

## Marvell's "Little T. C."

To the Editor:

My reactions to Professor Legouis' comments [March *PMLA*, pp. 275–77] are mixed. Although much of what he has to say, especially on Marvell, is judicious and perceptive, most of his objections to my central thesis—that Spenser's "April," Milton's Nativity Ode, and Marvell's "Little T. C." are all imitations and transformations of the golden-age eclogue—seem to me unfairly literal-minded (it is revealing that Professor Legouis is less reluctant to consider Milton's poem a golden-age eclogue simply because that poem "explicitly mentions 'the age of gold' "!). For Professor Legouis "imitation" apparently means equivalency, which is to say that if everything is not there nothing is there; and that is a trifle restrictive. Professor Legouis is troubled, for example, that, unlike Virgil's fourth eclogue, "April" is not prophetic and its central figure is not a child. However, surely Spenser can be allowed the freedom to adapt the form to his own uses, which were, first, to portray in terms of a seasonal framework the *Calender's* and pastoral's longing for an ideal world of spring (and of course the festival marking that season requires a maiden, not a child, to preside), and, secondly, to praise Elizabeth, obviously a woman not a child. Professor Legouis is also troubled by the fact that Elizabeth had not realized the golden age by 1579. As I said before (p. 1565), Eliza does not "equal" Elizabeth any more than Britomart "equals" her. Moreover, is it not the nature of flattery to exaggerate and idealize? It is no more strange that Elizabeth had not realized the golden age by 1579 than that she was not a fourth grace or that she was not born "without spotte" (l. 50).

Professor Legouis does not seem to question that Milton's Nativity Ode is indebted to the golden-age tradition; instead he asks, "Is Milton's poem a 'meditation'?" Well, yes, I think it does agree with the main points of Professor Martz's description of the meditative poem: its central act is an act of interior dramatization in which the meditator imagines himself really present at a scene in the life of Christ; and through this act the meditator attains a higher level of understanding than he had before.<sup>1</sup> Meditation works as a mode of discovery about the meaning of the Nativity, to which the seeking out of the Christ-child is the chief metaphor. The shift of perspective on the golden age beginning with Stanza xv is part of this discovery. Whether or not "cyclical time" and "linear time"

fully describe the terms of this shift can be argued.<sup>2</sup> Regardless of terminology, it is clear that the meditator, who at first hoped that time would repeat itself and begin again at the beginning ("Time will run back, and fetch the age of gold," l. 135), ultimately learns that the Christian golden age will occur only at the end of time as man knows it: the golden age thus does not stipulate, as the pagans thought, a rebirth of the world and a return to its youth but involves instead the end of "The aged Earth" (l. 160) "at the world's last session" (l. 163).

Professor Legouis and I are thus hopelessly at odds, I am afraid, over the Spenser and Milton poems. My opinions have not changed substantially since I wrote the article, and they are not substantially changed by his "doubts." This is not true, however, of Marvell's "Little T. C." Although I would still maintain, for many of the same reasons outlined in the article, the poem's indebtedness to the golden-age tradition, Professor Legouis is correct: "Little T. C." does not reject chastity for free love. But having made this retraction, I am nonetheless not entirely satisfied with Professor Legouis' reading. For me he leaves the poem in pieces, and I would like to try again to place these pieces in their proper order.

In "Little T. C." the control over and reformation of nature, which is the hallmark of the messianic mission, can be destructive as well as re-creative. From the opening "picture" of T. C. taming the wild flowers and giving them names, there is an ambivalence toward the powers and as-yet-unformed possibilities of a child whose actions, as Professor Legouis rightly notes, "can pass without warning from harmless discerning 'simplicity' to destructive activities." What T. C.'s maturity will bring can be conjectured only from the hints she provides as a child. The final four stanzas consist of speculation and advice, based on the opening picture of T. C., as to what her maturity will, and ought to, bring. The poet first considers the possibility, playfully yet seriously, of a progression from pastoral to heroic (Stanzas ii–iii)—the progression of Virgil's messianic child, who moves from the small but promising things of pastoral in his youth to the greater things of the heroic in his maturity.<sup>3</sup> T. C.'s heroic "high cause" (l. 8) and "Glories" (l. 24) involve not only control over her own desire through chastity but also tyranny over masculine desire for her. Her "chaster Laws" (l. 11) and honor are more than merely "standing on her guard against male seductive 'trains,'" as Professor Legouis contends; for by the end of the third stanza she is intent not only on

preserving her virtue as a chaste woman but also on breaking men's hearts as a martial femme fatale, as her eyes "drive / In Triumph over Hearts that strive, / And them that yield but more despise" (ll. 20–22). Although T. C.'s chastity is a virtue, it runs the risk of destructive pride and cruelty. The peace that it is traditionally the golden-age child's "high cause" to bring about has become love's war; and in an ironic reversal of messianic conventions, peace will not come about until T. C. herself is "appease[d]" (l. 16).

