spargimento*, the scattering of members or fragments":

> Out of its Western sources in the first Psalm and the Song of Songs, the matter of scattered fragments is crucial to the fiction of the *Canzoniere*....

[5] Outram borrowed Herbert's subtitle to *The Temple*, "... the Private Poems and Sacred Ejaculations ...," for instance, in his cover-text description of *Hiram and Jenny*.

> [F]rom the standpoint of poetics, the main job of the motif is to articulate as a struggle within the fiction — in spiritual, psychological, stylistic terms — what the work accomplishes on the generic scene by proposing a fiction at all, namely the establishment of an *unus*, an *integer*, [a unity, a whole] from *rime sparse* [scattered rhyme]. The act of founding the phenomenon of fiction on lyric fragments is the originary, traumatic event in the history of the form.... (17)

What Greene is describing here as the central concern of the lyric-sequence-as-form is exactly the "problem of unity" we have encountered in other contexts; here the problem is cast in terms of the scattering/gathering dichotomy that runs through Western literature: from Dante ("In that abyss I saw how love held bound / Into one volume all the leaves whose flight / Is scattered through the universe around ..." [Sayers/Reynolds, trans. 33.87]) to Donne ("and his hand shall binde up all our scattered leaves againe, for that Librarie where every booke shall lie open to one another ..." [101]) to Outram, in whose work it becomes another variation on the unity-in-diversity theme ("... I only know / that we are gathered by our loves, as we have grown / into our love, and that it might be so ..." ["Presence" 10-12]). Greene's study reinforces my sense of the poetic sequence as a form both dependent on and well-suited to the exploration and elaboration of mereological questions.

This thesis project is first and foremost a close reading of Outram's poems. As such, it participates in a critical tradition very much presided over by Peter Sanger's *'Her Kindled Shadow ...': An Introduction to the Work of Richard Outram* (2001, 2002). One reviewer of this volume has praised — somewhat grudgingly — "Sanger's gifts as an exegetical gumshoe," his ability to pick up on subtle allusions and track them to their sources, to "solve" puzzling diction, to explicate telling ambiguities (Starnino 23). And indeed,

Sanger's book does function, invaluably, as a kind of Outram-encyclopedia, cross-referencing his poetic corpus with literary, philosophical, and theological tradition from Saint Augustine to Geoffrey Hill. But this function, however important, is incidental to Sanger's larger achievement, described by Jeffery Donaldson: "Sanger's essay has had to map out, for the first time, and with scant help, the arc of Outram's varied career, its formal and stylistic attributes, its areas of concern, its coherent patterns, complexities, unities and preoccupations" ("Light" n. pag.).[6] *'Her Kindled Shadow ...'*, then, is a fine and comprehensive "map" of Outram's oeuvre; I have cross-referenced my thesis quite extensively with this book, accordingly. Though my course often departs from Sanger's, his chart has given me my bearings.

There is a sense in which *'Her Kindled Shadow ...'* treats Outram's oeuvre as one great poetic sequence, manifesting an extraordinary unity of concern from the earliest works through to the latest. When Sanger addresses *Hiram and Jenny*, *Mogul Recollected*, and *Benedict Abroad*, he addresses them within the context of this larger whole. These works, he argues, with their play of reverence and irreverence, their happy discontinuities, their ragtag casts of characters, have the shape of farce. His definition of this form goes beyond the standard "comedy designed to provoke the audience to simple, hearty laughter" (Abrams 30). He uses the term to recall "the interludes of impromptu buffoonery, which the actors in the religious dramas were accustomed to interpolate into their text" (131). Farce then, like the poetic sequence, has its roots in discontinuity; it is a *spargimento* form, deriving its energy from the tension between opposed (but symbiotic) dramatic impulses, division and connection.

There is another sense, however — as Sanger also implies — in which each

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[6] To Donaldson's appreciation, I would add the following: that the achievement of *'Her Kindled Shadow ...'* — and of the essay ("Of Death ...") which is its postscript — lies not only in its content, but in its form; Sanger, a poet himself, has evolved a critical voice that allows him to describe, very clearly, the complexities of Outram's work, without reducing them to discursive formulae.

sequence forms its own liturgy, with its own farcical interpolations. This perspective deserves more attention, for it allows us to examine the part-whole structures that Outram consciously made (poems-within-sequence), as analogies not only to the larger part-whole structure formed by the sequences within his oeuvre, but to other part-whole structures: the oeuvre within the literature or within the larger whole of the language; the individual human being within the marriage or within the larger whole of the human community; the human community within that largest whole, the universe.

This thesis, then, is in conversation with *'Her Kindled Shadow ...'*; it is also in conversation with the body of shorter critical texts that has grown up around Outram's work. When Sanger set about his "Introduction," he found "only four other fairly extended considerations of Outram's work": a 1976 article by Hubert de Santana, in *Books in Canada*; a 1988 article by Alberto Manguel, in *Saturday Night* (a revised version of this piece subsequently appeared in Manguel's *Into the Looking Glass Wood*); a "careful, patient review" by Louis MacKendrick of the collection *Man in Love;* and a special issue of *DA: A Journal of the Printing Arts*, which focused on the Gauntlet Press. In recent years, Outram's work has become somewhat better known, due in large part to the efforts of Sanger and Manguel (and also in part, sadly, to the fact of Outram's death in January 2005, marked by memorial features on CBC's *Sunday Edition*, on the widely-read literary web site *Bookninja*, and in both *The Globe and Mail* and *The Toronto Star*; since then, a number of Outram's poet-contemporaries — George Murray,[7] S. P. Zitner, J. D. Black, Wayne Clifford, and Sanger himself — have published poems addressing Outram or his death). Three magazines (*The Antigonish Review*, *Canadian Notes & Queries*, and *The New Quarterly*) have come out with substantial features on Outram's poems and printed works (in 2001, 2003, and 2004, respectively). A casebook on his work is currently taking shape, edited

[7] Murray has also published a short essay on Outram's work, in *Maisonneuve* ("Collecting").

by Ingrid C. Ruthig, as part of the Guernica Editions Writers Series. Contributors to these projects come from a wide range of backgrounds and take a wide variety of approaches: poet Eric Ormsby has praised Outram's work for its musicality; scholar William Blissett has celebrated the physical beauty of Outram and Howard's handmade books; Jeffery Donaldson has discussed the reciprocity of Outram's poems and Howard's paintings; and fiction-writer Terry Griggs has drawn attention to Outram's exuberant word-store.

Criticism of Outram's work is not invariably laudatory; some readers, put off by his formalism or verbal aplomb, have taken him to task, in short reviews, for his "ubiquitous use of rhyme" (Fitzgerald 56), his formal "corseting" (Vulpé 89), or the "extravagance" of his diction (Solway 10); though the last of these critics concedes — I think astutely — there is "a strong possibility that Outram is the kind of poet one must learn to read in the way one gradually masters a foreign language and that the discomfort readers ... sometimes feel with portions of his work is arguably a function of initial struggle, of the rigours of acquisition" (12).

The consensus that emerges among critics who have taken the time to "learn to read" Outram in this way is that there is a troubling disconnect between his stature as a poet and the scant recognition heretofore afforded him by the publishing establishment and the academic community. The opening lines of Sanger's book are telling:

> This essay should not be possible or necessary. Richard Outram, poet and printer, is one of the major figures in twentieth century English-Canadian literature. But the basic bibliographical, biographical and critical tasks needed to help the common reader consider Outram's latest work carefully have barely started. A comparable situation would have been one in which a reviewer of Auden's *City Without Walls*, published in 1969, had no

choice but to read him as an unknown. (11)

My thesis participates in that ongoing project of establishing a "basic bibliographical, biographical and critical" context for Outram's work. It also participates in a second stage of criticism, however: one that assumes Outram's acknowledged importance as a poet, and discusses his work in the context of a wider literary tradition, accordingly. Sanger's valuation of Outram's work is not unique. W. J. Keith has included Outram in the new revised edition of his survey text *Canadian Literature in English.* Manguel has called him "one of the finest poets in the English language" (226). Guy Davenport praises him as "a poet who can make the whole world look new" (8). Frye scholar Robert Denham has heralded Outram, qua poet, as a major Frye-interpreter (Denham xii). And publisher Tim Inkster of the Porcupine's Quill plans a *Selected Poems* of Outram's, for inclusion in the press's Essential Poets series. To proceed as if Outram is an "unknown," at this juncture, would be to ignore the voices of these readers.

There is another critical voice that bears on Outram's work which must be considered here, and that is Outram's own. Outram's publishing life is difficult to separate from his private correspondence; a large readership, in his lifetime, consisted of friends and colleagues among whom he and Howard circulated their Gauntlet Press broadsheet- and pamphlet-publications. Often, these publications were accompanied by Outram's "slant" commentary on the poems. (He frequently cited Emily Dickinson's "Tell all the truth but tell it slant - / Success in Circuit lies....")[8] Often, the broadsheets bear a quotation *au verso* which is in conversation with the poem; pamphlets likewise use quotations, by way of introduction, epigraph or endnote. In the book-length sequence, *Ms Cassie*, consonant quotations from other writers and thinkers are interposed at interludes in Outram's text. A partial list of writers quoted in such contexts would include Frye,

[8] Outram also engaged in more direct — though no less decorous — commentary, in his correspondence with critics and readers who were engaged in writing and thinking about his poems; see, in particular, his letters to Sanger and to Manguel (Thomas Fisher Rare Book Lib., ms. coll. 00457).

most prominently, alongside Bateson, C. G. Jung, Simone Weil, G. K. Chesterton, William Gass, Immanuel Kant, and Sören Kierkegaard. These quotations do not "explain" or "illustrate" Outram's poems, any more than the English Bible explains or illustrates the poems of George Herbert. They rather establish an allusive context, giving readers a sense of the larger, literary whole in which Outram's poems participate.

Outram's commentary on poetics (his own and others') also comprises a series of lectures he delivered at the Arts and Letters Club of Toronto, where he was a member, between 1991 and 2003. These lectures take in a wide range of topics, from medieval heraldry to modern physics — yet all of them are, to borrow two of their titles, "Exercises in Exegesis" and meditations on "Poetic Practice," from various angles and at various removes. A number of these lectures have particular relevance to my study: "Stardust," with its considerations of identity and distinction, of scattered and gathered parts; "Notes on William Blake's 'The Tyger'," with its consonance with the creaturely themes of *Mogul Recollected*; and "Poetic Practice," with its consideration of particular sorts of boundaries — those which contain a poet in his practice, a lover in his devotion. With the exception of "Poetic Practice," which was posted to the *Bookninja* web site in 2003, these lectures are only available in typescript — in the reading room of the Arts and Letters Club in Toronto, and at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library of the University of Toronto (ms. coll. 00457), where many of Outram's books and papers went after his death. Nonetheless, as Outram's unpublished oeuvre begins to make its way into print, these lectures, along with Outram's less formal prose, will become an increasingly important context for readings of his poetry.

The body of criticism bearing directly on Outram's work, then, is small but growing. There are two further critical contexts for my study: the first is the context of generic debate about the nature of the poetic sequence, its structure and its characteristic

concerns; the second is the context afforded by the mereological projects of other writers and thinkers. Such projects have conventionally thrown their emphasis either on the side of diversity (categorizations, typologies, chains-of-being) or on that of unity (holisms, monads, gestalts). Outram's unity-in-diversity vision is an attempt to transcend (without negating) this opposition. I have already mentioned Milton's similar attempt. Outram's work is in conversation with many other unity-in-diversity visions, however;[9] I want to touch briefly on those of Frye and Bateson, in particular, as both writers were of great importance to Outram.[10]

Central to Frye's unity-in-diversity vision is the metaphor of Christ as total man, a "spiritual body." He imagines this spiritual body in mereological terms, as a whole which is part of all of us, and of which we are all a part:

> In English the word body has two meanings, the physical individual and an aggregate that may include a number of individuals.... [T]he whole of mankind may be called metaphorically a single body, even though we say that such a complex unity is really an aggregate. But the "spiritual body" seems to have some genuine independence of the single permanently anchored identity to which the *soma psychikon* [natural body] is confined. The Jesus of history, according to most Christian views, was a soul-body unit like anyone else; the spiritual body of the risen Christ is everywhere and in everyone ... it may be a part of us or we may be a part of it. (*Words* 125-26)

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[9] For an elegant summary of such visions, across a wide range of traditions, see the chapter on "Interpenetration" in Robert Denham's *Northrop Frye: Religious Visionary and Architect of the Spiritual World.*

[10] Outram studied under Frye at the University of Toronto in the 1940s, and Frye remained something of a "spiritual preceptor" for him throughout his life (Carbert, "Faith" 44); a forthcoming essay by Denham will explore this connection (in Ruthig, *Richard Outram*). Outram placed Bateson alongside Frye in this regard: "Bateson remains, over the years, next to Frye, the most important thinker in what might laughingly be called my intellectual life. There are profound correspondences between the two, I believe ..." (letter to Denham, 21 Nov. 2001).

Elsewhere, Frye writes of a desire to turn this totalizing metaphor "inside out": "Instead of a metaphor of unity and integration we should [then] have a metaphor of particularity, the kind of vision Blake expressed in the phrase 'minute particulars' and in such lines as 'To see the world in a grain of sand'" (*Great Code* 167). Denham establishes the relatedness of these statements, with their respective visions of unity and particularity, in the wider context of Frye's oeuvre: "unity-in-diversity is the insistent theme throughout Frye's career, whether he is writing about the symbols, myths, archetypes, and genres of literature or about the modes of religious experience" (135). Denham picks up on Frye's word "interpenetration," "synonymous with the identity of the one and the many, of particularity and totality" (39), to embody this theme. Frye's notion of interpenetration was not so much catalytic as corroborative of Outram's "interpenetrative" poetics, I believe; it furnished Outram with a vocabulary with which to describe certain aspects of his work. He uses the word interpenetration, for instance, in his "Afterword" to *Brief Immortals*, to describe the intended reciprocity of word and image in his and Howard's collaborative publications.[11]

Unity-in-diversity is also an "insistent theme" in Bateson's work. Bateson discusses, for instance, the tension between our continuous (unified) perception of the world, and our discontinuous (diverse) means of describing that perception in language:

> "difference" will always propose delimitation and boundaries. If our means of describing the world arises out of a notion of difference ... then our picture of the universe will necessarily be particulate. It becomes an act of faith to distrust language and believe in monism. Of necessity we shall split our descriptions when we talk about the universe. But there may be better and worse ways of doing this splitting of the universe into

[11] Outram also uses the word "interpenetrate" in an unpublished (1984) translation of "Correspondences," by Charles Baudelaire, as an equivalent for the French "se répondent" (line 8).

nameable parts. (qtd. in Harries-Jones 208-209)

Bateson sets up a dichotomy of world and word in this passage; yet, for him as for Outram, world and word are mutually affective. He writes of this relationship in terms of "recursion": "the way in which events continually enter into, become entangled with, and then re-enter the universe they describe" (Harries-Jones 3). Batesonian recursion afforded Outram a model for mereological relations in which the part affects the whole just as the whole affects the part. Batesonian recursion is consonant with Frygian interpenetration; each is a way of conceiving of the symbiosis of whole and part.

Recursive relations occur, in theme and form, throughout Outram's poetry: a bird is sent out into the flooded world, and returns to its keeper with tidings of landfall ("Ark"); a light-source scatters its reflection in the bevel of a mirror, which ultimately recollects and returns the light ("Mirror of Meaning"); a tossed stone sends concentric ripples out to lap at a distant shoreline, which returns these rings to the centre ("The Flight Out of Egypt"); in this same poem, a word, spoken, resonates to the "rare bound of the universe of words" and returns upon its speaker, "shrived in this telling."

Language relies on difference, as Bateson notes — but it also exhibits a deep-seated drive toward integration. I have called these the "divergent" and "convergent" impulses of language, respectively: unity strives toward particularity (Word flows into words), particularity toward unity (words flow into Word). This recursive or interpenetrative relationship, in language, between the unified and the particular underlies the literary device of synechdoche: a special, "mereological" case of metaphor, in which "a part of something" is used "to signify the whole, or (more rarely) the whole ... to signify a part" (Abrams 69).[12] At a recent conference on "Frye and the Word," Andrew

[12] Jacobson notes that synechdochic operations are fundamental not only to literature, but to language more generally; in his address to the M.I.T. colloquium on parts and wholes, he considers the "rich scale of tensions between wholes and parts ... involved in the constitution of language, where *pars pro toto* and, on the other hand, *totum pro parte*, *genus pro specie*, and *species pro individuo* are the fundamental devices" (162).

Halmi speculated about the implications of such metaphor, not only for a literary text but for its reader: "When the part represents the whole, each of us becomes the world in which we walk, and there we may find ourselves, if not more truly, then at least less strange" (103). He is suggesting an analogy between human beings in their part-whole relations and literary structures in their part-whole relations. If the analogy holds, the existence of synecdoche in literature suggests a similarly interpenetrative order in human life, where not only does the cosmos contain the human being, but the human being contains the cosmos. This sort of argument-by-analogy is fallacious from a scientific perspective; but, from a poetic perspective, it is perfectly acceptable: "In conceptual thought analogy is tricky and misleading beyond the heuristic stage," Frye writes: "in imaginative thought it's the *telos* of knowledge" (*Religious* 215). It is largely on analogies of this sort — on the certainty that they could ring true and prove transformative — that Outram built his poetic faith. He was deeply invested in a "belief in the correspondence of microcosm and macrocosm, in the harmonic structure of the universe" (Yates, qtg. Rudolf Wittkower 364). It is for this reason, I suspect, that he found so corroborative a remark of Sanger's, that if Outram's "work were to survive in fragments one could put together a civilization from them —" (Outram, letter to Sanger, 16 Dec. 1996). This remark implies that Outram's work is truly microcosmic, consonant not only with the universe of words, out of which it was fashioned, but with the universe itself — out of which (given Outram's sense of the identity of word and world) it was fashioned.

In Outram's poems, both the convergent and the divergent impulses of language are constantly at play. We can see their interaction in the stylistic tension that exists, in his oeuvre, between a bare minimalism and baroque proliferation of diction and detail. The poem "Salamander" from *Man in Love* affords an example of the former: four brief stanzas printed, as at the four points of a compass or a cross, around the silent centre of

Howard's *Salamander* engraving:

First Word
I am overheard.

I am here & there
Nowhere nowhere.

Save now & then
I am where & when.

I am why proved.
I am Love Loved. (60)

At the other end of the stylistic spectrum, we have the poem "Tempest," from *Hiram and Jenny,* in which Outram catalogues the flotsam and jetsam "spewed" by Leviathan in the midst of a storm:

> Lost Scriptures. Patched rubber waders. Prophets, forgotten. Orts. Snapped masts and entangled rigging. Harlots in dishabille. Three dud petards. Various Regency fops. Landladies, massive. One mauve Squid. Bottles in ships. A thirty year run of The Bangalore Times. Couples attempting exotic coitus, without much success, on swings. Ambergris. Puncheons of ardent spirits, unbroached. Plato's ideal collar-stud. Two portly butlers and various pale catamites, weeping.... (*Hiram* 111)

I have often been amazed — and slightly puzzled — that one poet could write, habitually, in two such different styles: the one so stark and lapidary, the other so lush and effusive. But these styles are not opposed; they are complementary. They give voice to the two poles of Outram's poetic universe, the singular and the inexhaustible, between which all of creaturehood is arrayed. They enact the symbiosis of the unity and diversity with which they respectively correspond.

Outram's poetic mereology, for all I have been calling it "a vision of the world in its inexhaustible singular creaturehood," is irreducible to discursive formulae; it is inseparable from the language in which he writes. Critics who have taken him to task for either his hermetic spareness or his baroque effusiveness have missed the fact that these stylistic traits are *functional* — deeply resonant with Outram's characteristic themes.

To say that form and theme are thus inseparable is hardly revolutionary. It is one of the central tenets of the New Criticism. Brooks writes repeatedly of "the resistance which any good poem sets up against all attempts to paraphrase it" (*Urn* 196). But what I am talking about in relation to Outram's work goes beyond the New Critical "heresy of paraphrase." Unity-in-diversity is a value, for Outram, not only in aesthetics, but in ethics. In one of his late letters, he defends ambiguity and paradox (both literary enactments of unity-in-diversity) in terms reminiscent of Brooks',[13] but extending Brooks' literary compass to comprise the ethical:

> I hold, as an article of poetic faith, the conviction that one major moral obligation of all imaginative (as opposed, at least partially, to discursive) writers is ever to labour to maintain and advance the cause of meaningful ambiguity, together with its antinomian sibling, paradox. Against the ever-present banalities of illiterate literalism. Beware not the Jabberwocky, but abhor the soundbite. Beware not technology, but the burnt-out Bush. (letter to the author, 7 May 2004)

Another defense of poetry, from Outram's 1989 review of the (illiterately literal) *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary*, strikes a similar chord:

> Prosody (not entered in COBUILD), once considered an essential part of grammar, has been defined by Richard Blackmur as "the precise and loving care of the motion of meaning in language." If we fail to yearn, as Yeats would put it, beyond the prosaic to the prosodic, it will be to our willful and acute deprivation. ("Smack" 4-5)

The examples of prosodic utterance that Outram offers, following this statement (Christopher Smart's "For in my nature I quested for beauty, but God, God hath sent me

[13] "If the poet ... must perforce dramatize the oneness of the experience, even though paying tribute to its diversity, then his use of paradox and ambiguity is seen as necessary..." (*Urn* 213).

to sea for pearls"; Annie Dillard's description of a weasel, "ten inches long, thin as a curve, a muscled ribbon, brown as fruitwood, soft-furred, alert"), suggest an analogical diversity, in language, to the world's diversity of life.

This correlation between linguistic systems and biological systems has been suggested before — by, for instance, Lewis Thomas in *The Lives of a Cell*, and by George Steiner in *After Babel*, both books Outram owned (O'Rinn, n. pag.) and valued. Recently, the correlation has been promoted to causal relationship by linguist David Harrison:

> the languages of ethnic groups [Harrison argues] contain vitally important information about species often unknown to formal science. If the language is lost, so too will vanish the knowledge it contains about natural phenomena.... lack of linguistic diversity poses a direct threat to biodiversity. (Macintyre, n. pag.)

Outram saw vividly that the charge of preservation falls to the speakers of *all* languages: not only to the denizens — or colonizers — of Siberia or Papua New Guinea (among the "ethnic groups" of Macintyre's article). Elsewhere in that 1989 dictionary-review, Outram wrote: "life is manifestly too short ever to learn enough of the inexhaustible richness and resonance of the English language, for we who are immersed in it." Still, it was an endeavour to which he gave his life: not only to learn his language, but to speak it with eminent fluency, to contribute to its ongoing consensual development ("we try to shape and be shaped by it in our thought, speech and writing"). This was, he wrote, "literally a labour of love" ("Smack" 1).

