Theta XIII
Forms of the Supernatural on Stage: Evolution, Mutations

Textes réunis par
Richard Hillman

"O for a Muse of Fire":
Revenant-Authors, *Pericles* and *The Golden Age*

Pádraic Lamb

Université de Tours / Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance – CNRS

> O for a muse of fire, that would ascend
> The brightest heaven of invention,
> A kingdom for a stage, princes to act
> And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!
> Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,
> Assume the port of Mars; and at his heels,
> Leash'd in like hounds, should famine, sword and fire
> Crouch for employment. But pardon, and gentles all,
> The flat unraised spirits that have dared
> On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
> So great an object: can this cockpit hold
> The vasty fields of France? or may we cram
> Within this wooden O the very casques
> That did affright the air at Agincourt?
>
> (Shakespeare, *H5*, I.Cho.1-14)[1]

This is the lament of the Chorus in *Henry V*, regretting the human limits of the capacities of the acting troupe, and thus the limits of the spectacle. We recognise in this prologue the topos of recusation and the figure of preterition: the Chorus shrouds the entire theatrical enterprise in modesty, framing the images (*enargeia*) of the description with the figure of preterition—the very absence of the unnamed inspiring Muse. The energetic vividness (*energeia*) of the spec-

---

[1] Quotations from Shakespeare, and from Shakespeare and Fletcher's *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, are taken from *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*.

tator's imagination,[2] is only further excited by this: "If *only* we had a Muse of Fire, we could…". There is, in this famous passage, a pairing of the rhetorical art of *evidentia* with the grandiose intimation of unrepresentability, whereby the audience sees what the Chorus claims not to be able to describe.[3] Recusation and the preteritive mention of the Muse have their intended ironic effect, and I contend that the Chorus's speech strikes the audience with a sublime effect, as if indeed the Muse herself had spoken. The answer of the audience member to the question, "can this cockpit hold / The vasty fields of France?", is surely a resounding "yes".[4] After the bravura, the audience is left to ask, as intended, if this is what the "flat unraised spirits" can do, what on earth would a play authored by the Muse or acted by *raised* spirits be like?

That is the question I would like to explore in this article, in relation to the revenant-author, particularly in the role of Chorus in *Pericles* (1608) and *The Golden Age* (1610).[5] Leaving aside the learned question of what kind of revenant he is, I want to ask what are the rhetorical and dramatic effects of a choric revenant-author. In order to understand the functioning of this supernatural figure, I will first relate its use to the idea of the sublime as a rhetorical effect in poetic texts. The examples of the representation of Homer in Ennius and George Chapman, and that of Chaucer in Spenser, will be used to show the operation of the literary sublime in relation to celebratory invocations of the revenant-author's inspiration. Two dramatic recusations of supernatural authorship, by the Chorus of *Henry V* (1599) and the Prologue of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (1613-14), will then help me to distinguish the dramatic functioning of the revenant-author in *Pericles* and *The Golden Age*. In these two plays, Gower and Homer, respectively, are at once raised spirit, author and Chorus. As such, they embody supernatural authorship on stage. These revenant-authors seem ideally placed to overcome the limitations of the theatre as formulated by *Henry V*'s human Chorus.

It has been true at all times that the supernatural sells. The supernatural effectively grabs attention, as the underrated practical critic, the poet and playwright George Gascoigne frankly recognises in his "Certayne Notes of Instruction in English Verse" of 1576. Though he was writing in particular about love poetry, his point stands for other genres of verbal art. The supernatural is the opposite of *trita* and *obvia*:

---

2   For clear distinctions of *enargeia* (the mental image) from *energeia* (its effect), see Plett, pp. 120-30.

3   On *evidentia* (including prosopopoeia), see Lausberg, §§810-19, 826-29. On preterition as an instrument of *evidentia*, see §882, §885. References are to paragraph numbers of that work.

4   I find, then, that critics who say the answer "of course, is no", like Garber (p. 251), rather miss the point.

5   For an analysis of the Author-Presenter on the principle of "credibility", see Débax. I would argue that *Henry V*'s Chorus makes and wins the initial case for credibility by rhetorical brilliance.