The cruel and destructive femininity of this heroic femme fatale, who has overcome the Tyrant Love only to become herself a tyrant, is no more to the taste of the poet here than it is in "The Gallery"; and here, as in "The Gallery," the poet prefers the pastoral image. The poet will witness such "Glories" only from "some shade" (l. 24)—which may mean the shade of the grave but which may also mean the shade of nature and pastoral. Accordingly the poet returns to the pastoral setting, where he reveals his own choice regarding the "high cause" of T. C.'s maturity. The dual possibilities of T. C.'s powers are again emphasized, this time by the contrast between the two imperatives with which the poem concludes: In Stanza iv, the poet asks T. C. to "Reform the errors of the Spring" (l. 27); and in the final stanza, he asks (and warns) her to "Gather the Flow'rs, but spare the Buds" (l. 35). The flowers T. C. is asked to reform must be emblems of womankind, if this stanza is to have any organic relation to the preceding description of T. C.'s womanhood and to the final stanza's portrayal of T. C. as a blossoming flower. Her childlike perfecting of nature's flowers looks forward, so the poet hopes, to a perfecting of the feminine flower. The fair but unsweet tulips, like fair women, should also be sweet. Roses should be "disarm[ed]" of their thorns; so, too, feminine beauty should cease to attract only to prick the aspiring lover with cruel thorns (and so, too, should the heroic T. C. of stanzas two and three be disarmed). Finally, violets, flowers of remembrance, should "a longer Age endure" (l. 32); so, too, the remembrance of fidelity of fickle women. Stanza iv, then, advises T. C. on the kind of reformation, "th' Example" (l. 38), she ideally will offer. In contrast, the Virgilian admonition to the child in Stanza v poses a contrary "Example," also portrayed in terms of flowers. If T. C. does not permit the buds to flower, she may become "th' Example" of a "crime" (l. 36) against Flora by interfering with natural growth and maturation; for, although chastity is a virtue, Flora requires a blossoming of both human and physical nature. The final stanza thus petitions T. C. to begin now to curb her feminine tendency to prideful tyranny over nature, which she already has begun to manifest in her relationship to the flowers, and to use her powers not to restrict but to perfect nature. Not the lofty landscape of the heroic but the humbler

landscape of pastoral images forth the poet's hopeful prophecy. The poet, witnessing T. C. begin her "golden daies" (l. 2) "in a Prospect of Flowers," looks forward (*prospectare*) to discover her "Prospect"; and he finds that "Prospect" there in the pastoral scene itself, in T. C.'s blossoming into the perfect flower and woman, beautiful but also gracious and gentle: a prospect of flowers in a prospect of flowers.

This, I hope, is a fairer reading of the poem. Golden-age motifs and vocabulary are used wittily and playfully to compliment the promising child, but also seriously, to put forth the poet's ideal of woman. The fear that T. C. would, like her elder sister, fail to become a woman (Margoliouth's "historical" explanation favored by Professor Legouis) is incorporated into a larger concern about the very meaning of what it is to be a woman.

I should like to say, finally, that it seems to me strange that, as part of his continuing attack on what he calls "New Criticism," Professor Legouis should seize upon an article which relies so heavily upon literary history and conventions to interpret the poems it examines. No doubt "New Criticism" continues to be an influence; but, except in freshman English courses, where it still has a certain value, "New Criticism" in its "pure," hermetic form has been dead for some time now. That anecdote Professor Legouis recalls from the twenties is indeed a charming piece, but I wonder if it does not reveal more than he realizes.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Defining "meditation" is a slippery task, as Professor Martz admits: "In the end, no definition can hope to hold the adventurous vitality of the meditative art. . . . But perhaps it is enough to say that the central meditative action consists of an interior drama, in which a man projects a self upon a mental stage, and there comes to understand that self in the light of a divine presence" ("Introduction," *The Meditative Poem*; Garden City, N. Y.: Anchor Books, 1963, p. xxxi). Professor Martz examines the Nativity Ode in terms of "Problems in Puritan Meditation," Chap. iv of *The Poetry of Meditation*, rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1962); and he includes the poem in his anthology, *The Meditative Poem*, as one of "a number of poems . . . that may not at first, and perhaps never will, appear to participate in the meditative genre" ("Introduction," p. xxx).

<sup>2</sup> Let me take this opportunity to make a small correction: The reference to Augustine's critique of pagan cyclism should be to *De Civ. Dei*, xii, 14–16, not to *Confessiones*, xi, 14–30 (both passages, however, discuss the nature of time).

<sup>3</sup> On the relationship of great things to small in Virgil, and for an excellent discussion of this concept in the fourth eclogue, see John S. Coolidge, "Great Things and Small:

The Virgilian Progression," *CL*, 17 (1965), 1–23. See also the introduction ("The Pastoral Context") to my book, *Spenser, Marvell, and Renaissance Pastoral* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970).