The three chapters of this thesis take up Outram's book-sequences in chronological order: *Hiram and Jenny*, *Mogul Recollected*, *Benedict Abroad.* Each chapter focuses on a mereological symbol which resonates both thematically and formally in the sequence. Thus my first chapter, on *Hiram and Jenny*, focuses on the symbol of the

"riddle," in all its senses. Thematically, riddles (sieves, lattices) recur in this sequence as images of permeable boundaries between and among wholes and parts: boundaries that assert distinction between one thing and another, and yet permit passage between them. Such boundaries are characteristic of an interpenetrative order. Formally, riddles (conundrums, enigmas) become devices for upholding meaningful ambiguity in the sequence, insisting on the simultaneous truth of contradictory qualities — not only unity and diversity, but individuality and collectivity, mortality and immortality.

My second chapter focuses on the mereological symbol of the faceted mirror: a part which, in its fragmented reflections, may contain the whole of the universe into which it is set. Thematically, mirrors — both flawless and faceted — recur in *Mogul Recollected*, the former connoting narcissistic entrapment and "illiterate literalism," the latter connoting "otherwise" (wise-to-the-other) reflection and meaningful ambiguity. Formally, the faceted mirror becomes a model for the sequence itself which, in its many lyric facets, is capable of reflecting myriad truths.

My third chapter focuses on the symbol of the stage: a microcosmic whole in which an actor plays her "part." Thematically, this sequence is peopled by actors; "entrance" and "exit" are its cardinal motifs. Formally, the sequence becomes a stage, its first and last poems labelled "exit" and "entrance" respectively. Here, as elsewhere in Outram's work, the whole proves recursively responsive to the part: an actor's improvisations on her mortal script (her part) reshape the world/stage on which she plays, and which in turn shapes her acting.

Common to all of these mereological symbols is a sense of what I call "imperfection by design." A riddle is a whole that is full of holes: it is intentionally permeable. The surface of a faceted mirror is "flawed," its reflections purposively fragmented. A stage, like a riddle, is made to be permeable: the playing space admits of

entrances and exits; an actor continues to play her part in life after her part on the stage has ended. Frye reminds us that the word "imperfect" has two distinct senses: "in one sense it is that which falls short of perfection; in another it is that which is not finished but continuously active, as in the tense system of verbs in most languages" (*Great Code* 168). Outram's poetic sequences are "imperfect" in both senses. They are permeable: the boundaries that define them are purposively riddled, to allow the passage through them of allusions and personae, of writer and reader. At the same time, they are "not finished but continually active." The endings of their poems are never full stops; rather, they are points of interchange, permeable boundaries between part and whole. In *Answer to Job*, an important book for Outram, Jung writes, "just as completeness is always imperfect, so perfection is always incomplete, and therefore represents a final state which is hopelessly sterile" (52).[14] Imperfection is the necessary human counterpoint to inhuman perfection. Perfection and imperfection become another symbiotic pair, alongside unity and diversity, mortality and immortality.

My aim, in this thesis, is not to read Outram's work through a "mereological" lens; such a reading would be procrustean on one hand (prescribing a meaning-making formula), and kleptocratic on the other ("mereology," as a philosophical discipline, comes with a long tradition which my literary borrowing of the term elides). My aim is rather to examine whole-part relations as modelled in and enacted by Outram's poems, with an eye toward discovering the sorts of mereological correspondences he sets up between the universe of words and the universe at large. What emerges is that mereological concerns are ultimately mortal concerns: deeply involved with our sense of the boundedness of human life, but also with our sense of its connectedness.

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[14] See also Bateson's thinking about the creative potential of "noise" and "error" (Harries-Jones 113-116).

Chapter One: The Riddle

The concept of unity (wholeness) elides boundaries; the concept of diversity (particularity) imposes them. Outram's poetic mereology works, in both theme and form, to develop a vision of unity-in-diversity, simultaneously insisting on boundaries and unsettling them. In *Hiram and Jenny*, the first and longest of his book-sequences, the riddle (both a lattice-work and an enigma) becomes important as a figure for the permeable boundary. Outram's metaphors in this sequence often suggest a three-stage transformation: the non-negotiable boundaries of a human lifetime (birth and death) are mapped onto the spatial boundaries of a site or a structure; these spatial boundaries are then "leapt," or "crossed," or "riddled" — that is, shown to be permeable.

The mereologist's key terms, whole and part, apply to both temporal and spatial phenomena. An hour is not "part" of a day in quite the same way that a tree is "part" of a forest. In the case of the tree, one can manipulate the part within the whole: one can walk around it, or water it, or fell it and remove it from the forest. One cannot circumnavigate an hour, nor make it grow and change, nor remove it from a day. And yet, we use the words "part" and "whole" to describe both sets of relationships: the tree (part) is to the forest (whole) as the hour (part) is to the day (whole). The language of mereology thus suggests analogies between temporal and spatial phenomena.

If the words "whole" and "part" apply across the temporal-spatial divide, however, this is not generally the case for the words we use to describe the demarcations between and among parts and wholes. Spatial wholes are defined by boundaries, thresholds, borders, containers, verges, outlines, frontiers, limits, and so on. Temporal wholes, by contrast, are defined by binaries: mornings and evenings, births and deaths, beginnings and ends. Our language seems determined to differentiate between two types of temporal boundary: an initiating demarcation, and a concluding demarcation, a

beginning and an end. The two are not interchangeable, in discursive language or in life. The two are, however, interchangeable in poetry: Outram makes them so, again and again. And he does this in part through temporal-spatial analogies: mapping a time span onto a spatial structure, he removes the constraining logic distinguishing beginning and ending. Beginning and ending become, equally, walls or moats or (as in a theatre) "wings." Unlike beginnings and endings, walls are possessed of doors, moats of bridges, wings of entrances and exits: human beings can negotiate these boundaries in a way they cannot negotiate beginnings and endings — particularly their own beginnings and endings, birth and death. Temporal-spatial analogies thus become, for Outram, a means of interrogating — without negating — the fact of mortality.

Outram was loathe to speak directly about his poems, preferring the "slant" commentary of allusion and quotation; he could be very direct, however, when speaking about his central concerns: "Facing death," he once said, quoting Eric Gill, "that is the chief business of living" (qtd. in Sanger, "Of Death" 9). And elsewhere: "All of my poems, even the darkest, are love poems and were written to Barbara" (*Immortals*, "Afterword"). These two statements, and their themes, are related by context. The former is quoted in Outram's memorial address for one of his closest friends, the typographer and designer Allan Fleming. The latter was written as part of the "Afterword" to Outram's final collection, *Brief Immortals*, which he circulated among friends in the wake of Howard's death, and at a time when he was facing the prospect of his own. The two statements are also linked by another line from this afterword: "We lived and worked long in mutual delight together. Our absolute incautious certainty remains, that we shall die together, not only into inevitable death, but unto Love." This passage echoes W. H. Auden's famous line, from "September 1, 1939": "We must love one another or die." And yet it is also haunted by a variation on Auden's phrase: we

must love one another *and* die. Both possibilities are entertained as truths in Outram's poems.

That love and death are literature's primary concerns is a critical cliché. More interesting to me, here, is the extent to which love and death are involved with whole-part relations. For Outram, death and lovelessness are mereological problems; they spring from the boundedness of the human condition — the impermeability of our minds and skins, the non-negotiability of our beginnings and endings. We are parts divorced from the whole. And yet reductive holisms — an orthodox heaven, a new-age Gaia-myth, a scientific vision of the inevitable heat-death of the universe — are not the answer. These are visions of the whole divorced from the part, from the particular, and are ultimately as sterile as their individualistic counterparts. What is required is a vision of unity-in-diversity.

As I discussed in my introduction, the poetic sequence enacts unity-in-diversity; it is founded on "the establishment of an *unus*, an *integer*, from *rime sparse* ..."; its cardinal motif is *spargimento*, the gathering of scattered parts (Greene 17). Conventional *spargimento* images evoke spatiality: the physical scattering abroad of leaves, people, or pages. The *unus* re-established is then spatial in form: a tree, a tower, a volume. Yet the fragments of a poetic sequence are demarcated in time as well as space: the *unus* they seek to establish is a vision not only of physical integrity, but of temporal continuity. A poetic sequence thus enacts unity-in-diversity in both space and time.

The relative spatiality and temporality of literary works is contested, however. The New Critics privileged spatial metaphors, like Brooks' "well-wrought urn." Frye, who never considered himself a "New Critic," nonetheless shared this spatializing bent.[1] "Frye is *the* architectonic thinker in modern criticism," Imre Salusinszky writes; "nothing

[1] For Frye's take on the "New Criticism," see for example the final paragraph of "Approaching the Lyric," in *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism* (31-37).

is more pronounced in his work than a relentless imaging and spatializing of knowledge" (46).[2] For Frye, spatialization is a way of conceiving of "wholeness" in literary works:

> Works of literature ... move in time like music and spread out in images like painting. The word narrative or *mythos* conveys the sense of movement caught by the ear, and the word meaning or *dianoia* conveys, or an least preserves, the sense of simultaneity caught by the eye. We *listen to* the poem as it moves from beginning to end, but as soon as the whole of it is in our minds at once we "see" what it means. More exactly, this response is not simply to *the* whole *of* it, but to *a* whole *in* it: we have a vision of meaning or *dianoia* whenever any simultaneous apprehension is possible. (77-78)

Human beings seem to have difficulty conceiving of "simultaneous apprehension" in temporal terms. We can take in multiple stimuli or think multiple thoughts "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye," but as soon as we try to speak about the experience we turn to spatial metaphors: the notes of a chord are "higher" or "lower" than one another; concomitant ideas are "superimposed." Psychologist Rudolf Arnheim has gone so far as to deny the possibility of holistic perception in time: "In order to comprehend an event as a whole, one must view it in simultaneity, and that means spatially and visually" (qtd. in Calinescu 26). But literary critics, often responding to Frye or to the New Critics, have fought against this notion. There is, for them, a spatial heresy (not unlike the heresy of paraphrase), which denies a work its temporal complexities, and also denies the reader's experience of a work in time.

In his study of rereading — that is, reading with the "whole" of a work in mind — Matei Calinescu writes:

> Spatial approaches to (re)reading ... do have heuristic value and call

[2] Frye did, however, acknowledge the heuristic nature of such projections (*Unbuttoned* 271).

> attention to important aspects of literary understanding, such as those regarding the compositional structure or the architectonics of a work. But time remains of the essence in the very act of apprehending a literary text of any length and complexity.... And if rereading is indeed more "spatial" than first-time reading, it can also be, when it is a labor of love and of deeper commitment ... an even more emphatically temporal activity than reading: a way of giving a spiritual dimension to time. (27)

Frank Kermode, too, has worked to develop a temporal vocabulary for the quality of wholeness in literature. For him, our sense of a work's wholeness — like our sense of "the fullness of time," generally — derives from "the sense of an ending": "Men in the middest make considerable imaginative investments in coherent patterns which, by the provision of an end, make possible a satisfying consonance with the origins and with the middle" (17).

Kermode points out that the spatial/temporal divide among critics tends to fall along generic lines: thus critics whose primary concern is lyric poetry will favour spatial models for the quality of wholeness in literature, while critics whose primary concern is narrative fiction — which, in its very length, foregrounds a sense of time elapsed — will favour temporal models (174). The poetic sequence, which partakes of both lyrical and narrative modes, lends itself to both kinds of models; I want to begin by re-examining Frye's spatializing model, however, as it acts in much the same way as do Outram's temporal-spatial metaphors.

In Frye's discussion of *mythos* and *dianoia*, it is the end that serves as the point of interchange between the temporal and the spatial. Only when we reach the end of a work — or a passage, or a poem — is the whole of it in our minds; and only when the whole is in our minds can we perform the transposition from the temporal to the spatial

dimension, from *mythos* to *dianoia*.[3] The transposition happens, then, in retrospect. It is a kind of resurrection: the story is reborn in a new (spatial) dimension at the very moment of its (temporal) death. As such, the temporal-spatial transposition has a metaphysical analogy. "What is immortal is not the life we are going to live after death," Frye wrote in one of his notebooks, "but the life we have lived. The Resurrection must be *retrospective*" (*Unbuttoned* 143).

Insofar as the resurrection (human or literary) is retrospective, it is also in some sense retrograde, predicated on reversing the direction of the *mythos,* running backwards from the end of a story or poem to its beginning. This kind of retrograde movement is a recurrent theme in Outram's poetry. (I will discuss it in greater length in Chapters Two and Three, when I turn my attention to *Mogul Recollected*, with its explicitly retrospective stance, and to *Benedict Abroad*, with its many comic reversals.) We can see the interactions of the retrospective and the resurrective in an early poem of Outram's entitled "Story":[4]

> Let us begin with Death
> Overheard, in the cry
> Of the first breath,
>
> That for what it is worth,
> We may all thereby
> End with Birth. (*Turns*, 5)

Two temporal wholes — the narrative or *mythos* of a "Story," and the birth-to-death trajectory of a human life — are laid alongside one another in this poem, but foot to head and head to foot: death is matched up with beginning, and birth with end. Beginning and end are thus momentarily conflated and, in their conflation, momentarily transformed. Birth becomes death (perhaps the "petit mort" of orgasm, which may conceive a life); at

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[3] Frye often uses the word "recognition" to denote the moment of transposition. For a thorough account of the connotations this word held for Frye, see Denham 116-23.

[4] I have discussed this poem in further detail as part of the "How Poems Work" series of *Arc Poetry Magazine* (Jernigan, "Story").

the same time, death becomes (re)birth.[5]

The transformation which takes place in "Story" recalls the apocalyptic transformations of the Bible: "the last shall be first, and the first last" (Mat. 20.16). But it also recalls various secular models in which retrograde motion is associated with wisdom. "Reversal is the direction of learning which transforms existence into writing," Walter Benjamin writes (138). In his retelling of the King Arthur legends, T. H. White makes the prophet Merlyn backward-living: "Now ordinary people are born forwards in Time," Merlyn says to young Arthur, "and nearly everything in the world goes forward too.... But I unfortunately was born at the wrong end of time, and I have to live backwards from in front, while surrounded by a lot of people living forwards from behind. Some people call it having second sight" (29).[6] Nearly everything goes forward, Merlyn says — nearly, but not quite. For poems share Merlyn's capacity for retrograde motion: once the whole of a poem is in our minds, we can in some sense "read" it both forwards *and* backwards. There is, after all, a third temporal whole in Outram's poem "Story," not described but enacted; this is the *mythos* of the poem, to use Frye's term. As Frye shows, this *mythos* may be metaphorically reborn as *dianoia* — an imagined spatial whole, which "escapes" time's linear motion — as soon as we have heard the poem's final word: appropriately, "Birth."

Outram's metaphors often suggest a three-stage transformation, as I have said, from a bounded temporal whole, to a bounded spatial whole, to a permeable whole — a riddle — in which mereological categories, as well as spatio-temporal categories, interpenetrate. The three "stages" of this transformation have formal analogies in three

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[5] See also Sanger's essay "Of Death ...," which discusses this "death" pun in Outram's late poems.

[6] There is a long tradition of Merlyn as a figure who, in his "many literary functions and guises," masters time "by changing or remaining determinedly anachronistic" (Goodrich xvii). In Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur,* for instance — White's primary source — Merlyn appears to Arthur twice in quick succession, first as a child, and then as an old man (Malory 31).

conceptions of the poetic sequence, which Outram ventures, implicitly, at various points in his work: the poetic sequence as time-span (Frye's *mythos*); the poetic sequence as spatial structure (Frye's *dianoia*); and the poetic sequence as a permeable (interpenetrative) whole (a riddle), partaking of both temporal and spatial dimensions.

Riddle is a crucial, multivalent term in Outram's work. As Sanger notes, the word "riddle" is a pun: it is both an enigma and a lattice, a conundrum and a sieve (74). The word thus allows me to address permeability as both form and theme: a poem may be written in the form of a riddle, its language enigmatic, at once concealing and revealing its subject; a poetic sequence may be structured as a kind of lattice work, its interstices the gaps between its consecutive poems, through which ideas or personae or allusions may pass. At the same time, either a poem or a poetic sequence may take permeability as its theme: a bird passes in an out of the chinks in a "riddled" barn wall; a blood-flecked buck leaps an intricate river; a man exits and then re-enters the riddle of life, the limit of which — death — is made suddenly permeable.

My reading of *Hiram and Jenny* will proceed through three "stages," then, corresponding with the three stages of metaphorical transformation described above: temporal whole, spatial whole, permeable whole. Outram's metaphorical transformations among these stages are neither progressive, nor absolute, however. The various wholes themselves interpenetrate, and a metaphorical "movement" from one to another does not cancel the first, but complicates and enriches it. Nor does Outram ultimately privilege the spatial order over the temporal, for all he makes use of its metaphoric possibilities, vis-à-vis permeability (human beings move with more freedom in space than in time, for they may travel through the latter in only one direction). *Hiram and Jenny* is full of structure-images, but its chief artificer, Hiram, works in a temporal medium: he plays the banjo.

If one conceives of a poetic sequence in the terms of strict succession — as *mythos* stripped of *dianoia* — one might define it as a gathering of poems which has "a beginning and a muddle and an end." This "classic formula" for fiction (Kemp 288) is one Outram often cited, with varying degrees of irony.[7] His poem "Elsewhere" (from *Dove Legend*) begins:

> A beginning and a muddle and an end. Clever.
> 'No young man believes that he will ever die.'
> It is Thursday again; the garbage goes out.
>
> And Bede's sparrows have carried strands of grass
> into the top branches of the fitful beech,
> they stream in the aimless formulaic wind.
>
> 'The lie is the specific evil which man
> has introduced into nature.' We live
> and we die by our fictions nevertheless. (1-9)

Each of these stanzas contains an overt literary allusion: the first quoting from William Hazlitt's essay "On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth," the second evoking an episode in the Venerable Bede's *A History of the English Church and People*, and the third quoting from Martin Buber's *Good and Evil.* Each of these cited texts is in some sense a fiction: not a literary fiction, like a novel, but a "sense-making paradigm" (Kermode 44), designed to help us order our existence. (One man's "sense-making paradigm" is another man's lie, however, as Outram's slippery diction, moving seamlessly between the words, reminds us.) By such fictions, as Outram says, "we live / and we die." The mortal thrust of this enjambed line is underscored by those "strands of grass" in the second stanza, which recall, in the context, Isaiah's "All flesh is grass" (40.6). Yet the line is profoundly ambiguous. To live by something is, generally speaking, to embrace it, to subscribe to it, to order one's life according to its precepts. To die by something is, generally speaking,

[7] Peter Kemp, editor of *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Quotations,* cites Philip Larkin's 1978 use of the "beginning-muddle-end" phrase; Bill Bradfield, editor of *Books and Reading: A Book of Quotations,* traces the phrase to Peter de Vries — who may have been Larkin's source.

to be killed by it. Fictions, with their beginnings, "muddles," and ends, are thus both our salvation and our undoing.

Frye writes that beginnings and endings belong, not to the order of nature, but to human experience: "we begin and we end, and ... we insist that because we begin and we end, beginnings and endings must be much more deeply built into the scheme of things" (*Biblical* 135). Beginnings and endings are thus integral to the "sense-making paradigms" — those fictions, or lies — that we project onto the world: a Bible which begins "In the beginning" and ends with Apocalypse; or a theoretical physics which begins with a Big Bang and ends with universal heat-death. These fictions are specifically eschatological: like the apocalyptic narratives discussed by Kermode in *The Sense of an Ending*, they reflect "our deep need for intelligible Ends" (8). Outram's point, in "Elsewhere," is that *all* fictions have an eschatological aspect: they need not narrate an end; they need simply to "end intelligibly," in Kermode's terms, in order to participate in that "necessary" lie.

Hiram and Jenny, as a fiction, is no exception to this rule; it has a beginning and an end, and we may read it chronologically from first to last. Outram uses all the resources of theme and form, however, to unsettle simplistic conceptions of beginning and ending: those mereological limits that define our fictions and our lives. "It is time to begin," he announces — but only, ironically, in the book's fifth poem ("Off the Hook," line 13). And the declaration *Consummatum est,* it is finished, comes ten poems before the book's ending ("Crux," line 26). The poem "Hiram's Rope" admonishes the end-seeking reader (questing, like Frye, for the "recognition moment" at which *mythos* becomes *dianoia*), "Only a green landlubber figures / that he can tell a beginning from an end" (19-20). In another poem ("Moth"), an outspoken moth proclaims to Jenny, "I am Beginning! I am End! / I am All in All!" (7-8). But Jenny has been "long wary of the dark; / endless metamorphosis; / the exclamation mark" (10-12). The exclamation mark is a form of

terminal punctuation: sentences move, like lives, dependent clauses notwithstanding, toward their ends. Bateson picks up on this linguistic analogy for mortality: death is a kind of four-dimensional "punctuation," he writes. Yet death's punctuation is never quite a full stop. It ends a life, not only in the three dimensions of space, but in the "fourth dimension" of time; and yet it also enables the continuation of the larger story. In the context of Abraxas — Bateson's term for "the largest conceivable *gestalt* (or organized view of the cosmos — especially the biological world)" — there "are no positive values which are not precisely balanced by destruction," he writes. "All [omelettes] are made of broken eggs" (qtd. in Harries-Jones 210). Jenny, like Bateson, realizes that the "end" which is death opens out on a larger continuity.

Hiram and Jenny's confusion of finitude, of absolute beginnings and ends, spills over from direct statement into represented act. Thus two artists in the book proclaim their works finished, only to have them continue of their own, or another's, accord. The moons and constellations painted by "Professor Alessandro Fausto Montefiore" on the ceiling of the town movie theatre begin to migrate, slowly, across their sky ("Art"); Feely carves a sculpture of Christ crucified, only to find the figure vanished from the cross ("Commission"). Here and elsewhere, humanity's "ends" are complicated by the ongoing order in which they take place.

In other poems, the "ends" of the universe (the entropic heat-death described by science; the apocalypse described by religion) are complicated by humanity's ongoing (that is, imperfect) order. In "Entropy," Hiram and Jenny pass "a sunny afternoon / together on the seashore ... making them sandcastles / which grew into a pretty good-sized town" (1-4): "And it was finished when they said it was, / and not before or after. We begin / at our beginnings, which are never-ending" (13-15). In "Autumn in Eden," Chronos — ally of "Entropy" — is likewise confounded:

> Chronos is slowing down. But he gets around.
> And around, and around again. Which just might be
> His deep undoing.... (8-10)

Time becomes a skein or bobbin here; its cycle becomes the means of its unravelling. Thus, watches run backwards in *Hiram and Jenny,* or not at all ("Time"); the sun sets in the morning ("Metaphysic"), and throughout the collection, day and night are conflated, as are sleeping and waking, and indeed life and death: for as time loses its grip on *Hiram and Jenny*'s world, so does mortality.