> If I should undertake to wryte in prayse of a gentlewoman, I would neither praise hir christal eye, nor hir cherrie lippe, etc. For these things are *trita et obvia*. But I would either finde some supernaturall cause wherby my penne might walke in the superlative degree, or els I would undertake to aunswere for any imperfection that shee hath, and thereupon rayse the prayse of hir commendacion. (Gascoigne, p. 48)

As a theme, Gascoigne notes, the supernatural is essentially piquant and captivating. By the mere choice of a supernatural theme, he asserts, a writer gains easy access to sublime effects. The traditional division of styles, *humilis-mediocris-sublimis*, reserved the sublime or grand style for divine and noble matters, which further associates sublimity with the supernatural. The sublime effect in the passage from *Henry V* is doubly facilitated by its treatment of the "Muse" and the "brightest heaven of invention", as well as of heroic war.

The sublime has always been associated with the supernatural in the Western tradition, including but not limited to (Pseudo-)Longinus. Surely unbeknownst to himself, Gascoigne was echoing the views of earlier critics. That supernatural subjects give what is, in effect, a rhetorical shortcut to effects of grandeur and sublimity had been observed by Pseudo-Demetrius and Hermogenes (Till, 58-59). Rhetoric admits of different means of capturing attention with a sublime effect, which range from *copia*, in the dominant Ciceronian tradition, to a single elevated thought, as particularly promoted by Longinus: the biblical "*Fiat lux*" is notably cited by the latter as an example of this (IX.9). Both means of creating a sublime effect rely on moving the listener: hence the Latin *movere* in Cicero and Quintilian, and the exaggerated *movere* of ecstasy, rapture and transport in Platonic texts and in Longinus (Goyet). In what follows, I will use "sublime" as a tool for the rhetorical analysis of the supernatural, both the means employed and the effects achieved.[6]

What I will call Gascoigne's principle, the supernatural subject as a shortcut to the sublime, explains some of the appeal of the supernatural as a rhetorical or theatrical element. Operating across genres, the revenant-author can be seen as a particularly strong opening gambit which sublimely represents the excellence of the text to follow, as emanating from a supernaturally-present author.

Literary Precedents and Aspiring Authors

The revenant-author has a distinguished literary history, with the invocation of the spirit of an author very often being coupled with a prosopopoeia of the same. From Ennius to George Chapman, Homer is invoked by poets in order to establish a lineage between

---

6   Borris, drawing on Porter, has recently renewed the study of the literary sublime in the Renaissance on a Platonic basis.

their works and his, to endorse a continuity between the canonical work of poetry and their groundbreaking attempts. This model was then applied to authors in the native tradition, including Gower and Chaucer.

Ennius is a key figure in the transmission of epic from Greece to Rome, though only fragments of his works now subsist. The proem to his historical epic, the *Annals* (2nd century BCE), is the first appearance of the revenant Homer. Ennius relates how, in a dream, Homer appeared to him and told him that he is the latest incarnation of the Greek poet's soul; previous habitacles include at least a peacock. The fragments on their own are not very clear, but allusions in a scholiast of Persius helps clarify the situation. Ennius's description of the apparition and some lines of the prosopopoeia of Homer are extant:

> Fettered in soft calm sleep
> Homer the poet appeared at my side
> . . . .
> "O loving kindness of thy heart
> . . . .
> I remember becoming a peacock".[7]

The anonymous scholiast, clarifying an allusion in Persius, elucidates the fragments of Ennius and confirms the presence of the two features of this representation in the fragments of Ennius I wish to underline—that is, Homer's manifestation and his speaking *pro persona sua*: "Persius alludes to Ennius, who states that in a dream he saw a vision of Homer on Parnassus; Homer said that his soul was in Ennius."[8] The scholiast goes on to report that Homer states his soul "had been conveyed into Ennius" according to the "rule laid down by the philosopher Pythagoras" (pp. 8-9). This is a reference to metempsychosis or transmigration and relates, therefore, the manifestation and prosopopoeia of the revenant-author to a mystical, supernatural phenomenon.

Homer's most famous apparition in the English Renaissace is in the translations and texts of George Chapman, who attempts something similar to Ennius. In a verse-preface first published in 1609, he points to a failure of metempsychosis or "ample transmigration" ("To the Reader", l. 35), as he calls it, in other translations of Homer, and implies the success of metempsychosis in his case. This implication is fleshed out and given poetic expression in an account of his inspiring encounter with Homer in *Euthymiae Raptus or The Teares of Peace*, also published in 1609. The passage occurs in the poem's induction,

---

7   "[S]omno leni / visus Homerus adesse poeta / … / 'O pietas animi! / … / Memini me fiere pavum'…" (Ennius, ed. and trans. Warrington, ll. 4-13).

