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NARRATIVE DISCRETION AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MYSTIFICATION: AN ANALYSIS OF CHILDE HAROLD'S PILGRIMAGE (CANTOS I-II)

An analysis of the narrative voices and of the process of constitution of one or more subjects in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* should necessarily take into consideration the whole poem, and my survey of Cantos I and II should therefore be considered as a premise to further enquiry. My aim is to raise some questions and formulate some hypotheses on the Author/Hero relationship.

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage tells the journey of two personae which at the beginning are separated and carefully distinguished from one another and which, through the journey, lose their identity and character to merge into one another. Through the journey, in fact qualifiers which are originally used to characterise Harold are transferred to the poet and we witness the constitution of a stronger narrating "I" which becomes the subject of the story.

The question of Byron's biography has been raised many times in reference to *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, but it seems to me that both the Narrating Poet and Harold-though using Byron's life as a draft-have a more important artistic function than that of a biographic "I". The poet and Harold are two heroes who are continually struggling for authorship. The journey, the discovery of oneself as Subject, are both Harold's and the poet's.

This process of costitution as "Subject of the story" is set by Harold and then reported by the poet who, while relating Harold's adventures, also reports on his responses and development. The stages of Harold's process are then filtered through the sensibility of the poet who seems to divine the future:

To horse! to horse! he quits, for ever quits A scene of peace, though soothing to his soul: Again he rouses from his moping fits, But seeks not now the harlot and the bowl. Onward he flies, nor fix'd as yet the goal

Where he shall rest him on his pilgrimage; And o'er him many changing scenes must roll Ere toil his thirst for travel can assuage, Or he shall calm his breast, or learn experience sage.

Yet Mafra shall one moment claim delay,
Where dwelt of yore the Lusian's luckless queen;
And church and court did mingle their array,
And mass and revel were alternate seen;
Lordling and freres – ill sorted fry I ween!
But here the Babylonian whore hath built
A dome where flaunts she in such glorious sheen,
That men forget the blood which she hath spilt,
And bow the knee to Pomp that loves to varnish guilt.

(I, 28-29) (1)

Events are taking place in the present, but the poet sees them from both a temporal and a spatial distance even though his perspective seems to be Harold's.

According to Mikhail Bakhtin:

The consciousness of the hero, his sentiments and his wishes [...] are surrounded as if in a ring by the creative consciousness that the author has of the hero and his world: the hero's utterances about himself are surrounded and comprehended by the Author's utterances about the hero ².

As the Author refuses to be dominated by his hero, he has to create a device, a Narrating Poet who emphasises the disjunction, mediates the relationships and can eventually be dominated by the Author.

In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* the operation of separation is realized through a creative activity that Bakhtin calls *vnenachodimost'* and Tzvetan Todorov translates as exotopy:

Bakhtin asserts the necessity of distinguishing between two stages in every creative act: first, the stage of empathy or identification (the novelist puts himself in the place of his character), then a reverse movement whereby the novelist returns to his

¹ GEORGE BYRON, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, in Jerome J. McGann (ed.) The Complete Poetical Works, Oxford New York: Clarendon Press 1980) vol. II.

² MIKHAIL BAKHTIN, *L'autore e l'eroe*, translated and edited by Clara Strada Janovich, introduction by Vittorio Strada (Torino: Einaudi 1988) "La coscienza dell'eroe, il suo sentimento e il suo desiderio del mondo [...] sono circondati da ogni parte, come in un anello, dalla coscienza compiente che l'autore ha dell'eroe e del suo mondo; le dichiarazioni dell'eroe su se stesso sono circondate e compenetrate dalle dichiarazioni dell'autore sull'eroe." pp. 12-13. My translation from Italian here and below.

own position. This second aspect of creactive activity is named by Bakhtin with a new Russian coinage: *vnenachodimost'*, literally "finding oneself outside", which I shall translate again literally, but with a greek root, as *exotopy* [...] the author can accomplish, achieve, and close off his character only if he is external to him.

According to Bakhtin there are "events that, in principle, cannot unfold on the plane of a single and unified consciousness, but presuppose two consciuosnesses that do not fuse; they are events whose essential and constitutive element is the relation of a consciousness to another consciousness, precisely because it is other [Bakhtin's emphasis]" ⁴.