The metaphysical conceit conflating death and orgasm, suggested in the poem "Story," recurs in *Hiram and Jenny*; it participates in the system of images and formal devices which conflate and transform beginning and ending. There is also a related pun in *Hiram and Jenny*, in which to be "gone" is to be absent or to be pregnant ("... Some folks' troubles ... it's what her dad will say / when he finds out she's three months gone" ["Techne" 12, 13-14]). The twin puns are at work in the collection's title poem, which "ends":

> Morning is scrawny, scorched
> where the dog-star shone.
> Hiram I lay me down to die.
> Jenny is gone. (13-16)

This ending, in its punning ambiguities, is pregnant with beginning.

The poetic sequence as a form corroborates this sense of the "pregnancy" of endings: again and again, the ending of an individual poem opens out on the beginning of another. The sequence is reborn in every lyric; just as, Hiram's mother tells him, "you reborn, remembering, every morning" ("'Shoe Clerk ...'" 20). This consonance of personal and poetic beginnings is underwritten in the poem "Off the Hook":

> It is time to begin; the wind,
> fallen, has seen to that.
> The Immortals have doffed their plumes.
> Hiram puts on his hat. (13-16)

These "Immortals" recall a line from Heraclitus that Outram used as an endnote to the final poem in his final collection: "Immortals become mortals, mortals become immortals, they live in each other's death and die in each other's life." One way of reading "Off the Hook," then, is to see Hiram as taking up the burden of immortality: placing the plumed cap of the divine on his own head. But another reading is also possible: a plume can be a quill pen, as well as a headpiece. Given that Hiram is an artist, we might see him as not so much assuming immortality as picking up the story where the immortals left off. Their "The End" is his beginning.

If there is consonance between personal and poetic beginnings in *Hiram and Jenny*, there is also consonance between personal and poetic ends. This is particularly the case in the poem "Crux" — though this is not, significantly, the collection's final poem:

> Hiram is willing to bet
> (though he's not a betting man)
> that bright barn swallow can
> with no trouble at all
> fly through the solid wall
> of the barn and out again.
> . . . . . .
> Bede, he was nobody's fool.
> As somebody remarked, a rule
> there to be proved, as best
> a body can. Consummatum est. (2-6, 23-26)

Consummatum est: it is finished. The words are the last spoken by Christ on the cross in the Gospel of John. They were also apparently the last words spoken by the Venerable Bede. The legend goes that on his deathbed Bede was translating this Gospel, with the help of a scribe; hearing that the work was finished, he replied, "You have spoke truly.... It is well finished": *consummatum est* (Sherley-Price 20). These words signal that "Crux," like the poem "Elsewhere" from *Dove Legend*, is concerned with eschatological fictions, with the nature of "the end." Hiram's "bright barn swallow" echoes "Bede's sparrows," which, in

"Elsewhere," "carried strands of [all flesh is] grass" into the "top branches of the fitful beech." These sparrows have their source in Bede's well-known recollection of a parable told to the seventh-century Anglo-Saxon King Edwin, by one of his counsellors:

> Your Majesty, when we compare the present life of man on earth with that time of which we have no knowledge it seems to me like the swift flight of a single sparrow through the banqueting-hall where you are sitting at dinner on a winter's day with your thanes and counsellors. In the midst there is a comforting fire to warm the hall; outside, the storms of winter rain or snow are raging.... Even so, man appears on earth for a little while; but of what went before this life or of what follows, we know nothing.... (trans. Sherley-Price 127)

King Edwin's counsellor is working his way round to an argument in favour of Christianity, the "new teaching," which he claims may afford "more certain knowledge" about before and after. But Hiram's swallow flies a less doctrinal course: if there is "a rule ... to be proved," in "Crux," it has less to do with the nature of before and after than with the nature of the boundaries that define them. To the swallow, the "riddled" walls of the barn are permeable; if the temporal whole of a lifetime is mapped onto the spatial whole of a barn, the ending of that lifetime, "Consummatum est," becomes likewise permeable. The "Crux" of this poem is the metaphorical possibility of life before birth, after death.

The poem "Crux," like Frye's metaphor for reading, moves from a temporal whole to a spatial whole, where physical thresholds stand in for beginnings and endings. Like beginnings and endings, physical thresholds may be construed as necessary fictions. "Of necessity we shall split our descriptions when we talk about the universe," Bateson writes; "But there may be better and worse ways of splitting the universe into nameable

parts." At the same time it becomes, for Bateson, "an act of faith to distrust language and believe in monism" (qtd. in Harries-Jones 208-209): we must learn to hold unity and diversity simultaneously in our minds. *Hiram and Jenny* is constantly keeping this balance. Boundaries, like beginnings and endings, are insisted upon at the same time as they are unsettled: they are no sooner drawn than crossed, no sooner crossed than redrawn.

The most prominent spatial boundary in *Hiram and Jenny* is the shoreline. While Outram never explicitly names the setting of the sequence (nor does he explicitly call it an island), he makes clear that it is defined, if not bounded, by the sea.[8] Here is his cover text for the collection:

> *Hiram and Jenny* concerns the comings and goings, the deeds and evasions, the Private Poems and Sacred Ejaculations, the maunderings and heroics, the reflections and refractions of past, present and future, of one Hiram and his lady friend Jenny, together with their cast of somewhat skewed friends and often amicable foes, as often as not relatives, who live in and around a small town somewhere in the Canadian Maritimes.

To live "in the ... Maritimes" — that is, by the sea — is to live in the constant awareness of boundaries: shorelines, margins, liminal zones. Yet this oceanic boundary is always in flux: changing according to winds or tides or glacial melt or "acts of god"; allowing itself to be "crossed" by ships or swimmers; reasserting itself (as it does at various points in *Hiram and Jenny*, overwhelming the land), to our occasional demise. The sound of the sea, described and onomatopoeically enacted in many of *Hiram and Jenny*'s poems, is a reminder of this profoundly unsettled boundary: "Black rocks beat back /

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[8] Islands were important loci for Outram and Howard. In a 1987 letter, Howard wrote: "Islands have always been symbols ... islands of desire, islands of consciousness. There is something to be found in the microcosm of an island which is a distillation, a focussing, of that which eludes us...." ("Letter"). *Hiram and Jenny: Unpublished Poems* begins with a poem in which Jenny sits down "to write her her own *Apocalypse*" (6). The poem is entitled "Island." St. John the Divine received his own *Apocalypse* on the island of Patmos; the reader is left to interpret Jenny's "island" as literally, or as metaphorically, as she wishes.

ragged remembering waves" ("Hiram with Banjo" 9-10); "[he] / muttered on about the sea, / it being the bass clef" ("Hiram and Ludwig" 3-4); "The long waves about to break, and broken" ("Jenny's Ears" 15); "a body of water, voracity and again and again moon-heaved" ("Changes" 1-2); "Crashed slabs of blackness / advancing" ("Hiram on the Night Shore" 1). The Biblical account of inundation, in Genesis, ends with God's covenant, a guarantee of boundaries: "neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth" (Gen. 9.11). In Revelation, the sea gives up its dead (20.13) and is abolished entirely (21.1). But in the world of *Hiram and Jenny*, creation is balanced by destruction. The boundary between land and sea, between life and death, though constantly interrogated, can never disappear. Thus the covenant offered at the end of *Hiram and Jenny*'s final poem, "Hiram on the Night Shore," is much more equivocal than that offered to Noah: "Only so far shall waves advance, / so far retreat" (15-16).

It is not far from the water-bound landscape of *Hiram and Jenny* to the winter-bound landscape of Bede's banquet hall, or to the oblivion-bound timescape of a human life. The boundaries of a lifetime seem impermeable; so do the walls of Hiram's barn — yet the swallows can apparently pass right through these walls, and back again. The poem "Ferry" seems to propose a similar structure: "Hiram ponders on taking the ferry, / leaves from Karen's wharf, most every evening" (1-2). We expect to find the land-sea margin to be as permeable as the barn wall. Yet the ferry is apparently run by "Karen"; the name is reminiscent of Charon, the boatman of the River Styx, who ferries his passengers only one way. The boundaries of mortality reassert themselves in this poem: "Thing is, once you leave, most mortal souls, / they never gets back. Not ever" (16-17).

The nature of that "never"/ "not ever" is a perennial concern for Hiram and Jenny. Many poems in this collection turn on the present absences of "dead" family

members, gone, like the day lilies in Hiram's garden, "into the world of light" ("Trample" 16). Yet the words "dead" and "gone" never quite lose their punning double sense. Absolutes tend to become their opposites in Outram's poems: never modulates into ever, absence into presence, nothing into something.[9] Likewise, in *Hiram and Jenny*, the negation "nobody" becomes a proper noun: a modern, Maritime equivalent of the medieval Nemo. Mikhail Bakhtin describes the origins of Nemo in *Rabelais and his World*:

> *Nemo* is a hero whose nature, position, and exceptional powers are equal to those of the second person of the Trinity, that is, the Son of God. [The French monk] Radulfus discovered the great *Nemo* in a number of Biblical, Evangelical, and liturgical texts, as well as in Cicero, Horace, and other writers of antiquity.... For instance, in the Scriptures *nemo deum vidit* (nobody has seen God) in his interpretation became "Nemo saw God." Thus, everything impossible, inadmissible, inaccessible, is, on the contrary, permitted for *Nemo.* (413)[10]

Nemo is capable of doing the impossible: he thus proves useful to Outram, who is interested in unsettling the seemingly non-negotiable boundary of death. Death is the boundary that nobody can cross; which is to say, Nobody can cross that boundary.

Nobody makes his first entrance, in *Hiram and Jenny*, in the poem "Down at the Station":

> So nobody goes nowhere any longer.
> Nothing gets shipped out and nobody comes.

[9] Sanger writes of this phenomenon at a number of different junctures in '*Her Kindled Shadow ....*' 'Nothing,' in Outram's poems, may connote "something and 'Other'" (40); it may also be, for Outram as for Shakespeare's Cordelia, a word for the love that passes expression (269). See also Sanger's essay "'Of Death and Bright Entanglement and Troth' and Outram's Last Poems."

[10] Radulfus' Nemo has various literary counterparts — perhaps most famously Homer's "Nobody," an alter-ego of Odysseus, in which guise the "man of many ways" escapes the Cyclops. He has philosophical and theological counterparts, as well: George Steiner's "substantive absence," the "agency and *mysterium tremendum*" that is left where God is gone, for instance ("Real" 38-39); or the "hid divinity" of the fourteenth-century mystics (Denham 174); or Weil's "God who is like the true God in everything, except that he does not exist, since we have not yet reached the point where God exists" (Weil 103).

Nobody hangs around under the slat awning:
no dogs, no drummers, no railroad dicks, no bums.

.....

So all of the folk hereabouts, they like it,
are still where they always have been. Men forget.
Hiram, borrowing shingles, saw him by torchlight,
stomping. He will be slain some night. But not yet. (4-8, 13-16)

The references to nobody's "stomping," to his being "slain some night," suggest his identity with the "blood-flecked buck" who, "With a single imperfect bound," leaps the "intricate river" in the collection's following poem ("Off the Hook," 4-6). The stag is a conventional emblem of Christ; thus nobody, like Nemo, is connected to "the second person of the Trinity" — and to the resurrective imagery of "Crux" (the Venerable Bede is described, in that poem, as being "nobody's fool"). This connection is reinforced in the poem "Commission." When Feely, the local simpleton-savant, carves a crucifixion, nobody is watching; Christ's figure subsequently disappears from the cross. Nobody, like Hiram's swallow, is a psychopomp figure: he leads us from one world into another; he is able to move between and among parts and wholes. It is thus appropriate that he hangs out "Down at the Station," that liminal zone, a place of entrances and exits. To "leap the intricate river" is to cross a boundary. Nobody "riddles" — makes permeable — the most formidable of boundaries, that between mortality and immortality, life and death.[11]

The personae who animate *Hiram and Jenny* exist in various relations, at various times, to the boundaries that enclose their lives; they experience the permeability of these

[11] Outram is able to play with such boundary-interrogating constructions in part through his borrowing of a Maritimesque vernacular for many of the poems in this sequence. In its use of reflexive pronouns and ambiguous verb-forms, this dialect conflates subject and object, singular and plural, establishing a sense of a world in which forms interpenetrate. Similarly, in its assignment of personal pronouns to "impersonal" things, it interrogates the boundaries between animate and inanimate. Most notably, here, in its habitual use of double negatives, this dialect conflates all and nothing, ever and never, somewhere and nowhere, somebody and nobody. The arrows Hiram makes in the poem "Toxophily" "can't go / nowhere, nohow," he tells us (37-38); elsewhere, the Apostle Paul tells Hiram: "got to keep being Hiram / striving, for all your worth; / else nobody won't inherit, / won't be no blessed earth" ("Hiram's Burden," 29-32).

boundaries with varying degrees of activity and passivity. Some characters (like nobody, or the swallows, or the boatman, or the buck) can cross these boundaries themselves; some characters can only watch others cross them (as Hiram watches the swallow fly in and out of the barn); some characters can see across these boundaries (or draw "close" to them, as does Hiram in "Banjo" or Jenny in "Island"), though they cannot cross them.

In his 1988 "Commissioning of the Class" address, at the Metropolitan United Church, Frye used the word "riddles" to describe the boundaries that enclose our lives:

> The knowledge that you can have is inexhaustible, and what is inexhaustible is benevolent. The knowledge that you cannot have is of the riddles of birth and death, of our future destiny and the purposes of God. Here there is no knowledge, but illusions that restrict freedom and limit hope. Accept the mystery behind knowledge: it is not darkness but shadow. (*Service* n. pag.)[12]

Frye's language here recalls the famous passage from St. Paul: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (I Cor. 13.12). Eleanor Cook reminds us that "darkly" here is a translation of the Greek *en ainigmati*, "in an enigma" (*Enigmas* xi). An enigma is a riddle; the Greek word came from the noun *ainos* "tale, story" (Ayto 202); thus any story may be construed, etymologically, as a riddle.[13]

In an early poem "Language," from *The Promise of Light*, Outram takes this a step further. Here, the riddle becomes not just any story, but, as Sanger notes, language itself (75). Implicit in this poem is a play on the double-meaning of the word riddle: a riddle is

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[12] This passage was printed in the program for Frye's own memorial service, three years later; the program is among Outram's papers at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library (ms. coll. 00457, box 21).

[13] It is interesting to note, in the context of Outram's work, that the Greek *ainigma* is also cognate with the word *ainissomai*, speak allusively (*OED*) — allusion having been one of Outram's favourite "riddling" devices.

"both a conundrum and a sieve" (Sanger 74). A sieve is a permeable boundary: like a net, a veil, a web, a scrim, a "blind / Lattice work," it simultaneously reveals and conceals what lies behind it. A conundrum is a permeable (meaningfully ambiguous) statement, which — like the first-person riddles of the Exeter Book — simultaneously conceals and reveals its speaker's "countenance and name":[14]

> God help us, if we fail
> To cast this net, this frail
> Mandatory veil,
>
> This web, this scrim, this blind
> Lattice work, behind
> Which Animate, we find
>
> Meshed, as One selfsame
> Violence of Flame
> Countenance and Name. (*Promise* n. pag.)

The riddle of language, in this poem, acts like a camera obscura which, by blocking one's view of the light at every point except a pinprick, allows one to look upon the sun. The vision achieved through the pinhole — like the vision achieved through a glass, darkly — will always be imperfect; it leaves out far more than it takes in. But the alternative is never to see the sun at all. Language, for Outram, is a boundary that connects, a division that unifies. It is a "blind / Lattice work" that stands between us and meaning; at the same time, it is our primary way of communicating meaning.

What, exactly, is the meaning on the other side of language in this poem? "One selfsame / Violence of Flame / Countenance and Name." Sanger "names" this entity as "the Light of the first Created Word." Picking up on Outram's mereological language (One selfsame ... Countenance ...) I will call it the original unity — which is indeed, in

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[14] Etymologically, the two versions of "riddle" are two separate words:

> The 'puzzling' sort of *riddle* is etymologically something you 'read.' For it originated as a derivative of Old English *rēdan,* the ancestor of modern English *read.... Riddle* 'sieve' goes back to a prehistoric German *khrid-* 'shake,' which also produced German dialect *reiter* 'seive.' It is also related to Latin *crībrum* 'seive' and *cernere* 'separate' ... (Ayto 445)

Biblical terms, "the Word" (John 1.1). It is also equivalent to Bateson's "monism," that unity on the other side of differentiating language. Such unity, beheld "face to face," is blinding: a "Violence of Flame." Language, like St. Paul's glass, imposes a "blind" that paradoxically allows us to see.

The boundary that binds, the division that unifies, is a recurring image in *Hiram and Jenny*. The breaking of waves, or bones, or bread, or day, becomes, paradoxically, a symbol of creative union and communion. Often, Outram uses the word "cleave" to connote such breaks, sounding the word's double meaning: both "to divide" and "to adhere (to)." The act of cleaving is mereological: it discovers diversity in unity, unity in diversity. It is one way of talking about the parts that human beings play within a larger whole: each part (an act, for instance, or an utterance) is a cleave, "the actualization of a given set of possibilities" (Ong 117), through that whole. Such "parts" are always to some extent "errant" or "imperfect": like the camera obscura, they leave out much more than they take in. Yet the alternative to the imperfect act and utterance of the part is the perfect stasis and silence of the whole: "a final state which is hopelessly sterile," as Jung wrote (52).[15]

The creative act of cleaving is the theme of the poem "Error," with its cleaving of waters (by light, or a vessel, or a swimmer, or, in the sexual act, by a lover):

> Hiram's discovered desire is to enter water
> as light enters water and alters it not,
> yet sets quick fire beneath the surface,
> as rapture may enter a body held in thought;

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[15] Walter J. Ong's commentary on the pomegranate-metaphor which Gerard Manley Hopkins uses to signify the universe in its minute particularities is a helpful gloss on Outram's use of the word cleave (cf. Sanger 278-79):

> Inside its skin, a pomegranate is a mass of hundreds of small granular seeds — *pomum granatum*, the 'grainy fruit.' The whole world is a pomegranate, and so is 'each species in it, each race, each individual.' The mass of particulars represented by the mass of seeds can be further particularized, for the fruit can be sliced through in any direction to produce an infinite number of different surfaces, plane or curved, each cross-section or 'cleave' of the fruit and its enclosed seeds representing the actualization of a given set of possibilities. (Ong 117)

even as water remains the reflecting semblance
that turns burning, that casts back shattered fire
manyfold into the blinded beholder's eye,
to enter water discovered is Hiram's desire;

even as cold motionless depths unsounded
by light or the lost rumour of light remain
haven of absent creatures, beings we deem
monstrous for light stricken from their domain;

yet into this radiant world Hiram and Jenny
slip together, bright in each other's sight,
as a vessel, surging, divides the featureless waters
that cleft, curled, breaking, may enter light. (69)

The radiant divisions discovered by (and discovering) Hiram and Jenny as they "slip together" (an image of sexual union) echo the creative divisions of Genesis, which bring forth diversity from unity: "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.... And God divided the light from the darkness.... And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters" (1.4, 6).[16] They also recall the riddles, the permeable boundaries, of the poem "Language"; Hiram's "discovered desire" is to enter water (also his lover) without altering water — as light does, passing through the "blind / Lattice work" of the water's surface to set "quick fire" beneath. The boundary between Hiram and Jenny — who are nonetheless "one flesh" — is, like a riddle, a division that unifies. It is a cleave: a breaking point, and also a point of connection. Again, a key allusion here is Biblical: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2.24).

"Error" — the title of this poem — was a significant word for Outram, linked to his sense of the necessary imperfection of the "cleaves" we make through the world, and

[16] Alberto Manguel elaborates this connection in his fine reading of *Hiram and Jenny*, part of a larger essay on Outram's work: "By the elemental act of bathing, with all its sexual reverberations, Outram's man and woman become the God of Creation who changed, the Book of Genesis tells us, 'the darkness on the face of the deep'" (232).

through the universe of words. (He often quoted Richard Wilbur's poem "Mind," in which the "graceful error" of a mind at play "corrects the cave" through which it navigates.)[17] Examples of graceful errors and saving imperfections abound in *Hiram and Jenny*. In the poem "Problem," for instance, Hiram gets himself "stuck ... on the low-piered foot-bridge, / in the shallow Blue Willow saucer" (2-4), entranced by "the ultimate blue motif ... / the white-glazed abeyance ... intricate gold figured / about the brim" (16, 23-25). The circles of white-glazed abeyance are "perfect," but they are essentially uninhabitable. It is only a pair of gracefully errant drunks, "in their bent reed punt, happy with rice / whisky" (27-28), that can rescue Hiram, offering him "vulgar / hilarious passage to nowhere particular / out of the perfect circles" (29-31). The drunks, imperfect heroes, are able to make permeable "the blue bounds of [perfect] blueness" in which Hiram is imprisoned. Like nobody and the swallow, they are boundary-crossing figures: psychopomps who have right of passage between worlds.

The drunks deliver Hiram to "nowhere particular." "Nowhere" is a recurring locus in *Hiram and Jenny*. "The broken-off telephone pole / by the shack by the ramshackle sea / points nowhere," we are told in the book's first poem (1-3); in "Banjo," "fooling about" on the instrument brings Hiram "close ... to nowhere, particular" (17-18). In a collection in which "nobody" is a Christ-figure, "nowhere" becomes a kind of earthly paradise (the drunks, like Christ, are fishers) — particularly when it is furnished with "particulars": the vital diversity of word and world which Outram's poems perennially celebrate.

The imagery of imprisonment and escape that we find in "Problem" recurs in Outram's poetic sequences. Among the personae in his early sequence "Turns," there is

[17] Sanger touches on this connection at various points in *'Her Kindled Shadow ...'*, most explicitly in his discussion of the poem "Seer Halted by Angels": "a frequent irony in Outram's poetry is that visionary knowledge is often the result of errors of act and judgement, particularly in the practice of art. (It might also be mentioned here that Richard Wilbur's poem, 'Mind,' has been a central influence upon Outram's work)" (60).

a man who is an escape artist by profession. An escape artist exists in an ambiguous relationship with the boundaries that confine him: such boundaries are his livelihood; at the same time, his vocation is to cross them — to make them permeable, imperfect; to turn them from walls into riddles. The escape artist thus becomes a key figure in Outram's poetic mereology: able to negotiate the boundaries between and among parts and wholes, yet also invested in the maintenance of these boundaries. Often, he has constructed the prison in which he is confined.