8   "Tangit Ennium qui dixit se vidisse per somnium in Parnaso Homerum sibi dicentem quod eius anima in suo esset corpora"; the scholiast is cited by Warrington, pp. 6-7. Cf. Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, I.120-26 who also refers to Homer's rising from Acheron and speaking to Ennius.

before the visionary encounter with Peace herself. The detailed physical description, the prosopopoeia of Homer and the dialogue between the latter and the speaker, are rhetorical means of creating a vivid image of this scene for the reader, of giving an immediate dramatic energy to the account of the supernatural encounter.[9] In Chapman's poem, the speaker is musing on man's condition,

> When sodainely, a comfortable light
> Brake through the shade; and, after it, the sight
> Of a most grave, and goodly person shinde;
> With eys turnd upwards, and was outward, blind;
> But, inward; past, and future things, he sawe;
> And was to both, and present times, their lawe.
> His sacred bosome was so full of fire,
> That t'was transparent; and made him expire
> His breath in flames, that did instruct (me thought)
> And (as my soule were then at full) they wrought.
> At which, I casting downe my humble eyes,
> Not daring to attempt their fervencies;
> He thus bespake me; Deare minde, do not feare
> My strange apparance; Now t'is time t'outweare
> Thy bashfull disposition, and put on
> As confident a countnance, as the Sunne.
> . . . .
> I brake into a trance, and then remainde
> (Like him) an onely soule; and so obtainde
> Such bouldnesse, by the sense hee did controule;
> That I set looke, to looke; and soule to soule.
> . . . .
> I am (sayd hee) that spirit Elysian,
> That (in thy native ayre; and on the hill
> Next Hitchins left hand) did thy bosome fill,
> With such a flood of soule; that thou wert faine
> (With acclamations of her Rapture then)
> To vent it, to the Echoes of the vale;
> When (meditating of me) a sweet gale
> Brought me upon thee; and thou didst inherit
> My true sense (for the time then) in my spirit;
> And I, invisible, went prompting thee,
> To those fayre Greenes, where thou didst english me.
> Scarce he had uttered this, when well I knewe
> It was my Princes Homer …

9   Millet explores the links between prosopopoeia, spectres and dramatic representation.

. . . .

That hee was Angell to me; Starre, and Fate. (*The Teares of Peace*, ll. 33-93)

Both Ennius and Chapman draw on the notion of the transmigration of souls to underline the Homeric inspiration of their verse, explicitly charging the representation of the revenant-author with the sublime. They aim to demonstrate a seamless transition from Homer's achievement to an innovative Latin epic or the first integral English translation of the Homeric poems. "*Anima*" in the Latin texts is notably supplemented with the Neoplatonic vocabulary of "*spiritus*" ("spirit", "breath", "wind"), "*infundere*" ("flood") and "Rapture" in Chapman's verse. Through prosopopoeia, the Latin and English poets imbue their respective vernacular poetic voices with the mystic authority of the Homeric Muse: Homer speaks Latin and English. The process of inspiration creates a spiritual identity between Homer and Ennius and Homer and Chapman. Crucially, this inspirational framework of supernatural communion makes the later poet's voice the necessary divine intermediary between Homer and the readers of the *Annals* or of Chapman's translations. Resting thus on the laurels of Homer, these Homeric epigones are also trying to place their works beyond criticism as canonical.

The revenant-author as canonizer is a role ascribed to Gower in his brief appearance (one rhyme royal stanza) in the dream-vision of John Skelton's *The Garland of Laurel*. His role here, along with Chaucer and Lydgate, is to welcome Skelton to the "collége" (l. 403) of great English poets. This revenant Gower, then, is an endorser but not an inspirer of the laureate Skelton. It falls to Chaucer to provide the first native example of a supernatural or sublime model prior to Gower's stage début in *Pericles*, in an example which predates Chapman's encounter with Homer.