It is, however, possible for the Author to lose this position, and in this case

The exotopy becomes morbid and ethical (the humiliated and the offended become, in this capacity of theirs, the characters of a vision, that is no longer purely artistic, of course). The assured, calm, unshakable, and rich position of exotopy is no more 5.

But even in this case the Author's function – "bearer of the vital content" – should be carefully distinguished from the hero's – "bearer of the aesthetic end" ⁶.

The idea of the *other* is then "necessary to accomplish, even if temporarily, a perception of the self that the individual can achieve only partially with respect to himself". According to Bakhtin in fact "It is only in another human being that I find an aesthetically (and ethically) convincing experience of human finitude, of a marched-off empirical objectivity".

The two heroes of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, fighting each other for the space in the text and the time of the story, are also fighting against the Author and "at times they are close, at times they are far from each other, but the plenitude of the work needs a definite divergence and the victory of the Author" 9. In order to maintain his position the Author can in fact

³ TZVETAN TODOROV, Mikhail Bakhtin. The Dialogical Principle (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press 1984) p. 99.

⁴ M. Bakhtin, "Avtor i geroj v esteticheskoj dejatel' nosti" as quoted in Todorov pp. 99-100.

odorov pp. 99-100 5 *Ibid*. 101.

M. BAKHTIN, L'autore e l'eroe p. 124.

⁷ Todorov p. 95.

8 M. BAKHTIN "Avtor i geroj..." ibid., p. 96.

⁹ M. BAKHTIN, *L'autore e l'eroe* p. 168. "ora si avvicinano, ora si separano decisamente; ma la pienezza del compimento dell'opera presuppone una decisa divergenza e la vittoria dell'autore".

use the discourse of the other toward his own ends, in such a way that he imprints on this discourse, that already has, and keeps, its own orientation, a new semantic orientation. Such a discourse must, in principle, be perceived as being another's. A single discourse winds up having two semantic orientations, two voices ¹⁰.

* *

As the study of the alternation of narrative voices is fundamental for a thorough analysis of the Author/Hero relationship in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* it becomes necessary to investigate those instances in which the overlapping is more marked.

The shift from one voice to another, rather than being characterised by an abrupt break, is – in most instances – characterised by a gradual passage, a fading of Harold's personality into the Poet's. The difficulty in isolating the two narrative voices leads to the formulation of a single figure which springs from the growing awareness of both Harold and the Poet.

According yo Jerome J. McGann, "in most cases it is possible to distinguish them [the two voices] quite clearly at any particular time" ¹¹, and twice is there "a blurring in the distinction [...] in the poem; first, in stanzas 14-26 of Canto I, and second, in stanzas 47-55 of Canto III" ¹². Although substantially accepting McGann's division ¹³, the blurrings seem to be more than two and the distinction not quite so clear ¹⁴ "at any particular time".

¹⁰ Todorov p. 71.

¹² McGann p. 69.

¹³ McGann pp. 68-69:

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Canto I:	
SPEAKER	STANZAS
Poet	1-13
Harold	Lyric: "Adieu, Adieu'
Poet	14
Harold	15-26
Poet	27-84
Harold	Lyric: "To Inez"
Poet	85-93
Canto II:	
Poet	1-30, 11. 1-4
Harold	30, 11. 5-9
Poet	31-72
	Suliote Song
Poet	73-98

¹⁴ Cp. Canto I, Lyric "Adieu, Adieu", 1. 1, ascribed to Harold and Canto I, stanza 85, 1. 1, ascribed to the poet.

Stanza 14 is said to be uttered by the poet because "its narrative/ descriptive style differs markedly from the burst of direct address with which 15 opens. In 14 [...] the speaker's tone is noticeably objective, as if he considered himself primarily an observer on the trip" ¹⁵. The construction of the last stanza of the Lyric, however, has 14 as its natural follow-up. In stanza 10 of the Lyric, Harold bids his native land farewell, the tone is gay, full of expectation, as it happens in 14 where "every bosom [is] gay", "Cintra's mountain greets them" and Tagus "his tribute bent to pay". In 14 Harold is still on board, hence the tone is an "objective" one; only in 15 is the "delicious land" to be seen by Harold (15,1 2):

'With thee, my bark, I'11 swiftly go Athwart the foaming brine;
Nor care what land thou bear'st me to, So not again to mine.
Welcome, welcome, ye dark-blue waves!
And when you fail my sight,
Welcome, ye deserts, and ye caves!
My native Land – Good Night!'