The mereological is the mortal, however, and there is a sense is which all of Outram's characters become escape artists: invested in death, the limit of their mortality (just as Kermode's "men in the middest" are invested in the ends which give "consonance" to their beginnings and their middles), they nonetheless are always seeking to unsettle this limit, interrogate this boundary. They become "riddlers" in two senses: they construct riddles, permeable prisons, which are models for negotiable mortality; at the same time, they "riddle" — bore holes in — the impermeable wall of death.[18] Again and again, they enact the cycle of imprisonment and escape, performing — and thereby unsettling — their own mortality. They cleave the whole of the world; at the same time, they cleave to the world, as does Hiram in "Kite in the Sun":

> Something living up there struggling,
> like fishing in the air,
> darkness visible has hooked on Hiram
> good, but he don't care
>
> to leave the ground yet, maybe later,
> for now, too much to cleave. (1-6)

The "sense of an ending" has hold on Hiram ("darkness visible" is Milton's hell) — but he plays that ending as a fisherman "plays" a fish,[19] or as an escape artist plays on the

[18] Worms, literal riddlers, are also recurrent figures in Outram's poems; cf. Sanger, 73-74.

[19] The fisherman is often an artist-persona in Outram's work; see especially "Epitaph for an Angler" in *Promise of Light*, which Outram intended as his own epitaph, as well ("Poetic Practice" n. pag.).

boundaries that enclose him.

Poets, like escape artists, exist in an ambiguous relationship with boundaries. In his final essay, "Poetic Practice," Outram uses Rosaline's (from Shakespeare's *As You Like It)* metaphor for love — a cage of rushes — as an image for poetic practice: the discipline a poet fashions for himself, and which in turn constrains him, enabling his work. Part of the attraction of the poetic sequence for Outram must have been that it is a riddle-form, allowing a poet to construct and then escape one "cage" after another. The poetic sequence is imperfect by design: integral to the form are not only the poems but the "gaps" between the poems, those holes in the whole, through which ideas and personae, poet and reader, may pass.[20]

In *Mogul Recollected*, Outram's second book-sequence, the riddle gives way to the faceted mirror as a model for this sort of imperfection-by-design. The two figures are related, however: "For now we see *through a glass* [*en enigmate*], darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." Thus the King James Version; but the Revised Standard Version translates differently: "For now we see *in a mirror* dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood" (emphasis mine). A mirror, like a riddle, can be a boundary that simultaneously divides and connects part ("I know in part") and whole ("I shall understand fully"). As riddle gives way to mirror, images of boundary-crossing (interpenetration, permeability) give way to images of reflection, both physical (the returning of light to its source by a faceted surface) and intellectual (the returning of thought to its source by a faceted mind). Reflection becomes a way of modelling the mutually affective relationship between part and whole which is a key element in Outram's poetic mereology.

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[20] We might read the poetic sequence as a "pomegranate" form, to use Hopkins' image; it allows a poet to construct a whole, and then to make myriad cleaves through that whole without destroying its integrity.

Chapter Two: The Faceted Mirror

Mirrors, like boundaries, may be perfect or imperfect. The equivalent, in Outram's poems, of the permeable (imperfect) boundary, or riddle, is the faceted mirror. The perfect mirror, like a perfect boundary, is a dead end; it offers a vision of narcissistic self-reflection, unity without diversity. It thus becomes a symbol for reductive holism: the false grail of "illiterate literalism" and singular truth. The faceted mirror, on the other hand, offers an "aspectual" vision of the truth:[1] one that advances "the cause of meaningful ambiguity, together with its antinomian sibling, paradox" (Outram, letter to the author 7 May 2004). The faceted mirror is a kind of "world-in-a-grain-of-sand," a symbol for unity-in-diversity. My discussion of *Hiram and Jenny* moved toward a reading of the poetic-sequence as riddle: a permeable container — simultaneously a whole unto itself (comprising myriad, interpenetrating parts) and an (interpenetrating) part of a larger whole. My discussion of *Mogul Recollected* will move toward a reading of the poetic sequence as faceted mirror: a part which contains, in its manifold reflections, the whole which in turn contains it.

For Outram, literary devices have their equivalents in reality: synecdoche, the identity of wholes and parts, is a property not only of language, but of the world. The Hua-yen Buddhist tradition uses the image of a "celestial jewelled net" to signify this property of reality, in which part and whole, like word and world, are analogously related and mutually affective. This jewelled net, which "hangs above the palace of Indra, the emperor of the gods," comprises myriad faceted mirrors: "... because the jewels are clear, they reflect one another's images, appearing in one another's reflections upon reflections,

[1] I use the word "aspectual" here, as does Jonathan Bate in *The Genius of Shakespeare*, to describe a state in which "truth is not singular." Formal recognition of the aspectuality of truth "is a key feature of many different twentieth-century cultural fields," Bate writes: Albert Einstein's physics, William Empson's literary criticism, Ludwig Wittgenstein's later philosophy (327-28). Bate distinguishes aspectuality from relativism, however, "the dissolution of absolutes which characterizes late-twentieth-century modes of criticism such as 'deconstruction'" (315). Aspectual literature does not dissolve absolutes, but allows them to coexist: unity alongside diversity, abstraction alongside actuality, immortality alongside mortality, and so on.

ad infinitum, all appearing at once in one jewel, and in each one it is so — ultimately there is no coming or going" (D. T. Suzuki, qtd. in Denham 54). Each jewel in the net of Indra is a part that contains, in reflection, the whole: a Blakean sand-grain, reflecting, in its minute particularities, all the world.

Outram employs metaphors of faceted, reflective surfaces — bevelled mirrors, wave-broken water, a light-gathering "grainsun" ("Riddle of Wound") — in his poems, to model the reciprocity of part and whole, in ways that recall the net of Indra. "Vision crumbles at the edges," he writes in the poem "Mirror of Meaning," in *Lightfall*; "Bright Christ burns / in the race of crazed reflection. / Grace returns" (lines 4-8). That which is "crazed" is etymologically "cracked" (Ayto 144). The unity-symbol, "Bright Christ," is fragmented in the cracked reflection of this imperfect mirror; yet the mirror, like a faceted jewel in the net of Indra, also gathers and returns that scattered light.

Enacted in "Mirror of Meaning" is what Blake gave as the theme of his *Four Zoas*: "The universal man ... His fall into division & his resurrection to unity" (l.15). Light falls into the particular world and is scattered; we, reflective beings that we are, go forth to gather light, and return it, in graced error, to its source. This reciprocal relationship is reminiscent of Batesonian recursion ("the way in which events continually enter into, become entangled with, and then re-enter the universe they describe"); it also recalls Outram's use of the word synergism, "the doctrine that the human will cooperates with divine grace in the work of regeneration" (letter 11 Jun. 2001). It also recalls the *spargimento* motif which is fundamental to the poetic sequence: the establishment of a unity from scattered rhyme.[2] All of these models for part-whole relations are sounded in *Mogul Recollected*; often, they modulate into models for the relations between the individual and the ecosystem, or between being and non-being, or between the human and the divine.

[2] The reciprocities implicit in Outram's use of the word "Grace" in *Lightfall* are also relevant here (cf. Sanger 315: "Grace is a gift from the hands of a giver. Grace is also the return of thanks for such a gift from those receiving it ...").

In some of Outram's poems ("The Angel of Glass Bevel," for instance, in *Lightfall*), an individual capable of beholding the panoply of "crazed" reflections in a faceted mirror is referred to as being "otherwise": wise, that is, to the Other; able to reflect on — and thus to reflect — the larger whole which in turn reflects (on) him. The opposite of such other-wisdom is self-absorption; and the mirror, of course, can also be a symbol for this latter state. The consummate mirror-gazers in the Western tradition are Narcissus and Dionysus, a man and a god, each caught by his own reflection: fatally unable to behold the Other for gazing on himself. Sanger writes, in a gloss on Outram's poem "Seer on Return Journey" (from *Seer,* 1973) that the problem the seer must solve "is the problem of Narcissus which ... is central to so many poems and sequences of poems in Outram's work. If the seer sees himself in the 'glass' or mirror ... he will not see Other ..." (57). This, too, is a model for part-whole relations. Unable to see the other for the one, the part ignores the whole, or the whole the part; the system falls apart as a consequence. The ecological analogy is Bateson's "breeding organism" who, bent only on its own survival, destroys its environment, thereby destroying itself. The physical and theological analogies are outlined by Frye, in a passage from *Creation and Recreation* that Outram quoted in a letter to Sanger: "The encounter of God and man in creation seems to be rather like what some of the great poets of nuclear physics have described as the encounter of matter with anti-matter: each annihilates the other" (29 Mar. 1999). This model, too, is sounded in *Mogul Recollected.* The two possibilities for mereological relation — the one creative, the other destructive — are held in precarious balance; they are two aspects of the truth, reflected simultaneously in Outram's many-faceted sequence.[3]

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[3] Bate cites Wittgenstein's illustration of aspectuality, "a famous drawing in a work of *Gestalt* psychology." Looked at one way, the drawing depicts a duck; looked at another way, it depicts a rabbit: "Both the duck aspect and the rabbit aspect are 'true,' but try as you might you cannot see them both at one and the same time" (Bate 328). Wittgenstein's model allows us to appreciate aspectuality in time: to see one aspect, and then the other, in turn. Outram's poems often ask us to appreciate aspectuality in simultaneity, however — to learn to hold multiple meanings of a word, phrase, or poem, in our minds at once.

Aesthetically, Outram's aspectual style allows him to depict, in microcosm, the world's complexity. The reader's interpretive task is thus not to choose between these two possibilities for mereological relation, as they are represented in the sequence — not, that is, to read the sequence as presenting one to the exclusion of the other — but rather to perceive them both at once. The imperative to choose is not erased, however; it is pushed back from the realm of critical interpretation to the realm of creative action — from the aesthetic realm, to the ethical. Creative and destructive possibilities are held in balance in the text, so that the reader may learn to see them both, and to distinguish between them. She may then choose to actualize one or the other *in her life*.[4] The implications of Outram's aspectual style are ethical, then, as well as aesthetic.

The mirror is, among other things, a traditional symbol for this kind of self-reckoning: to look in the mirror can be, proverbially, to take the measure of oneself and one's ethical choices. Mirror images and mirror-imagery — which recur in Outram's work[5] — are particularly concentrated in *Mogul Recollected*: in "Information," the speaker contemplates the possibility of putting "one reflecting elephant opposite another" (2); in "Mogul and Messenger," a blind Angel shows Mogul "the mirror of being" (4); in "Mogul Prophetic," Mogul gazes into such a mirror which, like the mirror made by the artist-god Hephaestus, reflects "time present past and future" (7); in "Sidewinder to

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[4] This is akin to the point Sanger makes in his preface to his 2001 selection of Outram's poems: "Imagine the greatest poets whom we have not read waiting for us to find them. We are still unformed. We have yet to make them out of ourselves. Such is the import and effect of Outram's achievement" (Preface 5). See also the final pages of Sanger's chapter on *Mogul Recollected* in *'Her Kindled Shadow ...'*: "The question really set by 'Mogul's Eye' is not whether Mogul's is an eye of single vision or not, it is whether readers, by the end of *Mogul Recollected*, are aware of their own human capacity for double vision and wish to exercise the eye of imagination, not merely the eye of discursive reason" (196-97).

[5] Both Jeffery Donaldson and Sanger have picked up on the significance of reflective surfaces in Outram's work, in ways that inform my readings here. Donaldson writes of reflective surfaces in the shared work of Outram and Howard: the "fragmented" surface of, for example, sea water, so diversely reflective, conceals in its depths "a unity of perception"; it is thus symbolic of "the kind of unified perception that wants to *surface* in the visible world" ("Encounters" 18) — symbolic, that is, of an interpenetrative order: unity-in-diversity. Sanger addresses mirror-imagery at various points in *'Her Kindled Shadow ...'*. In a recent letter, he writes, "[Outram] was fascinated by the reflection in the bevel of a beveled mirror. I ... see another elided margin [a boundary that connects, a division that unifies] there" (11 Oct. 2006).

Burgess," a sidewinder's eye reflects an "immortal pyre" (28); in "Mogul's Eye," a "bucket of living water" reflects — that is, "recollects," as in the sequence's title — the light (15).

Outram's most explicit use of mirror-imagery in the sequence is in the poem "Commission." Here Mogul, the book's elephant hero, sits for a self-portrait: "An inspired gift from one Prince / who had everything to another" (10-11). The recipient-Prince (who is also, as "one ... to another" implies, a reflection of Mogul) wields "the blinding power / of life and absolute death / over his subject creatures" (14-16). He is thus a figure for God (as is Mogul, occasionally; cf. Sanger 174) — in this case a God much like Bateson's Abraxas: a Creator-Destroyer, the "largest conceivable *gestalt*" (Bateson, qtd. in Harries-Jones 210). He is also a figure for that other creator-destroyer, the sun. But Mogul's (ironically) ivory icon is "finished / mirror-perfect" (13). The sun/god who is asked to gaze upon this perfect whole thus sees his (blinding) self reflected: "a terrible / featureless void, a reflection / of crazed fragments of darkness / in otherwise unalloyed light" (17-20).

"Commission" presents us with a vision of opposing mirrors: Mogul sits for a self-portrait; he renders himself, mirror-perfect, as a "Prince / who [has] everything" — as a god, blinding to behold. God and Elephant, identified with one another through the mechanism of the mirror, see "face to face" in this poem — but the vision proves mutually blinding. Mogul, "having succeeded beyond expectation," is "never / commissioned again, nor forgiven" (21-23). The Prince (who is also Mogul), having had enough of perfection, takes comfort in "another concubine, astoundingly / skilled, purportedly [that is, imperfectly] virgin" (25-26).

In "Commission," the artist is figured — like Hephaestus — as a mirror-maker. Mogul fails because he succeeds "beyond expectation." His work is mirror-perfect,

blinding to behold, like the perfect circles of *Hiram and Jenny*'s "Problem." *Mogul Recollected*, by contrast — like *Hiram and Jenny* — is imperfect by design. The faceted (that is, flawed, imperfect) mirror becomes not only a central motif but also, quite self-consciously, a structural device. In a 1994 reading from the sequence, Outram quoted a passage from Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature* which at one point he had "thought to use as an epigraph" for the book. The passage begins, "Man is an analogist and studies relations in all objects. He is placed in the centre of beings and a ray of relation passes from every being to him. And neither can man be understood without these objects, nor these objects without man ..." (Outram, "Poems" 9). Emerson's "rays of relation" resemble the "reflections on reflections" of the faceted mirror/jewels in the net of Indra, which "recollect" the light. Outram reinforces this connection in the remark which follows his quotation of the passage: "But let me read next, a group of poems that might make manifest, in a many-faceted Mogul, something of this radical correspondence" ("Poems" 9). One of the poems Outram proceeds to read is "Rogue Legend." This poem shows, in small, the way "many-faceted" reflection can become a literary device:

> The sun was at its zenith,
> the day was bright and wide,
>
> the Corps, assembled in its strength,
> saluted them with pride:
>
> the Major and his elephant
> were going for a ride
>
> into the steaming jungle's heart
> where both could not abide.
>
> The elephant, it has been said,
> may sport the thicker hide,
>
> but only just; the Major claims
> to have God on his side.

And only one of them returned;
the lesser beast had died.

He lifted up a bloody tusk:
'The ways of Man' he cried

'and God and Elephant incensed
will never coincide!' (64)

Who returns in this poem? Who dies? Who speaks the poem's final lines? Perhaps the elephant lifts his bloodied tusk, having gored the Major. Perhaps the Major hoists the bloody, severed tusk of the elephant he has slain. Perhaps God speaks these final lines. Perhaps God, separated from "Man" by "he cried" and the stanza break, is Elephant? Perhaps Elephant, incensed, kills Man and God together? The diction of the poem is purposively multi-faceted, designed to reflect these various readings, and others, simultaneously and in turn. It confounds any attempt to come up with a singular interpretation. The poem thus upholds the diversity its final lines seem to deny: "The ways of Man ... and God and Elephant incensed" may never coincide, in the world of illiterate literalism; they do coincide, however, in the (meaningfully ambiguous) world of the poem. The poem thus becomes an ethical model, for a cosmos patient of diversity.

Mogul Recollected is, in very broad terms, a parody of a grail quest. Embarked on this quest is "daft Percy," knight errant, circus roustabout, and Mogul's handler. Percy is a farcical incarnation of Perceval, the original grail-knight, of Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval* romance. He is also a mereological figure, a "universal man" who, like Blake's hero, undergoes a "fall into division" — and a possible "resurrection to unity."

The object of Percy's grail-quest is, among other things, a mirror-symbol. In Arthurian legend, the grail appears only to a knight who is pure of heart; it thus "reflects" his inner nature. In more recent times, as Richard Barber writes, "the Grail becomes a mirror" in another sense, "reflecting the preoccupations" of individual writers and their

various intellectual milieus:

> [The grail] drifts free of its Christian connotations for all but a handful of writers; the general consensus declares that the old symbols need to be reinterpreted, whether in Jungian, pagan or philosophical terms. Nothing is taken as defined; everything in the old stories is questioned and reshaped according to the mood of the moment. (290)

Modern grail-knights would do well to be aware of the reflective properties of the object they seek: the grail, a "perfect" surface, is liable to give one back an image of oneself.

The object of Percy's quest is also a mereological symbol. The traditional connotations of the grail are holistic: from its earliest appearance in Troyes' romance, it is a "holy object" — holy, cognate with whole — the naming of which has the power to heal (make whole) an ailing king (Barber 20, 93). The grail is furthermore a vessel: a container (like the "mortal notion" nursed by Hiram in "Countenance"). What it contains is traditionally the Eucharist: a part that stands for the whole. When Percival sees the grail in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, he associates it with a vision of "the spiritual city and all her spires / And gateways in a glory like one pearl — / No larger, though the goal of all the saints —" (1676-77): a sort of world-in-a-grain-of-sand.

Tennyson's Percival lacks Blake's eye — and Outram's — for minute particulars, however. After listening to his tale of grand abstractions and holy forms, the hermit with whom he speaks recalls him to the things of this world:

> gossip and old wives,
> And ills and aches, and teethings, lyings-in,
> And mirthful sayings, children of the place,
> That have no meaning half a league away ... ("The Holy Grail" 553-56)

"Rejoice, small man," he says, "in this small world of mine, / Yea, even in their hens and in their eggs —" (559-60). The hermit points to the weakness of holistic grails: their

tendency to become inhuman abstractions, like the "perfect circles" of "Problem" — visions of unity without diversity. He also points to the weakness of grail-quests: their tendency to subordinate means to ends, and thus to become enamoured of ending — to fall into thanatos.

Outram's attitude toward grail-quests — those undertaken not only by characters but by writers and readers — is deeply ambivalent. He is suspicious of "mirror-perfection," and takes issue with any journey that subjugates means to ends. A true grail, in the world of his poems, is an imperfect whole — a dented bucket, a faceted mirror. A true grail-quest identifies ends and means, until the journey (the middle, or the muddle, between beginning and ending) becomes an end in itself.

For Northrop Frye, the vision of a whole is one "end" of reading: "We *listen to* the poem as it moves from beginning to end, but as soon as the whole of it is in our minds at once we 'see' what it means" (*Anatomy* 77). What Frye is describing here has the shape of a grail romance: the reader quests, in time (*mythos*), for a (w)holy vision; at quest's end, she exchanges temporal experience for spatial experience (*dianoia*), the simultaneous apprehension of a physical structure which represents the desired whole.[6] The reader, like the knight errant, privileging the ending over the "muddle" that precedes it, or questing after the "whole story" at the expense of its particulars, may prove after all to be an errant knight. At the end of *Mogul Recollected*'s first poem — narrated, posthumously, by Mogul — "bright gulls" (figures for, among other things, errant readers; cf. Sanger 190-93) "sate" themselves on the eye of dead Mogul; that is, on Mogul's ending. This, Mogul tells us, "is their whole story." That "whole story" is a false grail: the singular truth and illiterate literalism that Outram's poems constantly complicate.

Outram does seem to have shared Frye's view that at least one goal of reading is

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[6] On reading as quest-romance in Frye, see also Salusinszky, 45-46.

the simultaneous apprehension of a whole; in his poem "Instruction," in *Mogul Recollected,* to have a piece of literature "by heart" is to have it "entire" — that is, wholly.[7] Yet apprehension of the whole cannot happen, for Outram, at the expense of the parts. The *mythos* cannot be subjugated to the *dianoia,* nor the means to the end. Thus Outram describes his own reading of another book, Sanger's *Spar: Words in Place*, as follows: "after a number, now, of re-readings, I hold in my mind this manuscript in *the unity of its faceted achievement* ..." (letter to Sanger, 2 Nov. 2001; emphasis mine). That "unity of its faceted achievement" is a compliment: Outram is acknowledging Sanger's mastery of imperfection-by-design. It is also a statement of Outram's values as a reader: his sense of the importance of retaining a vision of the text's complexity (its "faceted achievement") together with a vision of its unity. The "whole story," if it is not to be a false grail, must be multi-faceted: comprising unity-in-diversity.

The "elephant eye" of dead Mogul, in "Mogul Falling," is not the only false grail represented in *Mogul Recollected.* Dexter, one of two unscrupulous circus proprietors, is a collector of ankuses; he has quested after a grail-like object:

> the stained ankus
> hewn from the Cross that Christ
> bore on the Via Dolorosa,
> inlaid with the fourteen Stations
> and three scenic views of Calvary
> by an old master, in mother-of-pearl.... ("The Dexter Collection" 59-64)

Some legends have it that the holy grail was not only the vessel from which Christ drank at the last supper, but that in which Joseph of Arimathea caught his blood as he hung on the cross (Lupack 448). There is something more than a touch ghoulish in the quest for such an object — even when carried out by a knight less errant than Dexter. There can likewise be something more than a touch ghoulish about a reader's quest for the "whole

[7] Cf. the poem "Countenance," from *Hiram and Jenny,* in which Hiram's mother is described as having "by heart" "the whole kit and caboodle, simple, as always" (18-19).

story," given that the whole story can only be found at the end. "[I]t is one of the great charms of books that they have to end," writes Kermode (23); and elsewhere:

> We imagine, with nothing in between, the dull not-being of life, the intense non-being of death; but we do not imagine being — we do not imagine that it can be a joy. We are in love, at least in our literature, with the fantasy of death. Death and suffering, when we read, are our only means of conceiving the actuality of life. (199)

Walter Benjamin takes this a step further. The "meaning" of the life of a character in a novel "is revealed only at his death," he writes: "this stranger's fate by virtue of the flame which consumes it yields us the warmth which we never draw from our own fate. What draws the reader to the novel is the hope of warming his shivering life with a death he reads about" (100-101). Outram recognized and was suspicious of this kind of investment in ending — in both readers and writers. The title of his collection *Man in Love* recalls, among other things, Yeats' "Man is in love and loves what vanishes," from "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen"; but there is a thin line between loving what vanishes and loving vanishing — between eros, that is, and thanatos.