In the fourth book of *The Faerie Queene* (1590), Spenser undertakes to complete *The Squire's Tale* and invokes Chaucer's aid to help him (canto 2, stanzas 32-34). Resisting the call of the tradition exemplified in Ennius or Chapman, Spenser does not insert a prosopopoeia here. The speaker of *The Faerie Queene* invokes the spirit of "Dan Chaucer" to help him, and employs the jargon of Ficino's Neoplatonism familiar from the Chapman extract:

Then pardon, O most sacred happy Spirit,
That I thy Labours lost may thus revive,
And steal from thee the Meed of thy due Merit,
That none durst ever whilst thou wast alive,
And being dead, in vain yet many strive:
Ne dare I like, but through Infusion sweet
Of thine own Spirit (which doth in me survive)
I follow here the footing of thy Feet,
That with thy meaning so I may the rather meet. (Spenser, IV.2.34)

This passage, like the lines from Chapman, casts the relation with its literary predecessor in supernatural terms, conjoining the ancient notion of metempsychosis with Platonist ideas concerning poetic inspiration. The supernatural is exploited through the use of the Platonist vocabulary, but prosopopoeia of the Chaucer-Muse is strategically withheld. The opening line of stanza 32 ("Whylome as antique stories tellen us") channels the *incipit* of *The Knight's Tale* ("Whilom, as olde stories tellen us" [Chaucer, l. 859]). This verbal identity denotes a spiritual and enunciative identity: "thine own Spirit (which doth in me survive)". An explicit prosopopoeia, which essentially signifies a distinction of voices and personae, is not needed, it is implied, because the revenant has already joined, through "Infusion sweet", with the Spenserian speaker. The Chaucerian voice is already inspiring the Spenserian "I".

These poetic revenant-authors need to be accounted for in two ways: in terms of the fiction of inspiration and in terms of rhetoric and genre. The praise of the Ancients is to the glory of the Moderns, as Chapman and Spenser exalt Homer and Chaucer better to author their claims for themselves as rightful, anointed successors: representing this supernatural communion is a guarantee of the authenticity of the transmission and the corresponding value of their own works. Spenser seeks aesthetic validation of his "warlike numbers and Heroicke sound" (IV.2.32); Chapman claims the philosophic mantle of Homer and initiation into the "hidden Truthe" (*The Teares of Peace*, l. 125). The importance of the contemporary writers' intercession has already been alluded to: Homer, Gower and Chaucer have a privileged supernatural relation with the poetic speakers in the poems I have looked at, and not with the reader.

The second way of looking at these passages is through the lens of rhetoric and genre. These callings-up are rhetorical set-pieces indicative of how the poem is to be read: invocations and prosopopoeia are part of the sublime style, fit for genres like the hymn or epic, with correspondingly grave subjects such as the gods and war. The tone is lofty, to say the least. More particularly, prosopopoeia and invocation are part of the rhetoric of vision, allowing the poet to prove his capacity to represent vividly, as if before our very eyes, as in a theatre, the scene of inspiration between Author and author.

The aspiration to embody the *vates*-figure means that the highest test for the poet is producing this sublime effect. The aspiration to sublime effects mentioned in the introduction are, however, subject to caution. Badly done, the attempted sublime seems bombastic and affected.[10] Over-use deadens the effect, and so the skilful poet, according to

---

10   Thus, for Longinus, over-ornateness dooms attempts at the sublime to failure:
      The cunning use of figures is peculiarly subject to suspicion. … Wherefore a figure is at
      its best when the very fact that it is a figure escapes attention. … For just as all dim lights
      are extinguished in the blaze of the sun, so do the artifices of rhetoric fade from view
      when bathed in the pervading splendour of sublimity. (XVII.1-2)

Longinus, must use the "curb" as well as the "spur" with the sublime rhetoric at his disposal: "It is true that it [the expression of the sublime] often needs the spur, but it is also true that it often needs the curb" (Longinus, II.2). Judicious use of the raised spirits of ancient authors, for example, ensures drawing the readers' attention to an undertaking, sequence or effect made to seem so great that it requires supernatural intervention: the transposition of epic into Latin, the initiation into the philosophical secrets of Homer and translation of his works into English, or the continuation of a story begun by Chaucer, are all examples. This sublime representation of the power of the author, striking the reader like a "thunderbolt or flash of lightning", or "swell[ing] like some sea", or burning with "all the glow of a fiery spirit" (Longinus, XII.2), is designed to take hold of the imagination and dispose the reader to appreciate the poetic feat which follows, according to the text's pretensions. In this, it is similar to the rhetorical functions of epic invocations of the Muse, one of which, according to Ernst Curtius (p. 232), was to emphasise and invite admiration of the narrative's high points.[11]

These examples have shown the use of the revenant-author as a sublime poetico-rhetorical effect, capable of variation and subtleties. On the whole, revenant-authors provide external praise of the new text supposed to frame readers' reactions; their supernatural status is used to represent a degree of excellence of the new work which touches on the sublime.