On, on the vessel flies, the land is gone,
And winds are rude in Biscay's sleepless bay.
Four days are sped, but with the fifth, anon,
New shores descried make every bosom gay;
And Cintra's mountain greets them on their way,
And Tagus dashing onward to the deep,
His fabled golden tribute bent to pay;
And soon on board the Lusian pilots leap,
And steer 'twixt fertile shores where yet few rustics reap. [my emphases]

The lines of the Lyric and the lines of 14 offer an interesting interplay of metaphoric and metonymic images patterned as a chiastic structure. Stanza 14 looks like the rephrasing of 10: the thought-pattern is the same, just as the words and the syntactic structure are. Words and images are repeated either through direct calque or through relations of reciprocity. Even substituting some words from one line of 10 with the corresponding line of 14 and viceversa, the general structure would not change. The chiastic structure of the two stanzas, intersecting one another might also be read on both a horizontal and crossed axes. This, combined with the use of similes, emphasises the interdependence of 10 and 14 and suggests a common narrative voice.

¹¹ Jerome J. McGann, *Fiery Dust* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 1968) p. 68.

¹⁵ McGann p. 301.

Stanza 73, Canto II, gives further evidence that the division is not as clear as McGann affirms. The narrating voice is apparently the poet's, who resumes his narrative after the Suliote Song. There is, however, an abrupt change from 72, where the speaker is the poet, and the tone is quiet and idyllic, to 73, where a fiery speech and tone are the main features and the words reveal a deep emotion:

Childe Harold at a little distance stood And view'd, but not displeas'd, the revelrie, Nor hated harmless mirth, however rude: In sooth, it was no vulgar sight to see Their barbarous, yet their not indecent, glee, And, as the flames along their faces gleam'd. Their gestures *nimble*, dark eyes flashing free, The long wild locks that to their girdles stream'd, While thus in concert they this lay half sang, half scream'd [...]

Fair Greece! sad relic of departed worth! Immortal, though no more! though fallen, great! Who now shall lead thy scatter'd children forth, And long accustom'd bondage uncreate? Not such thy sons who whilome did await. the hopeless warriors of a willing doom, In bleak Thermopylae's sepulchral strait -Oh! who that gallant spirit shall resume, Leap from Eurotas' banks, and call thee from the tomb?

[my emphases]

Moreover, the tone of 73 and 74 refers us to Canto I, stanzas 16 and 17 where Harold described Lisboa's degradation ("though shent with Egypt's plague, unkempt, unwashed, unhurt", I, 17; "From birth till death enslaved; in word, in deed unmanned", II, 74). The similar rhetorical construction, their place in the structure of the poem - after a Lyric and after a song - suggest, again, a common narrative voice.

I do not intend to deny McGann's division altogether, but I would like to point out that the poem is full of "blurrings" and that these "blurrings" are further evidence of the struggle between Harold and the poet for power over the text.

As for the suggestion that the poem is fully autobiographical and that either the poet or Harold must be seen as specular images of Byron 16, McGann writes of the last part of Canto II, that "the

16 Cp. George Ellis, Quarterly Review, 1812, in Byron: The Critical Heritage,

external evidence is clear [that] Byron intended the stanzas as his own reflections 17. To confirm this statement he quotes a few letters to Dallas 18. In letter 206, Byron actually writes:

Dear Sir, - I have already taken up so much of your time that there needs no excuse on your part, but a great many on mine, for the present interruption. I have altered the passages according to your wish. With this note I send a few stanzas on a subject which has lately occupied much of my thoughts. They refer to the death of one to whose name you are a stranger, and, consequently, cannot be interested. I mean them to complete the present volume. They relate to the same person whom I have mentioned in Canto 2nd, and at the conclusion of the poem.