Mogul Recollected has its genesis in a writer's act of reading: Outram's discovery and reading of a pamphlet, entitled *The Circus Ship Fire*, at the Nova Scotia Museum. The title of the sequence that resulted, *Mogul Recollected*, suggests that writing and reading — both recollective acts — are among the sequence's themes. Outram offers an epigraph, from Sören Kierkegaard's *Stages on Life's Way*, as a gloss on the title:

> Memory is merely a minimal condition. By means of memory the experience presents itself to receive the consecration of recollection ... For recollection is ideality ... it involves effort and responsibility, which the indifferent act of memory does not involve ... Hence it is an art to

recollect. (qtd. in *Mogul* 9)

Like rereading, recollection is "a special case" in what Calinescu calls "a larger phenomenology of repetition: of remembering, reevoking, reviewing in retrospect, retracing, thinking back and rethinking, rediscovering and revisiting" (xii). Like rereading, recollecting is mereological. It participates in what Greene calls the "originary, traumatic event" in the history of the poetic-sequence form: "The act of founding the phenomenon of fiction on lyric fragments" (17), the gathering (that is, the re-collecting) of scattered parts.

Calinescu underscores the mereological nature of rereading, quoting Nabokov's paradox: "One cannot *read* a book: one can only reread it." This, he writes, "is an amusing reformulation of the famous quandary of the 'hermeneutic circle,' namely, that in order to understand a whole one must have a proper understanding of its parts, but in order to understand each part one must have a prior understanding of the whole" (20). *Mogul Recollected* is preeminently engaged with this "famous quandary." Its protagonist, Mogul, is an elephant; an elephant — in addition to being a conventional mascot for memory — is a conventional illustration of the hermeneutic circle. There are many versions of this parable. The best known to Western readers is perhaps John Godfrey Saxe's poem "The Blind Men and the Elephant." The following, somewhat subtler version, is from the *Masnavi* of Jalal al-Din Rumi. It describes an elephant brought "for exhibition and placed ... in a dark house." Finding "ocular inspection" impossible, each visitor feels the elephant with the palm of his hand:

> The palm of one fell on the trunk.
>
> 'This creature is like a water-spout,' he said.
>
> The hand of another lighted on the elephant's ear. To him the beast was evidently like a fan.

Another rubbed against its leg.

'I found the elephant's shape is like a pillar,' he said.

Another laid his hand on its back.

'Certainly this elephant was like a throne,' he said.

Rumi extracts from this story a moral reminiscent of St. Paul's *speculum in enigmate*: "The sensual eye is just like the palm of the hand," he writes. "The palm has not the means of covering the whole of the beast.... We are like boats dashing together; our eyes are darkened, yet we are in clear water" (208). This is a mereological moral, contrasting "whole" and "partial" vision; it is also a moral about the necessity of recollection.[8]

There are many "inscribed" recollectors — writers and readers — in *Mogul Recollected*. The first of these is Outram himself, whose discovery and reading of the museum pamphlet catalyzed the poems. He describes this incident in his introductory notes from that 1994 reading. "Browsing in the publications section" of the Nova Scotia Museum in Halifax, he "seized upon" a pamphlet entitled *The Circus Ship Fire*, by Helen Goodwin, one-time curator of the Nova Scotia Firefighters' Museum. The pamphlet is "largely given over to an account of a fire aboard the circus ship *FLEURUS* in Yarmouth harbour in 1863." In the back pages, however, Outram found "a brief narration of the burning and sinking of another vessel, the *ROYAL TAR*...." It immediately became clear to him that this account, which "had become an event in itself," demanded from him a "response of some kind" ("Poems" 1-2).

Outram extracts Goodwin's account of the burning and sinking of the *Royal Tar* in the initial pages (7-8) of *Mogul Recollected*:

The circus was billed as Dexter's Locomotive Museum and Burgess'

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[8] The readerly context of *Mogul Recollected* is further corroborated by an earlier poem of Outram's, from *Man in Love*. Here, six philosophers (like the six blind men of Saxe's poem) examine, not an elephant, but an "Elephant Folio": not a beast, that is, but a book. See also the poem in *Mogul Recollected* which reverses these roles: "Mogul's Consideration of Six Blind Men."

Collection of Serpents and Birds. It had performed in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia for four days from September 27 to October 1, 1836 and travelled and performed throughout Nova Scotia boarding the ship at Saint John, New Brunswick. In order to accommodate the large circus on deck, two lifeboats had to be left behind. The *Royal Tar* was making her regular run between Saint John, N.B., Eastport and Portland, Maine.

Twice the ship ran into rising winds, and took shelter, the second time behind Fox Island on Penobscot Bay. While anchored there, orders were given to fill her boiler. These orders were never carried out and as a result, while still at anchor, the boiler became red hot and set fire to two wedges inserted between the boiler and the elephant cage.

The fire spread. The human passengers abandoned ship willy-nilly. Under the supervision of one Captain Reed, 61 of them were ferried to a neighbouring ship, the *Veto*; another 29 drowned — one "dragged to his doom by his wealth," having "fastened a money belt with $500 of silver around his waist and jumped into the sea." The beasts, birds, and snakes aboard the *Royal Tar* fared considerably less well than did her human passengers: all went down with the ship, save three horses that swam to shore (another three "circled the ship until exhausted"). The fate of the circus elephant, Mogul, is given particular attention. Having "refused to jump into the ocean," Mogul paced the deck until, frightened by "a blast of hot air and burning embers," he "trumpeted in terror," placing his front legs upon the taffrail. The taffrail broke and Mogul plummeted, crashing down into the sea atop a makeshift raft and its passengers, "sinking them forever beneath the water." Mogul, we are told, perished before reaching shore; his body was found, a few days later, washed up on the shore of Fox Island.

A reader acquainted with the image-patterns and characteristic concerns of

Outram's earlier books — and especially of *Hiram and Jenny* — can imagine how this account would have galvanized his attention. It proffers a wonderfully Dickensian roster of names. The proprietors of the ill-fated circus are Dexter ("on the right" — but suggestive, as in "dexterity," of "manipulative skill") and Burgess ("an inhabitant of a town or borough"). The saviour of 61 passengers is Captain (all-flesh-is-grass) Reed. The ship is called the *Royal Tar:* a tar is a sailor; it is also an anagram for 'rat', the creature that traditionally deserts a sinking ship — as the tars in fact do, in this sinking. (Tar is also, tellingly, an anagram for 'art'; the propensity of artists to desert their craft is likewise one of the themes of *Mogul Recollected.*)[9] There are other telling details in Goodwin's account, beyond the names. The beasts that survive are a trinity (a whole greater than the sum of its parts); they survive by swimming to shore — that is, by crossing a boundary. The birds and snakes aboard — reminiscent of the avian cast of *Hiram and Jenny* (geese, crows, swallows, a dove) and of the adder with whom Jenny converses in "Cynic" — all perish by fire and water (shades of Jenny's abbreviated *Apocalypse*, from the poem "Island"). The drowned elephant, Mogul, washes up on the shore of an island, that recurring locus in Outram's poems.

All the makings of an Outramian poetic sequence seem to be here. One might be excused for expecting his signature devices: mereological transpositions in which the part becomes the whole, the whole the part; metaphysical inversions in which death becomes (re)birth: in short, "the sure / and certain hope of death and resurrection." Which is precisely the hope that Outram dashes in the poem "Aviary," midway through *Mogul Recollected*:

> Over the years Burgess had done his damnedest
> to add it, despite the cost, to his Collection;

[9] Outram delighted in anagrams — indeed in wordplay of all sorts. He was a devoted "cruciverbalist," and Sandy Balfour's cryptic-crossword-memoir, *Pretty Girl in Crimson Rose (8)*, was "for [him] an important book" (letter to the author, 7 May 2004). He once pointed out, amusedly, that his full name, Richard Daley Outram, might be read as an anagram for "Ouch! Married art lady."

nothing attracts the curious like the sure
and certain hope of death and resurrection.

In the event it was not a mishap, however,
that even a Phoenix was likely to survive:
most were drowned, beating against their cages,
if some, battened below, were burned alive. (42)

In chapter one, I discussed *Hiram and Jenny* as a riddle, a "cage of rushes" whose imperfect boundaries, like the walls of Hiram's barn, allow for the passage of ideas, personae, and allusions, of writer and of reader. Burgess is a man of many cages; at first glance, then, we might associate him with the artist-figures in *Hiram and Jenny.* But Burgess' cages are of iron, not of rushes; their "perfect" boundaries are non-negotiable. Birds and ideas both die "beating," heart-wise, in them. Burgess thus becomes a figure for the false artist, the con artist, who makes walls instead of riddles, "Collections" instead of recollections, illiterate literalisms instead of meaningful ambiguities.

As Sanger points out, con artists are legion in the collection. Dexter and Burgess, the circus proprietors, lead the pack: "By contriving a simulacrum of a Peaceable Kingdom, in which the equivalents of the lion and the lamb only apparently lie down together in peace, Dexter and Burgess are purveying penultimate gross forms as if they were visionary, eternal and ultimate ones.... They are, in a sense, false poets" (167). And they are not alone. There is the wood-engraver whose sensational depiction of the *Royal Tar*'s sinking elides "a passion, an exile, an inconsequential life / in captivity," recording "Only the manner of a death" ("Catastrophe" 11-12); there is the born-again boatswain who, in "Scrimshaw," turns Captain Reed into the sentimental saviour of a bowdlerized Revelation; there is the amphibian Hyla Panjandrum who spouts a pseudo-Frygian (Frye-like; cf. Sanger 185-86) gospel from out of Mogul's water bucket in "Confrontation"; there is the hung-over hack from the local paper who "scale[s] Mount Parnassus" (42), in an article as dishonest as it is clichéd ("Embarkation"); there is the

theatre director in "The Insane Root" who refuses to let actor-Mogul "exchange his buskins for his socks" (9) — that is, his tragic role for a comic one: tragedy sells tickets — and man, as Mogul reflects in the poem "Execution," "in his terrible / boredom, craves spectacle" (32-33).

A poetic sequence is, among other things, a spectacle; the poet is the ring-master who tricks out a story for the delectation of the masses (the poet also crowds in, along with those readerly "masses," insofar as he is spectator/reader of his own poem). The historical narrative Goodwin presented must have appealed to Outram not only because of its epistemologically fertile setting and motifs, but because of its connection to "showbiz." Showbiz is an analogy for the poetic vocation in many of Outram's poems; the stagey cast of Goodwin's account thus offered Outram a chance to "hold the mirror up" to his own ends and means.[10]

In addition to the various con artist (errant writer) figures in *Mogul Recollected*, there are various "gulled" (errant) reader figures. There are the bright gulls of "Mogul Falling" who, unable to hear Mogul's "otherwise" narration, glut themselves on the utter(ed) end of his eye (I). There are also the sailors of the poem "Mogul and Penobscot Mermaids" who, enamoured of ending, are led off course by sirens' song:

> Men have survived who have hearkened to our singing
> of perfect death. A lifetime, if not for long.
> Men are in love with death but they will not know it
> until they have been enamoured of our song.
>
> In their beginning was our wordless promise
> of wordless rapture; wordless is our refrain
> of endless death, endless as boundless oceans
> where they may rest as mankind made whole again.
>
> Sweet is our song to sailors above the tempest:
> bitter the death of an elephant, lost at sea,

[10] Sanger's fine chapter on *Mogul Recollected*, in *'Her Kindled Shadow ...'*, is preeminently concerned with the extent to which the book is — and is not — "a repudiation of itself and its means" (193).

> who has overheard, drowning, the mermaids singing
> of all that is past, or passing, or not to be. (23)

The sirens sing of "perfect death": death absolute, death impermeable. Their song echoes that of Yeats' golden bird, the eternal artifice which sings "To lords and ladies of Byzantium / Of what is past, or passing, or to come" ("Sailing to Byzantium" 31-32). But for Yeats, as for Blake, eternity — unlike the Penobscot mermaids — is "in love with the productions of Time." The song of his golden bird is thus, like Hiram's banjo tune, composed in the imperfect tense; it makes temporal boundaries fluid, permeable. The song of the Penobscot mermaids lacks the imperfection of the golden bird's "to come": they sing, rather, "of all that is past, or passing, or not to be." The end they sing of, wordlessly, is *utter*, then, not uttered (cf. Nahum 1:8-9). Their whole ("mankind made whole again") is absolute — and thus inhuman — like the "perfect circles" of "Problem." The siren's song is bitter to Mogul, drowning; for man — that sailor/reader enamoured of the end — sees not the unnecessary suffering of Mogul's life, but only the "necessary fiction" of his death.

Another "inscribed reader" in *Mogul Recollected* is that farcical grail-knight, daft Percy. Percy's name is short for Nahum Merlin Percival Delisle. As Sanger writes, these are "names ... to conjure with." By them alone, "Percy is heir to the ages"; "his cultural background should have provided him with the bearings he needed to discover his own 'Poetic Genius'" (175). "Percival," as I have said, is the name of the original grail-knight; "Merlin" is the (backwards-living, Other-wise) sage of Arthurian legend. "Delisle" means "of the island"; Sanger thus associates Percy with various lords of the British isles, factual and fictional (175). I read in that surname, also, an ironic kinship with Outram's other island protagonists, among them the personae of *Hiram and Jenny*. Percy's first name, Nahum, is that of the Old Testament writer who, as Sanger reminds us, "prophesies [as did Jonah] the destruction of the Assyrian Kingdom of Nineveh" (175):

"What do ye imagine against the Lord? he will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time" (Nahum 1:7-10). All of these figures — knight errant, sage, islander, prophet — have honourable traditions as poets' personae; yet Percy never takes up his writerly birthright.[11]

The outline of Percy's story, largely recounted in the poem "Rites of Passage," is as follows. Youngest son of a venerable English family (whose country seat might well be called "Camelot") he is sent to the colonies. There he shoots, as "rite of passage," a rare albino elephant ("White Elephant"); and is immediately sick with remorse. He is sent home in disgrace, by the Consul, some time later, as "a drunk who might disgrace the Colony" ("Rites" 11-12). The sight "of immemorial elms and parish spires, / the ease of his ancestral home" does not "provide him rehabilitation," however (12-15). He embarks again — in another, truer "rite of passage" — for another colony, Canada, where he becomes, unbeknownst to his family (in whose eyes he is "a commonplace remittance man" [36]) Mogul's handler: rubbing "a tar-camphor balm of his own concoction on Mogul's / festered chafe-sores night after night, mumbling / Latin tags and snatches of hymns to himself / and sometimes weeping, silently, for no reason" ("Compassion" 19-23). He dies, eventually, at the hands (or rather the trunk) of his charge:

> The death in Saint John of Percy was in this wise:
> Mogul grabbed him and brained him against his cage.
> He then proceeded to trample Percy's body.
> Mogul was on musth, become elephant rage.
> ("Unfortunate Incident in New Brunswick" 1-4)

Percy's "sacked forcemeat" (farced meat, as Sanger notes [172]) remains are smuggled on board the *Royal Tar* for a discrete sea burial; they are first cremated, then immersed, when the ship burns and goes down.

[11] Percival is also the name of a character in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*. Woolf's Percival, like Outram's, dies in the colonies, killed by an animal-other: he is thrown from his horse, while in India. *The Waves* was an important book for Outram, and one to which he frequently alluded; he must have been well aware of this connection. I am grateful to Dr. Bradley Clissold for drawing my attention to it.

Percy never becomes the writer his name seems to promise: "He did not write," we are told in "Rites of Passage," "and no one wrote to him" (37);[12] he does become something of a reader, however:

> Among Percy's effects was a blurred tin-type
> of him watering Mogul from a dented pail.
> A trick of light or exposure, it gleamed abundant,
> might have been anything under the moon. A grail.
> ("Unfortunate Incident ..." 25-28)

For Sanger, that dented pail "is everything and therefore nothing, a lunar figment ... emitting reflected rather than original Light...." The bucket "exists as a 'grail' at the poem's end only by reason of its abrupt and complete syntactical separation from everything which precedes it." Percy is accordingly "a lunar lunatic, not a visionary clown in motley like Hiram" (176). These lines permit another reading, however, alongside Sanger's. Let us suppose that the purpose of the "complete syntactical separation" of "A grail" from all that precedes it is designed, not to cut Percy off from the object of his quest, but to destabilize the reference of that "it" in the poem's penultimate line. Now the gleaming object may be, not just the "dented pail," but the tin-type itself: "A trick of light or exposure, it gleamed abundant, / might have been anything under the moon. A grail." "Tin-type" is hyphenated here, as it is not earlier in the collection. The photographic medium (tintype) thus modulates into the text (the type) on the page; the grail becomes the poem itself — that gleaming, multifaceted surface that Outram holds up for the reader's inspection (and reflection).

The tin-type/grail is "among Percy's effects"; also among his effects are at least two books. The first is a copy of *The Book of Common Prayer*, with which he was presented on leaving his public school, "Headlands." He is, ironically, "unable to read it" — though the poem does not specify whether this is because he is literally illiterate, or

[12] Given the identity of "nobody" in *Hiram and Jenny,* however, one could argue that this line means the opposite of what it seems to say — could argue that, although Percy didn't write, "nobody" wrote to him.

because he is illiterately literal in his approach to it; nevertheless, "he has entire by heart, if left unsaid, / the Litany; the Psalms; the General Confession; / The Order for the Burial of the Dead" ("Instruction" 1-8). The second book in Percy's possession is *The Boatman,* a volume of poems by Outram's contemporary Jay Macpherson.[13] In the poem "Good Book," he quotes from this volume for the benefit of Mogul — who has just been fishing in his water bucket for Leviathan:

> Daft Percy, who happened along, knowing more than most folk
> about the big ones that get away, fished out a little book
> from his hip pocket and recited to Mogul: 'Say Wisdom is
> a silver fish / And Love' (he had it by heart) 'a golden hook.' (17-20)

To have something by heart is — as in "Instruction" — to possess it entire: to be able to hold the whole of it in one's mind. The poem, so learned, goes from *mythos*, unfolding chronologically in time, to *dianoia*, existing simultaneously in space. In Outram's work — as I discussed in chapter one — such temporal-spatial transformations often allow for the poetic reversal of beginnings and ends; they turn death into (re)birth. But Percy's attempt at such reversal is in vain, for all he knows the script "entire." In "Instruction," he watches a film reel in which an elephant is killed (possibly by himself):

> The voices are inhuman, inhalated,
> a glossolalia; then the giant cough
> sucked up to sudden silence, the imploded
> rifle-shot. He turns the sound to 'off',
>
> and wishes that he had not done those things
> he ought not to have done. Of course, in vain.
> Half-cut, he runs the grainy film backwards
> to see the slaughtered tusker rise again. (9-16)

To recollect is human, Outram implies; to resurrect, divine. For Percy's first name, Nahum, as well as being the name of the Old Testament prophet, is an anagram for

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[13] Outram once remarked that there should be a copy of *The Boatman* in every grade-nine classroom in Canada: "Little else in the dispersed world of Canlit can offer such a direct, crystalline access to various essential modes of poetic experience, of poetic and mythic thinking and practice" ("Poems" 23).

human: and Percy indeed proves (all too) human in this account. The boundary of death reasserts itself, in this poem — as it did, occasionally, in *Hiram and Jenny* — confounding humanity's attempts to transform it.

In another of *Mogul Recollected's* poems, however, there is an instance of imaginative reversal that succeeds in transforming death. This reversal is performed by the speaker of the collection's third poem, an otherwise unnamed "seadog." The seadog "reads" another tintype, depicting Mogul's plummet from the deck of the *Royal Tar*:

> Well, takes puzzling out,
> a picture like this. Sometimes it helps if you turn it
> to down-side up. Then the creature is seen ascending
>
> from flame to an Elephant Heaven past agonized Angels
> bending in frozen compassion out of a mess of kindling,
> the shucked sins of the saved. It's a judgement, I'd say.
> ("Seadog with Tintype" 16-21)

The seadog/reader performs the resurrective act of poetic reversal at which Percy, in "Instruction," fails. The human and the divine interpenetrate: the drowning tars become "agonized Angels"; the vernacular seadog, in another reversal, becomes a god ("dog" is "god" spelled backwards — that is, mirror-imaged).[14]

It is tempting to read the seadog as Percy resurrected. The first thing that tempts me to make this identification is a seeming contradiction at the end of the poem "An Image of Truth":

> No one save daft Percy watched
> his Mogul die.
> To the present of God.
> The destructive sword fallen and his dear Mogul is dead
> his dear Mogul and a portion of Genius is soared on high
> lift up thy head! (25-30)

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[14] There is a poetic tradition in which the sea is God's mirror; in Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, for instance, the speaker addresses the ocean as "Thou glorious mirror, where the Almighty's form / Glasses itself in tempests" (4.183.1-2). In Baudelaire's "Man and the Sea," which Outram translated in 1984, the image is reversed: the sea is not God's glass, but man's.

"No one save daft Percy watched / his Mogul die," this poem tells us; the "Seadog with Tintype" "sees" Mogul die, however — "[t]o the present of God," no less: "ascending // from flame to an Elephant Heaven." Who then, is the seadog? One possible answer — if we read the negation, like the nobodies and nowheres of *Hiram and Jenny*, as a positive identity — is "No one save daft Percy."