### Thomas Mann's "Gladius Dei" Once Again

To the Editor:

In his article on Thomas Mann's "Gladius Dei" (*PMLA*, Oct. 1968), Ernst F. Hoffmann attempted an evaluation of its narrative technique which deserves to be challenged, since the problem involved concerns not only the interpretation of this particular story but also our appreciation of structural problems in the early work of Mann.

To Hoffmann, "Gladius Dei" is a "social and cultural satire and a literary finger exercise of the first order."<sup>1</sup> There is little one could object to in this statement; equally acceptable is Hoffmann's discussion of some of Mann's devices, such as Hieronymus' "imitatio" of Savonarola, the varying treatment of time, the importance of locale and social circumstance, and stylistic parody. But doubts arise when Hoffmann claims that the "verbal repetitions and self-quotations within the text"—one of the most distinctive features in Mann's fiction—"possess" a "rhetorical rather than symbolical function."<sup>2</sup> This judgment, I suspect, is based on Mann's own later view,<sup>3</sup> according to which his breakthrough to a musico-symbolical motif-structure did not occur until "Tonio Kröger." An unprejudiced reading of the story, however, can show that "Gladius Dei" does in fact have a symbolical motif-structure.

Like most other critics, Hoffman seems more or less to equate the "musicality" of Mann's fiction with the use of leitmotifs; and since he asserts that there is "a distinctive difference" between the "verbal repetitions" of this story and the "leitmotifs in the later works," he seems to deny "Gladius Dei" any musical motif-technique at all.<sup>4</sup> The danger behind such an argumentation, i.e., the fixation on leitmotifs,<sup>5</sup> is widespread in Mann criticism. It has led many critics to overlook the use of more traditional devices such as variation and inversion, which offer the author—in music as well as in literature—the possibility to hint at subtle and hidden connections between seemingly separate elements of his work.<sup>6</sup>

Hoffmann's observations on the structure of "Gladius Dei" remain on the surface. He comments on topographical references and their repetitions; but more important motifs (Hieronymus' coat and his facial expressions) are not examined. Consequently he failed to recognize the basically musical structure of "Gladius Dei"<sup>7</sup> and the symbolical motif on which the whole story rests.

This central motif is the motif of the sword. It is

announced—first somewhat enigmatically—in the Latin title of the story. At the end it recurs in Hieronymus' quotation from Savonarola: "Gladius Dei super terram . . . cito et velociter" (viii, 215), thus rounding out the narrative and revealing its specific meaning. Immediately before the end it appears in Hieronymus' mock apocalyptic vision as "ein breites Feuer-schwert . . . , das sich im Schwefellicht über die frohe Stadt hinreckte." But these very obvious references to the sword do not stand alone. Deeply indebted to the art of Wagner, and determined to compose "gute Partituren," Mann states his motif at the outset of the story, thus preparing for its subsequent musical development. In the long introductory section, the sword motif is sounded in the reference to the young people on Ludwigstraße, "die das Nothung-Motiv pfeifen" (viii, 197). The connection of this allusion with the title of the story becomes evident when we remember that in German the "Nothung-Motiv" from Wagner's *Ring* is often referred to as the "Schwert-Motiv."<sup>8</sup>

The situation alluded to is, I believe, that of Siegmund in the first act of *Die Walküre*—a work Mann also used in his story *Wälsungenblut*. Some highlights of the Siegmund-plot—his monologue "Ein Schwert verhiess mir der Vater" and his climactic discovery of the God-sent Nothung-sword with which he will battle Hunding for his sister and bride Sieglinde—are drawn into the web of "Gladius Dei." Siegmund's situation is echoed, though in a strongly burlesque distortion, in Hieronymus' dream—also reminiscent of Moses—"daß ein Befehl und Ruf aus der Höhe an Hieronymus erging" (viii, 204), to take steps against the excesses in the cult of the arts. Likewise, one may perceive an ironic echo of Siegmund's discovery of Nothung in Hieronymus' final vision of a sword which is to destroy Munich and Mr. Blütenzweig's art shop where his own spiritual bride, as it were, the Virgin, is being prostituted. Unlike Siegmund, however, Hieronymus proves to be grotesquely unable to gain possession of that sword, let alone wield it.

The musical treatment of a motif in literature can very well go beyond verbal repetitions. Mann makes use of this possibility in "Gladius Dei" by transforming, in analogy to the musical device of inversion, the sword to a sceptre. This occurs at the end of the first section when Munich's cult of the arts is summed up and put under the emblem of a "rosenumwundenes Zepter" (viii, 200). In this image we have a transformation of the sword and a reversal of its significance from destruction to fertility. The end of the story's first and last sections are thus balanced by the two motifs of the fiery sword and the sceptre entwined with roses—both appearing in the sky above Munich—and they are contrasted as two opposite symbols: one of destruction and one of flowering. Mann probably draws here on the traditional emblematic meaning of