In the same letter, however, he refuses any attempt at identification with Harold (just as in the "Preface", p. 19):

I by no means intend to identify myself with Harold, but to deny all connection with him. If in parts I may be thought to have drawn from myself, believe me it is but in parts, and I shall not own even to that. (my emphasis) As to the Monastic dome, etc., I thought those circumstances would suit him as well as any other, and I could describe what I had seen better than I could invent. I would not be such a fellow as I have made my hero for all the world 19.

We do not question Byron's widely drawing on his biography, but rather a reading of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage as "confessional poetry" 20. In his essay on Cantos I-II, Marchand, although stating that "in refusing to identify himself with his hero [...] Byron did not wholly falsify, for in one sense Harold is not Byron, he is the child of Byron's imagination" 21, concludes that Byron created Harold as an alter-ego "which was only a part of himself and gave expression to aspects of his nature of which his common sense could not quite approve" 22, thus emphasising his definition of Childe Harold's Pil-

Andrew Rutherford (ed.) (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; New York: Barnes and Noble Inc., 1970), pp. 43-52; Francis Jeffrey, Edinburgh Review 1812 in Byron: The Critical Heritage, pp. 38-42; LESLIE MARCHAND, Byron's Poetry (London: John Murray, 1965); JEROME J. McGANN, op. cit..

17 McGann p. 302.

19 The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals (vol. II), Rowland E. Prothero (ed.) (London: John Murray, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), p. 66.

20 MARCHAND p. 38.

²¹ MARCHAND p. 44.

22 MARCHAND p. 45.

¹⁸ McGann p. 302, n. 3. Only letter 206 could be traced since the page reference (I.C.: 66, 161, 162) in McGann's book refers to letter number 206 (p. 66) to Dallas and letter 256 (pp. 161, 162) to Bankes (with no mention of Childe Harold's

grimage as "confessional poetry".

The biography of the Author, however, should never interfere with the criticism of the text; the coincidence between the Hero and the Author

is in fact a *contradictio in adiecto*, since the author is a moment of the artistic totality and, as such, cannot coincide within this totality with the hero, who is another moment of it. The personal coincidence between the life of the person who speaks and the life of the person who is the subject of the speech, does not cancel the difference of these two moments within the artistic totality ²³.

In his analysis of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto I-II, Robert F. Gleckner recognizes the presence of three voices: Harold's, who "rarely speaks", "the narrator's", whom we call the poet, and "the poet's", whom we call the Author:

In no sense, then, can I see Harold as Byron's persona. He is instead both an object and a metaphor [...] The main point of view is that of the narrator, which is relatively narrow [...] The other point of view in the poem is that of the poet [the Author], whose vision is at once larger and smaller than that of the narrator. [...] The focus of *Childe Harold* is upon the narrator's reaction to the scenes and events of a poem which is happening to him, and upon the [Author's] organizazion of and attitudes toward that reaction. [...] However the man lived, the mind of the [Author], firm, immensely mobile, all-encompassing, and controlled, constantly exerted the restraint of art upon his emotional responses to man and the world ²⁴.

Byron's function as an Author, then, – his only possibility to reenter the text, to everwhelm Harold's and the poet's voices through his own – is the function of the /SCRIPTOR/ seen as

an *instance of utterance of form* and not content. [...] *Scriptor*, as utterance of *forms*, both on the level of manipulation of content [...] and on the level of stylistic intervention (the different species of *figure* – rhetorical and grammatical – which mark the text and which shall be read as forms – or species – of *signature*) ²⁵.

²³ M. BAKHTIN, *L'autore e l'eroe* p. 136. "la coincidenza tra l'eroe e l'autore è una contradictio in adiecto, dato che l'autore è un momento della totalità artistica e, come tale, non può coincidere in questa totalità con l'eroe che è un altro momento di essa. La coincidenza personale 'nella vita' tra la persona di cui si parla e la persona che parla non elimina la differenza di questi momenti all'interno della totalità artistica".

²⁴ ROBERT F. GLECKNER Byron and the Ruins of Paradise (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press 1967) pp. 43-44-48-49.