The second thing that tempts me to identify Percy and the seadog is an action performed at the end of the poem "Bestiary Lore":

> The Elephant, the most chaste of beasts, may be inflamed
> by mandragora; conceived in water, in water he is born.
> He dreads the suffocating Dragon and, absurd, the Mouse.
> He guards his vulnerable belly against the Unicorn.
>
> And he '... hath joints, but none for courtesy. His legs
> are legs for necessity.' Mogul has been taught to kneel.
> Not, granted, for courtesy. He sleeps standing, his bulk
> shored by an imagined bole. But his necessities are real.
>
> The Pelican rends her breast to revive her nestlings
> with her blood. Harried, the Beaver bites off his balls
> to escape his pursuers. Puny, but versed in betrayal,
> roustabout Percy will lift up Mogul where he falls. (69)

The final lines of this poem are double-edged. Read in one way, they depict Percy as a failure — a "lunar lunatic," as Sanger suggests. He is "puny": a "small man" like Tennyson's Percival (*Idylls* 1677). He betrays Mogul quite literally, by attempting to serve, as Sanger puts it, "both God and Mammon" (174); by working for Dexter and Burgess, that is, he makes Mogul's captivity possible. (The "he" who "falls" at the end of the poem can be read as either Mogul or Percy.) But there is another way of reading this poem's final lines. Puny is etymologically "born later"; to betray is etymologically to "hand over, deliver up." Percy, "born later" (or possibly reborn), and "versed" (poem-schooled) in the readerly art of turning things "to down-side up," delivers Mogul as the seadog does: "Then the creature is seen ascending // from flame to an Elephant

Heaven...." Percy's "lifting up" of Mogul corresponds to the seadog's act of inverting the tintype. In "Bestiary Lore," Percy performs the act of imaginative reversal at which, in "Instruction," he fails.

The "Bestiary" of this poem's title is a tribute and allusion to the twelfth-century bestiary translated by T. H. White (creator, coincidentally, of the backward-living Merlyn of *The Once and Future King*), with which Outram had been delightedly acquainted for thirty-some years at the time of *Mogul's* writing (Outram, *Tyger* 15). White's bestiary recounts, amid other elephant lore, the following: "The Elephant's nature is that if he tumbles down he cannot get up again." Felled by a hunter, "he calls out loudly, and immediately a large elephant appears, but it is not able to lift him up":

> At this they both cry out, and twelve more elephants arrive upon the scene: but even they cannot lift up the one who has fallen down. Then they all shout for help, and at once there comes a very Insignificant Elephant, and he puts his mouth with the proboscis under the big one, and lifts him up. (26-27)

The traditional, anagogic reading of this story sees the Insignificant Elephant as Christ, who "humiliated himself, and was made obedient even unto death, in order that he might raise men up" (*Bestiary* 27). Both Percy and the seadog attempt, Christlike, to "lift up Mogul" at various points in this sequence.

To read the seadog as Percy resurrected is overly simplistic, however. The possibility of Percy's resurrection is at once offered and held in reserve in this sequence — just as the possibility of Mogul's resurrection (and recollection) is at once offered and held in reserve. Given *Mogul Recollected*'s proliferation of mirror-imagery, it is more apt to see Percy and the seadog as mirror-images of one another: as mutually reflecting aspects, or facets, of the universal God/man, whose "fall into division & his resurrection to unity" is,

as I have said, one of *Mogul Recollected*'s themes. I suspect that Outram shares with Blake a source for this mereological fable in Thomas Taylor's account of the fall and resurrection of Dionysus.[15] Taylor describes how the Titans entrap the boy-god Dionysus by giving him a mirror. He is "captivated with beholding his image"; the Titans then seize him and tear him to pieces; "not content with this cruelty," they boil his members "in water," then roast them "by the fire." Dionysus, like daft Percy, is thus dismembered (made into "sacked forcement"), and then consumed by both fire and water.

Dionysus is subsequently resurrected, however ("restored to his pristine life and integrity" by the interference of Zeus and Apollo); the Titans are struck down in their turn, by irate Zeus; and from "the ashes of [their] burning bodies," mankind is made (qtd. in Raine 305). In this account, the relationship between gods and men is quite literally a whole-part relation. Men are made from the burned body-parts of the Titanic gods; at the same time, Dionysus (a god who is also the archetypal man, as Raine notes [305]) is dismembered and reassembled. As in the Heraclitean endnote to Outram's *Brief Immortals*, "Immortals become mortals, mortals become immortals, they live in each other's death and die in each other's life." The catalyst for these transformations — in the Dionysus story, as in *Mogul Recollected* — is the mirror.

In a lecture on Blake's poem "The Tyger," delivered three years after the publication of *Mogul Recollected,* Outram quoted another passage from White's *Bestiary,* in which a mother tiger — hot on the tracks of the hunter who has stolen her cub — is entrapped by the device of a glass ball thrown down in her path: "... she, taken in by her own reflection, assumes that the image of herself in the glass is her little one. She pulls up, hoping to collect the infant," only to find that she has been deceived (*Tyger* 15). I see an analogy, in the glass ball cast down by the fleeing hunter, for the mirror Mogul uses to

[15] A full account of Blake's debt to this source is give by Kathleen Raine in *Blake and Tradition.* For Raine, the Dionysus myth also informs the words spoken by Jesus at the Last Supper, and in the Sacrament of Holy Communion (419, n. 9); Outram, like Blake, sounds both the Christian and the classical stories.

"catch" the God/Prince (who is also himself) of the poem "Commission" — as the Titans catch Dionysus when he is a child. There is also an analogy, as Outram points out, between the hunters' glass balls and the "lances of terrible ... light" thrown down by the stars in Blake's poem:

> When the stars threw down their spears
> And water'd heaven with their tears:
> Did he smile his work to see?
> Did he who made the Lamb make thee? (17-20)

These starry lances appear several times in *Mogul Recollected.* They are "thrown down," in "Mogul's Orrery," "piercing wandering Mogul with cold fire" (16). In "Percy's Cosmogony," they are taken up again, reversing (as in a mirror) the image of the previous poem. There is a kind of reciprocity at work here: earth casts its mirrors up to heaven; heaven casts its mirrors down to earth. God is man; man is god; they are captivated by their reflection in one another.

There is a good deal of calculated uncertainty, however — or, to put it in more Outramian terms, meaningful ambiguity — in *Mogul Recollected*, about whether this reciprocity is for better or for worse. At times, Mogul (Elephant/God) and humanity (God/Man) seem to "cooperate ... in the work of regeneration" (as they do in "Bestiary Lore"); at other times, their encounter proves "mutually annihilating" (as it does in "Rogue Legend"). Both of these possibilities are reflected, simultaneously, in another poem, "Percy Dreaming." This poem follows the account of Percy's death, and thus suggests, in the strict chronology of the collection, that he, like Dionysus, has been regenerated. Yet this regeneration (and, with it, Mogul's regeneration) is hidden behind layers of regressing reality. Percy dreams he wakes into another dream:

> Percy dreamed two dreams, in their succession,
> of immolation. And in each of them he died
> into the mortal elements of fire and water:
> Percy and Mogul abandoned, side by side.

In death by relentless fire flaming Mogul
would succor Percy, and came to kindle him.
In death by whelming water Percy, weeping,
failed Mogul drowning, for he could not swim.

Sleep is a fleeting death. Percy dreamed he wakened
into a desolate dream wherein Mogul was reborn:
a Mogul half-remembered, half-forgotten, goaded
through Gate of Ivory, goaded through Gate of Horn. (79)

In Greek legend, "Dreams that are false pass through the ivory gate; those that are true pass through the gate of horn." The distinction depends on a pair of puns, one of them appropriately elephantine: "'ivory' in Greek is *elephas,* and the verb *elephairomai* means 'to cheat with empty hopes'; the Greek for 'horn' is *keras,* and the verb *karanoo* means 'I accomplish'" (Room 435). Is the dream of regeneration — for Man, for Elephant, for God — a true dream or a false dream? Does it "cheat [us] with empty hopes," or does it "accomplish" what it envisions? It does both: like other binaries in Outram's work, this one refuses to be resolved. "True dream" and "false dream," these double aspects, are simultaneously reflected in the poem's many-faceted surface. To see one to the exclusion of the other — to "goad" the poem into declaring itself one way or the other (as Burgess might, with his collection of ankuses, or goads) — is to seize upon a false grail.

The gulls' false grail — "their whole story" — is Mogul's dead eye: a polished surface that returns their own voracious image. Mogul's *living* eye, by contrast, becomes an image for a true grail. It is a faceted mirror that recollects the world aspectually: a unity-in-diversity vision of "life / in the myriad present: which is immortal" (23-24):

Mogul's eye had looked on eternal light
grooming the endless orient riverine grasslands;
piercing the overlapped canopy of the unfelled forest;
burning stark verticals in high mountain passes;
knifing through chinks in the slats of a boxcar,
holding the motes mingled in shafts of gold;
tangling snarls in the steel mesh of enclosures;

rebounding blaze from a bucket of living water;
quenched forever at last in Penobscot Bay.... ("Mogul's Eye" 8-16)

Mogul's eye, like the many-faceted jewels in the net of Indra, is a mereological symbol: it is the reflective (mortal) part that contains the (immortal) whole. Mogul's eye is "quenched forever at last in Penobscot Bay," yet the light on which it reflects — the light which falls into division in the particular world (grooming, piercing, burning, knifing), and is resurrected (reflected) to unity (holding, tangling, rebounding) — is "eternal."

The poem "Mogul's Eye" is the last in the sequence; it is thus able to recollect all that has come before, reflecting (on) both theme and form. Mogul's eye, we have been told, is a symbol for the "whole story"; here, that "whole story" proves many-faceted. It is thus a structural analogy for the poetic sequence, as Outram conceived it: a "faceted" unity (imperfect by design, like the riddles of *Hiram and Jenny).* Set like a jewel in the universe of words — "this net, this frail / Mandatory veil" ("Language" 2-3) — the faceted sequence comes to contain, in its manifold reflections, that various whole.

In *Benedict Abroad*, the final book-sequence I examine, Outram's structural analogy shifts again: here, the poetic sequence becomes, not a riddle or a faceted mirror, but a theatrical stage. The stage is connected to the other structural analogies I have discussed: like a riddle, it is a permeable whole, a container permitting entrances and exits. And like a polished surface, it may "hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature," as Hamlet says (3.2.21). The mirror the stage presents is faceted: it comprises "many parts" — many elements, but also many roles — which reflect the aspectual nature of the truth. The stage analogy has an important difference, however, from the riddle and mirror analogies, both of which are firmly anchored in the spatial dimension. The stage exists in space, but it is played upon in time; it thus allows Outram to explicitly explore the temporal dimension of his mereological vision — the significance of improvisation in time, alongside differentiation in space, as a manifestation of the world's vital diversity.

Chapter Three: The Stage

In *Benedict Abroad*, Outram turns the conventional analogy "All the world's a stage" to his own ends. Here, as in *Hiram and Jenny* and *Mogul Recollected*, his "own ends" involve the unsettling of endings: his poetics simultaneously upholds the temporal and spatial boundaries between and among parts and wholes and makes these boundaries permeable.

The canonical text for the world-stage analogy is Jaques' famous speech from *As You Like It.* The metaphorical "moves" in Jaques' speech — both mereological and spatio-temporal — set the stage for *Benedict Abroad*:

> All the world's a stage,
> And all the men and women merely players;
> They have their exits and their entrances,
> And one man in his time plays many parts,
> His acts being seven ages. (2.7.139-43)

There are actually a number of analogies at work in this passage, the most obvious being that which compares world and stage: two spatial wholes. But associated with this analogy are others that work across spatio-temporal categories. Jonathan Bate reminds us that dramas are enacted in both time and space: they are delimited by boundaries both temporal (beginning and end) and spatial (the wings in a proscenium theatre, or the edges of the Globe's thrust stage). Human beings are likewise delimited by boundaries both temporal (their births and deaths) and spatial (the skins that describe the limits of our bodies). Jaques presents us with the spatial whole of the world-as-stage, with its spatial boundaries through which one enters and exits. At the same time, he suggests the temporal whole of a play's performance, defined by its beginning (the actors' first entrance) and its end (the *exeunt omnes),* and divided, temporally, into seven acts. Likewise, he gives us the spatial whole of the actor (one man); and at the same time suggests the temporal whole of the actor, his lifetime, defined by its beginning (birth/entrance) and its

end (death/exit), and divided, temporally, into seven ages. Spatial and temporal wholes and parts are mapped onto one another in a series of shifting relationships. The words "entrance" and "exit" work as points of intersection between the spatial and the temporal. Each word describes simultaneously a point in space and a point in time: an opening, and the moment of passing through it.

In *Hiram and Jenny*, we saw spatio-temporal analogies of this sort; by mapping the non-negotiable boundaries of a lifetime onto the negotiable boundaries of a building or a locus, they established the metaphorical possibility of immortality. Jaques' speech, by contrast, is a meditation on *mortality*; yet the spatio-temporal slippage in his metaphors unsettles any absolute conception of the end.

This "slippage" is underscored by ambiguities in Jaques' diction. "All the world's a stage," he begins, "And all the men and women merely players; / They have their exits and their entrances...." A simple continuation of the world/stage analogy encourages us to read these entrances and exits as births and deaths: to enter the world is to be born, to exit it to die. In common experience, a person gets only one entrance (birth) and one exit (death), and in that order. But the analogy is immediately complicated. Exits come before entrances, in his account, implying the kind of metaphysical reversal we saw at work in Outram's "Story" ("Let us begin with Death ....") — and which is also important in *Benedict Abroad.* And Jacques' plural-forms are themselves ambiguous: he may be talking about many men and women, each with one entrance (birth) and one exit (death). At the same time, he may be talking about many men and women, each with many entrances and exits; after all, one man in his time plays many parts.[1]

Jaques' metaphors — like Outram's many-faceted sequences — at once offer the possibility of immortality, and hold it in reserve. "One man in his time plays many

[1] Even that "men and women" is touched by ambiguity, given that Shakespeare's women were originally played by men or boys.

parts" seems to imply a mobility, in regards to mortal boundaries, corresponding to the mobility an actor has in regards to the roles he plays; this implication must have been reinforced, for an audience of regular theatre-goers at the Globe, by the fact that the actor delivering this speech could have played Hamlet or Benedict or Macbeth (or indeed Rosaline) the week before. But this sense of mobility is curtailed as Jaques continues. The "many parts" a man plays are not chosen; rather they unfold inexorably in time as he moves through the seven ages of life, from first to last — and with, presumably, no reversals (or sex-changes). Jaques ends with this famous description of the seventh age:

> Last scene of all,
> That ends this strange eventful history,
> Is second childishness, and mere oblivion,
> Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans every thing. (163-66)

This seems to be a terminal vision. Yet that word "mere" loops us back to the opening words of the speech: "all the men and women merely players."[2] Surely the actor, crumpled on the stage sans every thing, will pick himself up and dust himself off, ready to take on another role, another "history." The mobility of the actor, who can be male or female, young or old, who can die one night and be reborn the next in the same role — or a different role — is both offered us and denied us. The analogy between world and stage is thus "imperfect"; such imperfection, as we have seen, is a key value in Outram's work.

The ambiguity in Jaques' speech is what William Empson (whose system corresponds, numerically, with Jaques') would call "seventh-type": "the two meanings of the word [or in this case the speech], the two values of the ambiguity, are the two opposite meanings defined by the context, so that the total effect is to show a fundamental division in the writer's mind" (192; cf. Bate 310). Jaques is saying: men are mortal. They are born, they move unilaterally through life, they die. At the same time, he

[2] "Merely" is a mereologically significant word, meaning both "purely" (wholly) and "only"; according to the *OED,* it descends from the Latin *merus,* "undiluted, unmixed, pure" (and not, as the spelling might suggest, from the Greek μεροσ/*meros,* part).

is saying the opposite: men are immortal, they may come and go from the stage, and come to the stage again, they may die out of one part and be born into another. This second meaning, waiting in the wings of Jaques' speech, is perhaps what brings us back to it again and again, long after the world-stage analogies of Shakespeare's contemporaries have passed from popular memory.[3] I will return to these ambiguities when I talk about performativity in *Benedict Abroad*, for the ambiguities that wait in the wings of Jaques' speech are exactly those that Outram pushes out onto the stage in this poetic sequence.

Jaques' language — like the theatrical vocabulary he employs, which uses the word "part" to connote both a player's role and his lines in the script — is mereological: all, one, ages, acts, parts. On the surface, the mereological relationships are relatively simple: a play is a whole made up of seven acts; a life is a whole made up of seven ages; a dramatis personae is a whole made up of "many parts." Yet the editors of the *Riverside Shakespeare* remind us that Jaques' lines are, among other things, a reference to the motto of the Globe theatre in which they were once spoken: "*Totus mundus agit histrionem* (The whole world plays the actor)" (Evans et al. 415). In light of this motto, the mereology of Jaques' speech becomes more complicated. All the world's a stage: the stage is the whole which contains the actor. And yet, according to the Globe's motto, the "whole world" also *plays the part* of the actor; thus the actor is, in some sense, a whole which contains the world. Whole and part interpenetrate. Suddenly Jaques' universe begins to look distinctly Outramian. Or: Outram's universe begins to look distinctly Shakespearean.

In *The Genius of Shakespeare*, Bate describes what he sees as the two fundamental

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[3] The world-stage analogy was a commonplace in Shakespeare's day (Bate 332; cf. Frye *Myth* 196, Yates 364). Frye sees Jaques' seventh-type ambiguity as an instance of flawed logic: "An actor has a life apart from his acting: Jacques' man going through his seven stages has no other life, but is simply an acting mechanism, a mechanism that soon wears out." For Frye, this is "the weak spot" in Jaques analogy; but this "weak spot," as I see it, is the speech's great strength — a productive tension that keeps these lines alive in the mind of the audience-member or reader.

"laws of the Shakespearean universe." These laws constitute the "rules" of the game we play whenever we "perform" Shakespeare, in the largest sense (Bate considers a critical reading a kind of performance) (323-27). I have already discussed Bate's first law in relation to the design of *Mogul Recollected.* This law states that "truth is not singular"; it is "aspectual" (327). For Bate, aspectuality is closely linked to impersonation. "All good literary works are aspectual," he writes, "but the drama is fully so because it disperses the authorial voice. It allows each character to embody a different 'aspect'": "each character is essential to the whole, but only one character speaks at once and the author does not single out any individual character/aspect as the embodiment of 'the truth'" (336). *Hiram and Jenny*, *Mogul Recollected*, and *Benedict Abroad* are not play scripts.[4] They are, however, premised on impersonation. No one character or group of characters holds the monopoly on "memorable language"; "opposing voices" are "animated" (Bate 330). Burgess may be an unrepentant scoundrel, but, like Shakespeare's best villains, he commands the stage. And so — like Shakespeare's best heroes — does Hiram. And Hiram's aging neighbour Grailey Bates. And that great soliloquist Mogul. The authorial voice is "dispersed." Outram's world thus shares with Shakespeare's the law of aspectuality.

The second law of the Shakespearean universe, for Bate, is performativity: "the performative truth of human 'being', ... that being and acting are indivisible" (332). Bate illustrates this law with a gloss on Jaques' speech:

> For Shakespeare, 'All the world's a stage / And all the men and women merely players'. This idea had often been stated before Shakespeare, but

[4] All three would adapt well to the stage, however; certainly to the spoken voice. Outram once wrote detailed notes regarding name-pronunciation to a friend who was "thinking of taping the whole of Benedict, for pure pleasure (he reads wondrously well)" (letter to Sanger, 3 Mar. 1999). And Outram did write play scripts. The Thomas Fisher manuscript-collection contains a finished one-act play entitled *Rich Is Best*, along with a handful of vignettes written by Outram for occasional performances at the Arts and Letters Club of Toronto.

> Shakespeare did not state it, he performed it. Because the idea is performed, the force of 'merely players' is not qualifying ('only players') but absolute ('wholly players'). (332)

Shakespeare's plays are studded with similarly metatheatrical moments — "plays within plays ... dissolutions of the distinction between reality, performance, and dream" (Bate 334); so, too, are Outram's poems. At the end of *Hiram and Jenny*, Hiram "will take up cap and bells / to play the fool // to his own kind" ("Hiram on the Night Shore" 7-9). In "The Insane Root," Mogul attempts "to exchange his buskins for his socks" (9). Of all these poetic sequences, *Benedict Abroad* makes the most thoroughgoing use of metatheatricality. The first and last poems in the sequence are titled "Exeunt Omnes" and "Entrance," respectively. Much of the book's action takes place in theatre-spaces. One of the characters is an actor by vocation, and all of the sequence's characters play roles and stage dramas of various kinds. Thus Outram's world also shares with Shakespeare's the "law of performativity."

Here we have two laws of the Shakespearean universe that are also laws of the Outramian universe. My contention is that the first law of the Outramian universe is unity-in-diversity, however, and that Outram's law contains Shakespeare's laws. For if we read Shakespeare's laws mereologically, we can see that they, too, present visions of unity-in-diversity. To say "truth is aspectual" is to say two things. First, that truth exists: it is a common standard to which we may objectively appeal. This is a statement of unity. But it is also to say that truth is aspectual: it is manifold, plural. And this is a statement of diversity. To say "human 'being' is performative" is likewise to say two things. First, that "human 'being' [the quality or practice of being human]" exists: it is a common reality to which we may objectively appeal. This is a statement of unity. But it is also to say that human "being" is performative, that "one man in his time plays many

parts." And this is a statement of diversity.[5]

Outram's unity-in-diversity vision is characterized, as we have seen, by the unsettling and interrogating of endings — those mereological boundaries that limit human lives. The devices Outram uses to accomplish this, in *Benedict Abroad*, are of three kinds; the Shakespearean world/stage analogy is at play in each. The first device is "performativity," to borrow Bate's term: Outram uses the actor's mobility with regards to entrances and exits to explore humankind's mobility (or lack thereof) with regards to births and deaths. The second is reversal: Outram employs the device of "turning things to downside-up," which we saw at work in both *Hiram and Jenny* and *Mogul Recollected*, to transform entrance into exit and exit into entrance, birth into death and death into birth. The third is what I call, to borrow Outram's terms, "ambling," or "moseying": that is, making the journey, or the means, or the middle/muddle of the play, "an end in itself." To identify the end as the middle, the middle as the end, is to remove death's sting: to assimilate the *exeunt omnes* to the body of the script, and death to the ongoing order of life.

I will begin by addressing performativity, then, in relation to endings. Outram, like Jaques, uses the actor's mobility with regards to entrances and exits — his (or, pre-

[5] Outram was well aware of the Shakespearean resonances in his work — particularly in his later work. In a letter to Sanger, on 26 April 1999, he wrote:

> Thinking that it might prove to be of some considerable assistance to you, this morning I went down to various bookstores hoping to find a copy of *The Genius of Shakespeare* by Jonathan Bate ..., that I might send it to you. Sometime early in 1998 I had read a long excerpt from it in the *TLS;* it was said to be forthcoming that autumn. I was greatly intrigued by what I read, but much intervened and only latterly did I get around to 'special ordering' the book, by now available in paperback. It arrived at long last, about a week ago: I will tell you that I have not read anything that is both as deeply, hearteningly corroborating for me, and to my mind casts as much light on what I have been trying to accomplish, in *Benedict* and *Ms Cassie* in particular, as does the last chapter, 'The Laws of the Shakespearean Universe.'