²⁵ STEFANO AGOSTI "Voce Narrativa e descrizione" in *Problemi del romanzo: materiali filosofici* 9 (Milano: Franco Angeli 1983) p. 28. "*istanza di enunciazione di forme* e non di contenuti [...] *Scripteur*, in quanto enunciazione di *forme*, sia a livello

The two heroes are then mainly responsible for the "content" of the poem, while Byron/Author/Scriptor is responsible for the "form" of this content. According to Oswald Ducrot, in order to distinguish between the Narrator's responsibilty and the hero's, one must distinguish between "discours rapporté" 26 and "interprétation polyphonique" 21. Applying Ducrot's terminology to Childe Harold's Pilgrimage there are instances of discours rapporté when the poet's function is to make Harold's thought or speech known. Harold then becomes the "théme" of the poet's utterance: Harold is characterised by his idiolect. These utterances, Harold's words, are indicated by the poet as characterising Harold, the enunciation of these utterances is presented as a statement on Harold and consequently the poet/enunciator is to be identified as responsible for the entire enunciation (i.e. Canto, 27 and 28). There are instances of interprétation polyphonique when the illocutionary act through which the enunciation is characterised is to be ascribed to a voice which is not that of the "locuteur" 28. In this case the enunciation is presented as an affirmation of Harold/enunciator, while the poet hides himself behind Harold (i.e. Canto I "To Inez, stanza 9; Canto I, 20). In the first case the interpretation and the responsibility of the utterance are the poet's just as is the conclusion that "as he [Harold] gazed on truth his aching eyes grew dim"; the listener/reader's understanding of Harold's character is filtered by the poet. In the second case it is Harold who speaks of "solitude" and takes on the responsibility of the illocutionary act. This differentiation will be fundamental for the analysis of Canto III and IV where Harold's constitution/destruction is realized only through the poet's interpretation. In Canto IV, in fact, we witness the apparently complete disappearance of Harold as Subject of the enunciation and to the increasing appearance of the poet as Subject of both enunciation and utterance.

di manipolazione di contenuti [...] sia a livello di intervento stilistico (le diverse specie di *figure*, retoriche e grammaticali, che marcano il testo e che saranno da intendere come altrettante forme – o specie – di *signature*".

26 OSWALD DUCROT "Text et énonciation" in Les Mots du discours (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit 1989) p. 44.

²⁷ Ducrot p. 44.

²⁸ I use the French term "locuteur" rather than the translation offered by the *Dictionary of Semiotics*, that is "speaker", as this term is too vague and its meaning applies both to the "locuteur" and the "énonciateur".

As for the problem of voice identification at the end of Canto II, a good example is offered by stanza 95:

95

Thou too art gone, thou lov'd and lovely one!
Whom youth and youth's affection bound to me;
Who did for me what none beside have done,
No shrank from one albeit unworthy thee.
What is my being? thou hast ceas'd to be!
Nor stayed to welcome here thy wanderer home,
Who mourns o'er hours which we no more shall seeWhould they had never been, or were to come!
Whould he had ne'er return'd to find fresh cause to roam!

A McGann points out, "on a proof marked 'fourth revise' bound up with MS.D, Byron wrote to Dallas: 'the *he* refers to 'wanderer' and anything is better than I I I always I'" ²⁹.

If we accept this letter as a piece of evidence – as it is the Author/reader who provides an interpretation – and read "he" as the "Wanderer", we have three hypotheses:

(a) The poet [he] is both the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the utterance.

(b) The poet is subject of the enunciation and Harold [he] is subject of the utterance.

(c) Harold [he] is both subject of the enunciation and of the utterance.

(a) This solution is a contradiction as the "subject" of the journey, that is of the "pilgrimage", is Harold and therefore why, in fact, should the poet use a term which belongs to Harold, "Wanderer", to describe himself? There are no artistic reasons for this usurpation.

(b) In this case who are "me" (11. 2-3) and "my" (1. 5) referred to? If the subject of the enunciation is the poet, they must refer to him, then "wanderer and "he" must refer to the poet as well, since "wanderer" is linked to "my" through "thou" and "thy", but this has been proved contradictory (a), and therefore we cannot accept (b) either.