Benedict Abroad was published in 1998. I consider it unlikely that Outram's work on it was in progress at the time he saw the excerpt of Bate's book in *TLS*; I am not making an argument for influence here. Theatre metaphors and references are certainly prominent in Outram's post-1997 work (notably in *Ms Cassie* and *Lightfall,* and in the sequence *Tradecraft* in *Dove Legend)*; but they also figure in *Hiram and Jenny* (1988) and *Mogul Recollected* (1993). Indeed, they occur in Outram's earliest full-length book, *Exsultate, Jubilate* (1966). (The subject of theatre in Outram's poems would in fact be fertile ground for another full-length study, in itself.) Outram called Bate's book "corroborative," and I think that word captures the relationship exactly. Bate's book provided Outram with a critical vocabulary with which to think about strategies he'd already been employing in his poems for decades.

eminently, her) ability to cross boundaries without eliding them — to simultaneously uphold and reserve "the possibility of immortality" (cf. Outram, "Reflection"). This is most evident in a pair of poems which centre on *Benedict Abroad*'s actor-character (and character actor), Amanda. The first is "Melodrama":

> Amanda, before she went on, was made somehow acutely aware
> that the gods were restless tonight, if watching intently
> as always, and that their perspective was other. One played,
> it was an unwritten rule, to the loge, or to the dress circle;
> the director insisted. He called it '... received wisdom, darlings.'
> It was, with old piss-and-wind as the Villain, a sell-out house.
>
> And when she fell in the last act, blood-smeared, abandoned,
> and gazing unto heaven screamed and screamed and screamed
> in the stunned silence during the slow fade to the curtain
> the rest of the cast, gathered in the wings, gaped in horror. (22)

Amanda, performing her death-scene for an audience of "the gods" (both the deities and, as Sanger reminds us, the cheap seats in a theatre [287]) seems to have made her exit for good. The Villain, "old piss-and-wind," must be death itself ("Captain Death," as he is personified elsewhere in the collection). To all appearances he has triumphed; there is a "slow fade to the curtain": "mere oblivion," as in Jaques' speech. But in a subsequent poem entitled "Triumph," we see that the triumph is not death's, but Amanda's:

> 'You have to hand it to Amanda,' said the Director,
> 'that business with the firecat, in the third act;
> where in hell did it come from, for God's sake?
> For a moment I thought she'd skipped a groove,
> but she brought it off somehow, bless her.'
>
> Safely back in her dressing room, Amanda sipped
> lukewarm champagne and began to stanch her wounds.
> Not until nearly dawn did she leave the Lyric,
> long dark, slipping unnoticed out the stage door.
> And headed for her digs, exhausted, escorted
> by Lions that stared down the last pale stars ever. (37)

Bate reminds us of Ludwig Wittgenstein's reflections, from a notebook, on the nature of

death on stage. Wittgenstein cites the number of times in Shakespeare's plays in which an actor performs a person performing death: Juliet with her sleeping potion; Gloucester, ostensibly at the Dover cliffs. "We shall say the words 'really' 'pretend' 'die' etc. are used in a peculiar way when we talk of a play and differently in *ordinary life*," Wittgenstein writes: "Or: the criteria for a man dying in a play aren't the same as those of his dying *in reality*. But are we *justified* to say that Lear dies at the end of the play? Why not" (qtd. in Bate 332-33).[6] Shakespeare's genius, according to Bate, is "both to make us say and to prevent us from saying, 'The words "really" "pretend" "die", etc., are used in a peculiar way when we talk of a play and differently in ordinary life'" (333). This is Amanda's genius also. She dissolves "the distinction between reality, performance, and dream" (Bate 334); she is mistress of her entrances and exits.

In "Melodrama," for instance, Amanda "really" dies. Yet this exit from life — which is to say, from the world — is only apparent. She reappears in the greenroom, in "Triumph," shortly thereafter. Clearly, she was only "pretending" to die: her "exit," in "Melodrama," was theatrical, not mortal. In "Triumph" she exits again, this time "slipping unnoticed out the stage door." She has left not just the stage but the Lyric — that is, the theatre — now. The theatre is the Globe, the world. But she hasn't "really" left the world: we see her heading "for her digs, exhausted, escorted / by Lions that stared down the last pale stars ever." Then she exits again: not only from the Lyric (the theatre) but from the lyric (this poem). Is she "really" gone? No: she appears again, not only in later poems in *Benedict Abroad* ("Truism," "Bait," "Body Language," "Entrance"), but in Outram's last published collection, *Lightfall*. (She is the only one of *Benedict Abroad*'s personae to be explicitly named in this later collection; she appears by name in five of *Lightfall*'s poems: "Amanda Cast Vestal," "Amanda Off-Book," "Amanda, and Cello,

[6] Wittgenstein, incidentally, makes a cameo appearance in *Benedict Abroad* — in the person of Portland, a hospital porter. Bate reminds us that Wittgenstein once did a stint as a hospital porter, in a bid to "Give up philosophy" (319; cf. Sanger 274).

Distant," "Amanda Abed," and "Amanda Immortal," discussed below.) She thus makes permeable not only the temporal boundaries of lifetimes, and the spatial boundaries of the stage, but the spatio-temporal boundaries which describe the poetic sequence.

My discussion of the Amanda poems suggests a world in which death is subject to infinite regression: what seems to be a "real" death as we approach it is only ever a "pretend" death when we arrive; every exit becomes an entrance to another playing space. Yet all of the performed exits in *Benedict Abroad* are underwritten by a sense of the possibility of "real" death, just offstage. The ultimate exit — like other boundaries in Outram's poems — though constantly questioned, never entirely disappears.

When Amanda makes the last of her exits in "Triumph," she is "escorted / by Lions that stared down the last pale stars ever." These Lions, reminiscent of the firecat with which she wrestles in the third act of "Melodrama" — and also of her "lecherous ginger tom" cat, Gorbals ("Bait" 10) — are also, as Sanger points out, evocative of Wallace Stevens' "Poetry Is a Destructive Force."[7] That poem ends:

> The lion sleeps in the sun.
> Its nose is on its paws.
> It can kill a man. (13-15)

Outram quoted this poem, in full, in his final public address, "Poetic Practice," at a time when his own death must have seemed to him an eminently "real" possibility. That he believed Stevens' final line to be quite literally true is underscored not only by other statements in "Poetic Practice" ("... the assumption of a poetic practice can carry with it unique risks ..."; cf. Sanger, "Death" 24), but by a reference, in *Benedict Abroad*, to the "real death" of an artist; a death that occurred not only outside the bounds of the theatre, but

[7] See also Sanger's remarks, in "On Death ...," on Ramsden, "the last of Outram's extraordinary alter-egos or counter-egos" (16):

> I believe that [originally] the "den" part of his name referred only to the prophet Daniel who dared to stand alone and was thrown into the lions' den. Lions in Outram's poetry, as throughout traditional mythologies, are solar. For him (as for Wallace Stevens) they were emanations of poetic energy. After Howard's death, Outram was thrown, alone, into a lion's den of which his poem of November, 2002 could only have seemed to him starkest prophecy. (17)

outside the bounds of the poetic sequence. In the poem "Bait," the millionaire Albert offers Amanda a cottage on the Ouse. She turns him down:

> She might have succumbed to Albert, save
> for the constant presence, lining the banks,
> of the silent, intent fishermen, chumming
> with handfuls of writhing white gentles. (15-18)

Gentles are the carrion-eating larvae of bluebottle flies. Amanda's distaste for the cottage could be explained by simple squeamishness. But Amanda, stanching her wounds backstage, is hardly the squeamish sort. The key to her refusal must lie, rather, in the cottage's location. Why is it on the Ouse? Outram's summary of the book ("100-Word"), written presumably for cover copy (though not ultimately used as such), describes Benedict as a Torontonian, and a number of the book's poems contain Toronto-local references (Ward's Island, a Stratford-Festival T-shirt, et cetera). Why not the Humber River, then, or the Don? It was into the Ouse that Virginia Woolf made her exit, when she allowed herself to drown, in 1941. The structure of *Benedict Abroad* bears some resemblance to that of Woolf's *Between the Acts* (see fn. 15, below), so Woolf is present in the book's form as well as in its content. She, like Stevens' Lion who "can kill a man," represents the possibility of "real death" — the end of poetic practice — in the sequence. Amanda turns down Albert's offer of the cottage on the Ouse because of its proximity to the one exit that she, as an actor, cannot negotiate.[8]

If poetry can be destructive, however, it can also be deeply sustaining: we do not only die by our fictions, as Outram wrote in the poem "Elsewhere," we live by them. The firecat that shreds Amanda in the third act is also the Lion that escorts her home, the

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[8] Woolf was an important writer for Outram and Howard. They established, at one point, a considerable collection of Woolf and Bloomsbury first editions, and at one point made a pilgrimage to Monk's House. The colophon of Outram's final collection, published in the wake of Howard's death, includes the line "We were very happy" (*Immortals*, n. pag.) — a knowing recollection, I believe, of Woolf's last letter to her husband. I read the title of the Amanda-poem "Triumph" as a further reference to Woolf; it echoes a famous passage from *The Waves:* "The structure is now visible; what is inchoate is here stated; we are not so various or so mean.... This is our triumph; this is our consolation" (116).

same that "stares down the last pale stars ever" (as Mogul stares down the sun in "Mogul Prophetic"). In one poem in the collection, "I Wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate," Amanda assumes leonine form herself (cf. Sanger 286). The Amanda poems, like Jaques' soliloquy, turn on a seventh-type ambiguity. Amanda dies; Amanda does not die. Death is real; death is performed. The poems force us to hold these "opposites," unresolved, in our minds. The line which separates them is like the borders that demarcate the wholes and parts of Outram's mereological universe: the line exists. It is insisted upon. And at the same time it is constantly crossed, interrogated, made permeable.

In *Hiram and Jenny*, temporal-spatial analogies work across the boundary between theme and form. This is also the case in the Amanda poems. The poems show us the analogy between the temporal whole of a human life and the spatial whole of a theatre; yet they also suggest (as in "Triumph," in which the theatre is named the Lyric) that there is a third member of the analogy. The lifetime and the theatre space are mapped onto the poem (the lyric) itself. The reader is "born" into a poem at its beginning (enter reader); she moves through it from first to last and "dies" out of it at the end (exit reader). Yet the poem may also be conceived as a spatial whole: now the reader is an actor, able to enter and exit and enter again, and to take many different paths through the space, to go forwards and backwards, to play many parts.

Amanda is the only character in *Benedict Abroad* who is an actor by vocation — but almost all of the characters play roles or stage scenes of one kind or another, as I have said. Most often, these scenes, like Amanda's, involve entrances and exits, deaths and (re)births. I offer a selection of these "deaths and entrances," to borrow Dylan Thomas's phrase, to demonstrate their dizzying array, and to give a sense of the extent to which they dominate the stage business of *Benedict Abroad*: Benedict dies in the collection's first

poem ("Exeunt Omnes"), only to reappear in its second ("Benedict at the Opera"); Ms Czekely-Bardossy barely escapes death, having "backed her way through an unmarked door / on the top floor of the Albert Mantrovia Memorial Wing / and ... been scalded by Mozart" ("Hazard" 6-8); Portland dies, "to find out for himself / what all the fuss and bother was about," and returns "instanter" ("Trial" 1-3); Albert Mantrovia, self-made man, contemplates self-destruction ("Husband"); Victoria Mantrovia takes up lycanthropy, and survives nightly "transmogrification" ("Profit"); Benedict, interred, fashions "one rib from his side / into an immortal / rutabaga bride" ("Likeness" 18-20); Portland escapes death at Dunkirk ("Garbo Unsmutch'd"); Albert ascends "through the roof" and returns, Promethean, "bearing / flame concealed in a stalk of fennel" ("The Way to Bet" 17-21) — later, he dies, again (devoured, perhaps, by his "transmogrified" wife) ("Threnody"); Portland cheats death-by-television-firing-squad ("Blind Eye"); Benedict settles "on ever-present death" in order to escape from a prison (which may also be the theatre, or the Hospital, or the world) ("Inscape"); Albert shoots his mirror-image, in a duel with "the old-world-wicked Count Trebla" ("Affair of Honour"); Amanda gives birth, after "a harsh sentence, of Stygian confinement," to a girl ("Entrance") — who may be Benedict's daughter, and who may also, as Sanger notes, be Benedict reborn (289-90).

This multitude of births and deaths is explained in part by the fact that much of *Benedict* is set, as Portland puts it, "at the Hospital, / with its usual slovenly night-to-night human / business of insignificant deaths and births" ("Vacancy" 23-25). Yet this "night-to-night human / business," as it is actually played out in the collection, is anything but "usual" and "insignificant." Indeed, there is something distinctly stagey about it: smoke ("Entrance") and mirrors ("Affair of Honour"), and characters who do not so much speak their "dying" words as deliver them: "I say, chaps, that's torn it!"

("In Theory" 1); "When's all this shootin' and killin' gonna stop, Ma?" ("Affair of Honour" 36-37). When, in the poem "In Theory," the universe "collapses," it is in a manner tellingly reminiscent of the stage sets Outram assembled and disassembled in his "day-job" (it was often, in fact, a night-job, as it was shift work) as a stage hand crew leader for CBC television:

> O darkly, darkly, honest souls asleep,
> Dreamless we watch the painted cities rise,
> The canvas worlds collapsed into a heap.
> A house of cards, a rhythmless quick flux
> That might make Job or Heraclitus weep
>
> Contained us handsomely.... ("Stage Crew" 8-13)[9]

To the extent that the "deaths and births" of *Benedict Abroad* are *performed* — that is, theatrical — the Hospital becomes a theatre (which is also the Globe and the world),[10] and the hospital bed the stage, complete with curtains, on which the entrances and exits are enacted. Thus even this collection's most "naturalistic" death feels, in some sense, staged:

> The death of Benedict was attended by many genuine decencies.
> Friends visited, flowers were brought, and fat hothouse grapes.
> There were also the usual indecencies: the tubes and the needles
> and stinks and drugged gutturals behind hastily pulled drapes.
>
> All perfectly natural. And once more the morning sun has risen
> level and entered beyond burning; his perfectly turned-down bed,
> remade with crisp hospital corners, is pristine in immortal blaze.
> Portland informs Ms Czekely-Bardossy, 'Man, Benedict is dead.'
> ("Exeunt Omnes" 29-36)

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[9] For an articulate account of Outram's stage-crew world as theatrical milieu, see Sanger 30-31.

[10] Sanger's gloss on this locus, which has informed my reading, is as follows:

> [*Benedict Abroad*] is, among other things, a theatre. Call it The Globe if you wish, although at moments, as in "Exeunt Omnes," it is an operating theatre. Similar analogies have been drawn by other poets. Baudelaire in "Le Spleen de Paris" wrote, "Cette vie est un hôpital où chaque malade est possédé du desir de changer de lit." Eliot echoed him in "East Coker": "The whole earth is our hospital / Endowed by the ruined millionaire." (265)

Benedict's death seems "All perfectly natural." To borrow Wittgenstein's terms, he has "really" died. Yet the sun "rises" like a curtain and "enters" like an actor; the "pristine" bed resembles a stage cleared for the next performance. One almost has the impression that Benedict, like an actor, has "merely" exited — that he has escaped death (or perhaps "inscaped" death, as he does in a subsequent poem entitled "Inscape").

The possibility of escape from death — and, at the same time, of death as escape — is underscored by the description of a death (which may be Benedict's)[11] in terms of "sweet stealth," in one of the Amanda-poems from *Lightfall* ("Amanda Immortal"):

> She lay and watched the sun
> stain the housel-sheet,
> and listened for the first
> scurries in the street.
>
> At last she rose to go:
> washed and dressed, she stood
> before him in their bed,
> her very flesh and blood
>
> looking down on death,
> and turned and closed the blind
> against the light and left
> his sweet stealth behind. (n. pag.)

In my discussion of *Hiram and Jenny*, I mentioned the significance of boundary-crossing, "psychopomp" figures in Outram's poems: those who, like Hiram's swallow, or the boatman of Karen's wharf, can pass in and out of the riddles of this world. Actors, thieves, and escape artists — all masters of exits and entrances — become psychopomp figures in Outram's late poems. They are capable of crossing, with "sweet [performative] stealth," the most stubborn boundaries between and among wholes and parts, both temporal and spatial.

Performativity, then, is *Benedict Abroad*'s first device for the unsettling of endings;

[11] There is some suggestion in *Benedict Abroad* that Benedict and Amanda are lovers (cf. Sanger 289).

the second is reversal.[12] In the poem "Story," Death is placed at the beginning, Birth at the end: birth and death, beginning and end, are thus momentarily conflated and, in their conflation, momentarily transformed. A similar device is at play in "Seadog with Tintype" in *Mogul Recollected*: turn the tintype to down-side up, and Mogul's fall becomes an ascension; death becomes (re)birth.

A number of critics have theorized this business of turning things "to down-side up." I have already quoted Walter Benjamin: "Reversal is the direction of learning which transforms existence into writing" (138; cf. p. 33, above). Bakhtin discusses images of "turnabout" in the context of the Renaissance carnivalesque, as participating in the search for "a new reality beyond the visible horizon of official philosophy" (272). In *The World Upside-Down: Comedy from Jonson to Fielding,* Ian Donaldson discusses "inversion" as both a comic and a rhetorical principle. Frye performs still another variation on this theme, in his *Anatomy of Criticism,* discussing "demonic modulation," "the deliberate reversal of the customary moral associations of archetypes" (156): a poet's ruse to dupe the censors of conventional morality and religion. All of these contexts — the literary, the carnivalesque, the comic, the rhetorical, and the subversive — are relevant to *Benedict Abroad.*[13] Its drama is characterized by reversals, inversions, and turns of many kinds: a black cat, mirror-imaged, goes deathly white ("Constraint"); earth spies on heaven ("White on Rice"); a husband is fashioned from a wife's spare rib ("Husband"); a wife is

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[12] I use this term in a sense consonant with, though not identical to, its rhetorical meaning: Aristotelian "reversal," *peripety* or *peripeteia,* a turn-about "in the protagonist's fortunes" (Abrams 162), or, more broadly, "the departure from a basic paradigm" (Kermode 19). Though Outram's reversals are often "departures," in this sense, they also operate on a more literal level, as transformations in which "opposites" are switched: A takes the place of B, B takes the place of A. They bear some resemblance to the seventeenth-century rhetoricians' device of "inversion," in which, in formal debate, "a speaker's own accusation (or suspicion) [is] suddenly turned back against himself by his opponent" (I. Donaldson 3); their closest relative, however, is the "comic principle which Henri Bergson described as *inversion*": "a sudden comic switching of expected roles" (I. Donaldson 5-6). See also Sanger on parody-as-inversion in *Benedict Abroad* (287-88).

[13] Sanger establishes the carnival context, particularly, in *'Her Kindled Shadow ...'*, citing *Benedict Abroad*'s counterparts in "the festi stultorum, the early medieval fool's feasts" (263).

fashioned, but in the form of a rutabaga ("Likeness"); a woman "turns" into a werewolf ("Profit"). Outram's wordplay is constantly reminding us that such reversals are fundamental to poetry: that "verse" comes ultimately from the Latin *vertere,* to turn. In "Inscape," Benedict escapes (or inscapes), by turning around and strolling "arsy- / vers[e]y past the heavily guarded main gates" (40-41).[14]

But all of these reversals are in some sense microcosmic re-enactments of Outram's most radical reversal, that suggested in the poem "Story":

> Let us begin with Death
> Overheard, in the cry
> Of the first breath,
>
> That for what it is worth,
> We may all thereby
> End with Birth.

In *Benedict Abroad,* this reversal is performed on the level of the sequence. *Benedict Abroad* begins with death. Its first poem, entitled "Exeunt Omnes," begins with the terminal sound of a toilet flushing,[15] and recounts the death of Benedict. The collection's final poem, entitled "Entrance," features a series of arrivals, and recounts a birth:

> It was a harsh sentence, of Stygian confinement.
> One that confirmed, said Albert, his darkest fears;
> his gravest doubts. Truly a world-class abeyance.

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[14] See also Eleanor Cook, "The Poetics of Modern Punning," in which she suggests "that a poet cannot use the word [turn] at the beginning or end of a line without thinking about the original descriptive energy of the word" (175-76) — in relation to, for instance, "Threnody," the burlesque dirge for Albert in *Benedict Abroad*:

> Alas, his grievous wound refused
> to let him say his leman no
> where she in darkling ardour turned.
> Ah, what a way to go! (9-12)

That "turned" is multiply ironic. It recalls the rhetorical "turn," a change in register, fulcrumed on this line-break: from mock serious ("Alas ...") to comic ("Ah, what a way to go!"). Yet it also reminds us that Albert's wife is given to the pleasures of "lycanthropy" (cf. "Profit"); the word thus recalls her "turning" into a werewolf.

[15] Sanger calls this "probably the only poem ever written to begin with a toilet flushing" (265) — but there is a resonance between this beginning and that of Woolf's *Between the Acts*, a novel that shares some of *Benedict Abroad*'s theatrical motifs, and that opens with a conversation about a cesspool (7). Given the allusions to Woolf discussed above, this structural resonance takes on larger significance.

Extending, Amanda reckoned later, for light years.

The sun indeed took unwarranted time in rising:
Glad Day when it finally came predictably broke
the hearts of unwary beholders. 'Always remember,'
Carbuncle chortled, 'where there's fire, there's smoke.'

But at last Portland emerged through the swinging doors,
blood bright on his wrists. Off-stage, a thin raw skirl
and animal waul, the lament of the pipes began. 'Man,'
said Portland, he choked up and recovered, 'man, it's a girl.' (48)

There are actually three entrances described in this poem. Glad Day enters: at once the actual day, revealed by the rising (like a curtain) of the sun, and Blake's Glad Day, the "divine anthropos" (Sanger 287) from his "Glad Day" engraving (who also, incidentally, appears in Outram's poem "Outline").[16] The second entrance is Portland's, through doors which, "swinging," underscore the permeability of the boundary they define. Portland's name makes him an appropriate doorman: a port is, after all, a point of exit and entrance. It is thus fitting that he announces (in a phrase which itself enacts a [gender] reversal) the poem's third entrance, a birth: "Man, ... man it's a girl." The device of reversal, outlined in the poem "Story," has worked: having begun with death, Outram may end with birth. But "Story" also tells us that, in order to end with birth, we must "overhear" death "In the cry / Of the first breath." There is thus an intimation of mortality, of exit, in the very teeth of "Entrance." The infant's wail is described as a lament: "a thin raw skirl / and animal waul, the lament of the pipes began." Beginning and ending are conflated once again.