(c) The stanza acquires a syntactical and logical meaning only if Harold is seen as subject of both enunciation and utterance and if "wanderer" and "he" are considered as substitutes for "I": Harold who talks of himself in the third person through a discours rapporté.

The apparent distance between "I" and "he" can be bridged by a further interpretation which would also make (a) and (b) possible. The hypothesis is that Childe Harold's Pilgrimage is a poetical metaphor of a historical metonymy, and that the blurring of voices is the artistic solution to a conflict which is rendered through the historical evolution, structured as a narrative diachrony. That is to say that the confusion that hides the passage from /Young Harold/ to /Mature Harold/, and the creation of a fictitious poet are necessary for him so as not to be disjoined from /Young Harold/ and to continue to exist, if not on the historical level, at least on the aesthetic one. The adult does not want to be /Young Harold/ any longer without, however, disowning him but, on the contrary, intruding into and dissolving him. The two terms of the parable, young and mature Harold, in their position of /beginning/ and /end/, can be brought together into an ideal achrony in the figure of the poet, who can explicitly present himself and then merge with that same /Young Harold - he originally opposed himself to - through an operation of "débrayage/embrayage" 30.

Beyond the fact that this operation is put forward as implicit in the manifest dissolution of the two roles, only a global analysis conducted both on the superficial and the deep structural level of the entire text would confirm this hypothesis. On the other hand, a partial confirmation is seen in the gradual passage of the qualifiers and turns of phrase which identify Harold. An interesting instance of this passage is given in the development of the use of the adjectives 'young' and 'solitary' with all their variants ³¹:

Canto I Lyric, Stanza 9 1. 1 Stanza 27 1. 2 " 1. 8 Stanza 45 1. 1	"I'm in the world alone" "Solitary guise" "early youth" "his lonely way"	$(H \rightarrow H)$ $(P \rightarrow H)$ $(P \rightarrow H)$ $(P \rightarrow H)$
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³⁰ A.J. Greimas and J. Courtés Semiotics and language An Analytical Dictionary translated by Larry Crist, Daniel Patte et al (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1979): "Disengagement (débrayage) [...] the operation by which the domain of the enunciation disjuncts and projects forth from itself, at the moment of the language act and in view of manifestation, certain terms bound to its base structure, so as thereby to constitute the foundational elements of the discourse-utterance" (p. 87) "Engagement (embrayage) 1. Engagement is the inverse of disengagement. The latter is the effect of the expulsion from the domain of the enunciation of the category terms which serve as support for the utterance, whereas engagement designates the effect of a return to the enunciation" (p. 100).

²⁹ JEROME McGANN (ed.) The Complete Poetical Works "Commentary" p. 291.

The sign '→' means 'speaks of'.

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Stanza 84	1. 1	"nor mingled with the throng"	$(P \rightarrow H)$
To Inez 2	1. 2	"youth"	(H→H)
Canto II		Ž	(== ==/
Stanza 16	1. 4	"No lov'd one"	$(P \rightarrow H)$
"	1. 5	"No friend"	(P→H)
Stanza 23	1. 2	"love is at an end"	$(P \rightarrow P)$
"	1. 3	"lone"	$(P \rightarrow P)$
"	1. 4	"friendless"	$(P \rightarrow P)$
"	1. 6	"youth"	$(P \rightarrow P)$
"	1. 9	"who would not be a boy?"	$(P \rightarrow P)$
Stanza 26	1. 4	"with none"	$(P \rightarrow P)$
"	1. 6	"none"	$(P \rightarrow P)$
"	1. 9	"This is to be alone; this, is sol-	(P→P)
		itude"	ν /
Stanza 43	1. 1	"alone"	(P→H)
Stanza 93	1. 4	"And be alone on earth, as I am now"	$(P \rightarrow P)$
"	1. 9	"mine early years"	$(P \rightarrow P)$

Childe Harold, the solitary youth, has vanished, but he hardly disappears since, with the transmission of his own defining elements and his mood to the poet, he takes possession of the means/poet to re-appear at least in the text if not in the 'story'.