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[16] Sanger describes the image as follows:

> The engraving depicts a naked man with one foot upon the earth and the other lifted, as if he were about to spring forward, or as if he had just landed from a leap. His arms are stretched out in horizontal balance so that his upper body is cruciform. His head is surrounded by a nimbus of radiant sunlight. Underfoot is the worm of mortality which he is trampling. Flying away in the engraving's lower left quadrant is the bat which Blake sometimes used to symbolize ignorance. (125)

Glad Day, "trampling the worm of mortality," participates in the "Triumph" over absolute endings that is enacted by this last of *Benedict Abroad's* poems.

To begin with death, as Outram does in *Benedict Abroad*, is to bring death to mind: to keep it ever-present in one's consciousness as one moves through life (or, for that matter, through a play, or poem, or poetic sequence). Death then goes from being imminent to being immanent, in Kermode's terms (6) — seeded, that is, in every present moment. The result is a sense of the "fullness of time," the "consonance" of beginnings, middles and endings. The past and the future become merely "special cases of the present"; one has the sense of having staged an "escape from chronicity" (Kermode 59, 50). Such eschatological gymnastics are exactly what are involved in Benedict's "Inscape." Benedict, incarcerated, effects his own rescue by settling "on ever-present death" (30). Having made death immanent — having made the ending consonant with the beginning and the middle — he can transform, in another reversal, the dead-end of his prison into a beginning.[17] Having thus turned things "to down-side up," he strolls "casually backwards," passing "through the entire / top security system completely unnoticed" one Sunday afternoon (34-36) — Sunday, the Christian day of resurrection, being an appropriate time to stage an escape from mortality.

Implicit in the business of "immanent endings" is *Benedict Abroad*'s third device for unsettling ends: what I have called "ambling," or "moseying." To make the end immanent is to make the present tense — that is, the middle — an end in itself. By walking "casually," by "strolling," Benedict elevates the journey to the status of destination. He escapes, then, not by crossing the boundaries that confine him, but by exploring the infinite negotiability of the space they define — thus his escape is in fact an "inscape."

The shift away from beginnings and endings and toward middles is a mereological shift. For "beginning" and "end" are part of the vocabulary of holism; they

[17] Benedict may in fact have borrowed this device from Kermode; he has, after all, a keen "Sense of an Ending," having memorized "the prison library / as backup against the forthcoming millennium" (6-7).

imply the bounds of a unified temporal whole. But Outram never upholds unity at the expense of diversity. Middles are the domain of diversity, in which minute particularities multiply (like the grains of Hopkins' pomegranate [cf. ch. 1, fn. 15]) — through which one may travel on an infinite number of possible finite paths (or cleaves). The principle is summed up, with characteristic matter-of-factness, by Hiram:

> only one life hereabouts, we all in her,
> but ninety-and-nine ways, maybe more,
> of being alive, which is different. ("'As cold waters ...'" 23-25)

Outram restates the principle at the end of his "100-word summary" of *Benedict Abroad*: "The sequence has, like life, a beginning (death) and an end (birth); the middle rather ambles along, like life, being joyously unpredictable" ("Summary" n. pag.). That "joyously unpredictable" middle is the diversity Outram finds within the whole circumscribed by beginnings and endings. The middle "rather ambles along." Ambling, here, like "strolling" ("Inscape"), or "moseying" ("Hiram and Ludwig"), or "misbehaving" ("Magdalena Enamoured"), is what Michel de Certeau would call an art of practice: a creative variation on a theme, a way of "elud[ing] discipline without being outside the field in which it is exercised" (96).

De Certeau gives various examples of practical artists: walkers, *Wandersmänner*, who move through the city by personal routes, "writing" with their bodies "unrecognized poems" (staging unrecognized performances) among the city's strictures (93); "medieval poets and romancers who insinuate innovation into the text itself, into the terms of a tradition" (175); train travellers who give free play to their imaginative speculation while incarcerated in the "beautiful abstraction" of the railcar (114); workers who indulge in *la perruque*, their own work disguised as work for their employers (25); readers who "poach" on the prescribed interpretations of a text (165-76). *Benedict Abroad* is full of such figures. Portland, in particular, is a master of *la perruque*: clowning for the inmates during his shift

on the Hospital ward ("Comic"), or "[giving] silent joyous raspberry" in response to the pedantries of "Professor Lovey-Ducks," while sweeping up after a television recording session ("Moonlighting") — for Portland, like Outram, "moonlights" as a television stagehand.

Outram once told Michael Enright, of CBC's *Sunday Edition*, that in his days as a stagehand crew leader for CBC television he was able to train himself to do much of his reading and thinking on company time (Interview). He was thus, like Portland, a self-professed master of *la perruque*. As a poet, too, Outram might be considered an artist-of-practice. For modern poets, no less than the "medieval poets and romancers" described by de Certeau, "insinuate innovation into the text itself, into the terms of a tradition" (175): their poems perform variations on the themes prescribed by linguistic and literary convention. Each new poem thus "elude[s] discipline without being outside the field in which it is exercised." Poets may be practical artists in the daily labour of their writing lives, as well: their vocation, as well as being a means to an end (the end of becoming "some instrument of poetic utterance"), may become an end in itself. The title of Outram's final lecture, "Poetic Practice," reinforces this idea. He writes:

> To enter into a practice of poetry is to assume — as a vocation, a calling — a commitment to a lifelong, sometimes arduous process of the continual, disciplined focussing of the attention on the interplay of language, imagination and reason, within the faith (and the hope, and the charity) that it might be possible to become thereby some instrument of poetic utterance. (n. pag.)

Poems, "poetic utterances," may be finished within a poet's lifetime; the poet, and his practice, may not. As long as the poet is alive, poet and practice are ongoing: unfinished, imperfect. Poetic practice is a cleave, a particular way of being — of ambling through the

"joyously unpredictable" middle which is life.

Benedict Abroad offers two further figures of the artist of practice; the first of these suggests the second. The first is the actress, improvising within the bounds of her given script, as in Amanda's "third-act business" with the firecat. The second is any living "man or woman" ("All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players"). Living, for Outram, is the ultimate art of practice. "Trick is, times, to mosey," Beethoven tells Hiram ("Hiram and Ludwig" 19). Moseying through life, one may elude the "discipline" of mortality — without being outside the field in which it is exercised. Immortality is ultimately found *within* mortality; it is not an escape, but an inscape.

Arts of practice are mereological arts. They are ways of asserting individuality in the face of totalization. They take the emphasis off boundaries and place it on the navigated spaces; they take the emphasis off beginning and endings and place it on middles. They mediate between whole and part, between holism and particularity. They are arts expressive of unity-in-diversity.

I have said that Outram's poetics are premised on the functional reality of synecdoche: the idea that the whole is implicit in the part, even as the part is implicit in the whole, and that this is true not only in the universe of words, but in the universe at large. Whole and part, unity and diversity, are thus not diametrically opposed, but symbiotically related. If this relation holds, the arts of practice which elaborate the particular should have some effect on the totality in which they operate. In Outram's poetry, this is indeed the case, and on the largest possible scale. I see this in particular in the poem "Magdalena Enamoured." This poem, which appears in *Dove Legend* (2001), was originally collected in *Eros Descending*, privately published by Outram and Howard's Gauntlet Press in 1995. (The poem was also the text for the press's Valentine's-keepsake in 1994.) The protagonist shares a name with the wauling babe who enters in the final

poem of *Benedict Abroad.* I read "Magdalena Enamoured," then, as a kind of prescript (in the original sense, something "written at the beginning") to the later sequence.

If we identify the protagonist of "Magdalena Enamoured" with the wauling babe of *Benedict Abroad,* she is Amanda's daughter; like her mother, she crosses the bounds between poetic sequences; like her mother, also, she is an artist of practice. The poem reads as follows:

> As in some fragile vessel put to sea,
> which wayward winds have driven far from shore
> and all the haven she has set in store,
> against the strictures of mortality;
>
> the currents hurrying her craft along
> no helm can temper, nor true chart depict,
> nor rose correct where she is derelict
> in Sirens' recapitulated song;
>
> yet as she turns toward the very waves
> that thrust her through profundities of force
> upon her boundless undetermined course,
> the subtle ways in which she misbehaves
>
> will order all the elements to move
> in startled indirection to her love. (*Dove Legend* 22)

There is, about Magdalena's craft, "something at once incarcerational and navigational" (cf. de Certeau 113). Magdalena is driven by wayward winds, she is hurried by currents, she is subject to "the strictures of mortality" — recapitulated, perhaps, by those "Sirens" who, like Penobscot mermaids, sing of what is past, and passing, and not to be. Her course is uncharted and unchartable; she must navigate by dead reckoning.[18] Yet she manages to misbehave: to assert particularity in the face of homogeneity. "The subtle ways in which she misbehaves" — variations on the theme of the course on which she's hurried — are like Amanda's improvisations on a given script; they constitute an

[18] The Odyssean resonances here are underscored by the fact that the poem reads as a kind of epic simile ("As in some ..."). I am grateful to Dr. William Schipper for drawing my attention to this connection.

art of practice. In the final stanza, the variations, unexpectedly, affect the theme — ordering "all the elements to move / in startled indirection to her love." It is as if an actor has played her part so brilliantly that the given script, in astonishment, alters. Whole and part, unity and diversity, are symbiotically — or, to borrow Bateson's word, recursively — related: "events continually enter into, become entangled with, and then re-enter the universe they describe" (Harries-Jones 3).[19]

The "given script," in "Magadalena Enamoured," is universal in scale: it comprises "all the elements." Outram found his sense of this cosmological reciprocity of part and whole corroborated by the theories of astrophysicists, as he encountered them in the popular science books he read. In an address to the Arts and Letters Club, in the same year *Benedict Abroad* appeared in print, he quoted this passage from John Gribbin's *Companion to the Cosmos*: "Every atom in your body, except for those of hydrogen, was manufactured by nuclear explosions inside a star and spread across space in a supernova explosion. We are literally made of stardust" (qtd. in "Stardust" 12). In a letter to Sanger, a year later, Outram quoted another passage — from *Turbulent Mirror: An Illustrated Guide to Chaos Theory and the Science of Wholeness* — which makes clear the mereological implications of Gribbin's "explosion": "cosmologists speculate that if the initial conditions at the big bang had varied by as much as a single quantum of energy ... the universe would be a vastly different place. The whole shape of things depends upon the minutest part ..." (Peat and Briggs 75).

"We are stardust" has become something of a cliché; but one of the poet's tasks is to rejuvenate cliché. Outram does this, in the lecture "Stardust" and in his poetry (cf. "Countenance" in *Hiram and Jenny*, "Late Love Poem" in *Dove Legend*), by linking

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[19] For another, quite different, reading of "Magdalena Enamoured," see Sanger, 251-53. Sanger sees the protagonist as a Mary-Magdalene figure; the "thrust" of "her boundless undetermined course" is erotic. The poem, for me, allows both readings; certainly, the erotic and the "navigational" contexts are linked, for Outram (cf. the poem "Error" in *Hiram and Jenny*, discussed in Chapter One).

Gribbin's words to a literary tradition: the Bible's "dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return"; George Meredith's "Ah, what a dusty answer gets the soul / When hot for certainties in this our life"; Donald Justice's "The world is very dusty, Uncle. Let us work." And, perhaps most tellingly, a sonnet by Francisco de Quevedo y Villegas (*Cerrar podrá mis ojos la postrera* ...) which ends:

> Soul that has kept imprisoned a god entire,
> veins that have nourished such flame's lust,
> marrow that has caught illustrious fire,
>
> they will forsake their body, not their trust:
> will be as ashes, but hold to their desire,
> will be as dust, but an enamoured dust. (Outram/Manguel, trans. 9-14)

In the last line I find the key to the title of "Magdalena Enamoured." Magdalena, subject to "the strictures of mortality," is dust ("dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return"). Like Quevedo's dust, however, she is "enamoured" — in love, as Blake would have it, with the productions (the products, but also the performances) of Time. Time is the universal script in which she plays her part, space the universal theatre. All time and space, moving "in startled indirection to her love," are likewise (wise to that which is "like" them) enamoured, in this poem, of Magdalena.

Outram's poetic mereology, like Elizabethan theatre design, is underwritten by a deep-seated "belief in the correspondence of microcosm and macrocosm, in the harmonic structure of the universe" (Yates, qtg. Rudolf Wittkower 364). This is another way of articulating the symbiosis of whole and part that is characteristic of Outram's poems. In his work, the motto of the Globe becomes the motto of the universe: all the universe plays the part of the actor. "Magdalena Enamoured" is thus not the logical conclusion, but the imaginative expansion — into an astrophysical context, no less — of the world/stage metaphor Outram explores in *Benedict Abroad.*

If the actor plays in the theatre of the universe, the poet plays in the universe of

words. His utterances, like the actor's gestures, "continually enter into, become entangled with, and then re-enter the universe they describe." This "recursiveness" is what is at issue in "The Flight Out of Egypt," the penultimate poem in *Dove Legend*:

> ... Once, in choosing a sacramental stone,
> one of the burnished plenitude strewn at my feet,
> I threw it as far as I might out into the hugely
>
> indifferent ocean. At once the barely discernible
> rings started to spread outward. Love, it is this,
> when they reach the rare bound of the universe of words
>
> .....
>
> ... becomes my prayer:
> that they will in the new-sanctioned order of things
> curve and return upon us shrived in this telling.
> ("The Flight Out of Egypt" 37-42, 46-48)

The stone in this poem becomes, in turn, a figure for the poet's word: thrown into the "universe of words," it at once gives rise to "barely discernible" outward-spreading rings. These ripples, when they reach "the rare bound of the universe of words" may be returned upon the speaker, informed by the (new-sanctioned; that is, new-sanctified) whole; at the same time, they may subtly alter the "rare bounds" of that whole, as waves change the shape of the shoreline that reflects them.

The relationship described in this poem is not unlike that described by T. S. Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent." The part must come to contain the whole, Eliot writes: the individual writer must come to apprehend the whole of the literary tradition as "a simultaneous order" (14). Within this "order," the writer navigates like Magdalena, enamoured. The subtle ways in the which he "misbehaves," in his own, new work, may "order all the elements to move": "The existing order is complete before the new work arrives," Eliot explains; "for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions,

values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted ..." (15).[20] Eliot's argument helps to make sense not only of the intense allusiveness of Outram's work, but of the amount of energy Outram invested in circulating the work of other writers among his literary acquaintances. He often bought spare copies of books that were important to him to send to friends; and a considerable amount of the output of the Gauntlet Press, in its later, electronic, phase, comprised broadsheet-publications of poems by writers other than Outram, old and new — or of poems by Outram, but with accompanying quotations from other writers, which served to establish a context, either resonant or dissonant. Outram was working to give his readers a sense of the universe of words in which he navigated: of the whole which informed his particular work, and which his particular work aimed, recursively, in turn, to inform.

Just as the tradition alters in response to the (in turn responsive) individual talent, the universe of words alters in response to the (in turn responsive) individual utterance. The utterance with which *Benedict Abroad* ends (Portland's "Man ... man, it's a girl"), spoken on the stage of this poetic sequence, echoes to, and informs, the sequence's outermost bounds. It is returned by those bounds, and is — in turn — informed by them. The sequence, too, is an utterance, spoken on the larger stage of the universe of words, and echoing to (and from) its outermost bounds, in a recursive, creative relationship. The mereological is the mortal, however: the prayer of Outram's poems is ultimately for a consonance of language and life, such that human "being," too, dropped like "a sacramental stone" into the "hugely indifferent" universe, may nevertheless "in the new-sanctioned order of things / curve and return upon us shrived in this telling."

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[20] Cf. the conclusion of Manguel's essay "Waiting for an Echo: On Reading Richard Outram": "Each new writer who, in the eyes of even one reader, becomes essential to understanding the world, changes history, provides a new order, demands a new reading of the past" (234).

Conclusion

In a 2004 letter, Outram discussed his attraction to the poetic sequence as a form:

> Perhaps a dozen years ago, Claude Bissell said to me, 'Richard, why don't poets write long poems any more?' I can't remember how I answered - something about poets being pragmatists, wanting to get their work published and who was going to publish a long poem nowadays - something unsatisfactory. But the great truth is ... that the 'length' of a poem is measured in the mind and heart; of the author and her reader, not by counting lines. It is a vertical, *axis mundi* height and depth: and, spiritually, an ever-exotic, ever-familiar Presence. A long-dwelling, far-reaching, inexhaustible centre and circumference every where....
>
> The poetic sequence, because it is thematic, partaking of narrative, is particularly happy, however, in marshalling these desiderata; and the poetic sequence that creates, recreates and thus resurrects personae by the generous accumulation of personhoods in their unique, sometimes all-too-human voices, with their worldly uncertainties and loving certainties canting the universe on the fulcrum of the Word with the enhanced leverage of their strength of craft - and cunning - this may be our present 'triumph ... consolation,' Who knows? (letter to the author, 26 Aug. 2004)

Like all of Outram's prose, this passage is deeply consonant, both thematically and formally, with his poetry. He begins by presenting two dialectic pairs — mind and heart, author and reader — the members of which he immediately places into symbiotic relation. Mind and heart, author and reader, must collaborate in the determination of a poem's "length." He then performs a temporal-spatial transformation, of the sort I see in

poems like "Crux" and "Ferry," or in the theatrical metaphors of *Benedict Abroad:* he transforms the notion of the "length" of a poem from the horizontal axis of duration-in-time to the "vertical" axis of "height and depth" — that is, extent-in-space. Having drawn these axis-lines, however, he makes them permeable (they "cross" one another) and ongoing; thus the poem becomes first "long-dwelling," then "inexhaustible" (ongoing in time); first "far-reaching," then "every where" (unfolding in space). Ultimately, the categories of time and space disappear: now and then are wed, as past and future give way to "ever ... Presence"; here and there are wed, as "centre and circumference" become co-located "every where."

In his second paragraph, Outram steps back from this over-arching unity, however, to address the "imperfection" (the ongoing-ness, and the eccentricity) of his favoured form. He moves from the monolithic connotations of the "long poem" to the *spargimento* connotations of the "poetic sequence." The dialectical pairs of the first paragraph (mind/heart, writer/reader, horizontal/vertical, height/depth, exotic/particular, centre/circumference) dissolve into the middle-grounds of narrative, personae, "the generous accumulation of personhoods in their unique, sometimes all-too-human-voices, with their worldly uncertainties and loving certainties." Diversity is discovered in unity: "all-too-human" imperfection cants (riddles, reflects) the universe, allowing the reader (and writer) a particular (that is, informed by the part) glimpse of the whole. The fulcrum (the riddle, the mirror) is the (poetic) Word; the leverage comes from human craft (practical art) and cunning (sweet stealth). This may be our "present 'triumph ... consolation'," a phrase from Woolf's *The Waves* which also echoes through *Benedict Abroad:* "The structure is now visible; what is inchoate is here stated; we are not so various or so mean.... This is our triumph; this is our consolation" (116).

Up to this point, this excerpt from Outram's letter reads like his definitive "line"

on the topic of the poetic-sequence form. The lines in Outram's work are always drawn to be crossed, however, and crossed to be redrawn; thus he makes the line of his own poetics permeable, imperfect, with the addition of that final sentence: "Who knows?"

My sense of the richness of these paragraphs from Outram's letter has developed as I've read and reflected on his poetic sequences; it was this letter, however, that initially got me thinking, in a serious way, about Outram's preference for the poetic-sequence form. It is in this same letter that Outram describes a poetic sequence as a "whole (richer, yet not greater than the sum of its parts for each is its own whole)," exhibiting "the integrity of boundless possibility." Cued by this description, my study of poetic form evolved into a study of poetic mereology — an approach that helped me to understand the profound consonance of theme and form in Outram's work.

I admit that the word "mereology" makes me uncomfortable. I am skeptical of such interdisciplinary borrowings, which often have the effect of leaving discipline behind: they sever the vocabulary from the tradition out of which it evolved. I am still more uncomfortable, however, with the more familiar word "holism," which has unhappy connotations of homogeneity, and which is furthermore an "ism": a doctrine, as opposed to a study ("-ology"). Either word is problematic, however, in that it privileges one quality over the other: the quality of partness (mereology, from the Greek μεροσ, part, is literally part-ology) or the quality of wholeness (whole-ism).

Poets, happily, may get round these terminological difficulties, abandoning "isms" and "ologies" altogether, and discussing whole-part relations by way of myth and metaphor, or by punningly ringing the changes on the words "whole" and/or "part" themselves — as does Phillis Levin:

PART

Of something, separate, not

Whole; a role, something to play
While one is separate or parting;

Also a piece, a section, as in
Part of me is here, part of me
Is missing; an essential portion,

Something falling to someone
In division; a particular voice
Or instrument (also the score

For it), or line of music;
The line where the hair
Is parted. A verb: to break

Or suffer the breaking of,
Become detached,
Broken; to go from, leave,

Take from, sever, as in
Lord, part me from him,
I cannot bear to ever (3)

An English-language critic looking to develop a mereological vocabulary could do worse than follow Levin's lead, teasing out the meanings of "part" and "whole," those old expressions: charting, for instance, the history of sexual punning on these words; or following the braided evolution of "whole," "hole," and "holy," in contexts sacred and profane; or tracking the application of the word "part" in the theatre, first to an actor's lines, and later to the role she plays.

Terminological difficulties notwithstanding, it is clear to me that a critical vocabulary capable of addressing "the motion and the meaning" of whole-part relations in literature can be deeply productive. It helps us to understand the workings of *spargimento* forms like the poetic sequence and the farce, and of *spargimento* motifs like Dante's gathering and scattering. It also gives us a new framework within which to address the Eliot-esque interplay of novelty and tradition. Finally, it gives us a way to talk about the

"microcosmic" quality that has been recognized in the work of our "great" authors: William Shakespeare and Félix Lope de Vega Carpio are Jonathan Bate's examples of writers with a microcosmic bent; I would add Richard Outram to this list.

Each of Outram's book-sequences — *Hiram and Jenny, Mogul Recollected,* and *Benedict Abroad* — is a microcosm: a world of words that corresponds, in its mereological relations, to the world at large. It is a whole comprising many parts. Yet each poetic sequence also exists in a mereological relationship *with* the world at large: it participates in that larger whole. As I said in my introduction, this sense of simultaneous wholeness and partness is also characteristic of a human being's experience in relation to the world: we are wholes unto ourselves; we are parts of a larger whole. This correspondence informs, for me, the feeling of kinship we have with our works of literature: it is not just that we recognize ourselves in their characters; it is that we recognize ourselves, mereologically, in their forms. The mereological is the mortal: it is how we learn to play our parts, to negotiate our boundaries. It is how we learn to turn our endings into beginnings.

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