Staging the Sublime Author

The poetic examples talk up the wonderful effects of inspired authors and Muse-figures, and indeed the Chorus of *Henry V* pays homage to the topos. This may have prepared an audience for shock-and-awe effects. At the same time, the Chorus very precisely raises possible problems with staging this supernatural Muse: how indeed can "this cockpit hold / The vasty fields of France?"

Following on from Spenser's use of Chaucer as revenant-author, we come to the prologue to *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, which addresses the theatrical problems raised by the Chorus and the question of poetic invocation with the figure of a distinctly Spenserian Chaucer-figure. Contrary to the passage from *The Faerie Queene*, however, this prologue contains a prosopopoeia of Chaucer but no invocation. Taking the story not from *The Squire's Tale* but from *The Knight's Tale*, the Prologue shares his fear with the audience that if the play, drawn from such noble stock, is a failure, Chaucer will be spinning in his grave. This is a variant on the modesty topos. Gary Taylor writes something about *Henry V* which, I think, can help clarify this procedure: "the modesty of the Chorus

---

11 Curtius does not explore the sublime in depth because Longinus's treatise was unknown to the Middle Ages, but what he terms "high points" can be equated with rhetorical effects of the sublime.

implies considerable confidence: in the theatre, one apologises only for one's most reliable effects, while expressing the greatest possible confidence about anything wobbly" (Taylor, p. 56). By bringing it up, the Prologue shows that he does not in fact think it likely the play would give cause for Chaucer to be outraged. In a marked contrast with the tone of the opening lines ("New plays and maidenheads are near akin; / Much followed both, for both much money gi'en" [*TNK*, Pro.1-2]), Chaucer is evoked as the model of a supreme noble, learned and inspired poet (the "bays" of Apollo). He is not invoked or staged, but the Prologue proceeds with a prosopopoeia of what Chaucer would say, were he outraged by the play, and finishes with express admiration of Chaucer's sublime eloquence:

> It [the play] has a noble breeder and a pure,
> A learned, and a poet never went
> More famous yet 'twixt Po and silver Trent.
> Chaucer, of all admired, the story gives;
> There, constant to eternity, it lives.
> If we let fall the nobleness of this,
> And the first sound this child hear be a hiss,
> How will it shake the bones of that good man
> And make him cry from underground "O, fan
> From me the witless chaff of such a writer
> That blasts my bays and my famed works makes
>   lighter
> Than Robin Hood!" This is the fear we bring;
> For, to say truth, it were an endless thing
> And too ambitious, to aspire to him,
> Weak as we are, and, almost breathless, swim
> In this deep water. (*TNK*, Pro.10-25)

Prosopopoeia, though in poetry an effect of presence, is by contrast in this dramatic use an effect of absence, as it is spoken by the same actor as the Prologue and explicitly hypothetical ("If"). The Prologue's "fear" is that the play will not be equal to Chaucer. The speaker of *The Faerie Queene* found a way to overcome the same fear through the use of the revenant-author topos and invocation of the spirit of Chaucer: "Ne dare I like, but through infusion sweete / Of thine owne spirit". Chaucer's near-invocation in Shakespeare and Fletcher's play can be seen as a recusation on the part of the Prologue to "aspire" to Chaucer, to channel his inspiration for this enterprise. True to form, this recusation does not fail to maximise the evocation of the suppressed topic — that is, Chaucer's sublime eloquence. Rhetorical commonplaces ("deep water"[12]), as well as Platonic topoi of inspiration (*spiritus* and *infundere*, spirit/breath and liquid), also used by Spenser, are used to represent

---

[12]   Cf. Puttenham, p. 214.

Chaucer's eloquence as sublimely overwhelming the Prologue. The emphasis on the separation of the "weak" and "breathless" Prologue from the "deep water" of Chaucer's eloquence more forcefully represents Chaucer's mysterious power. Thus, Chaucer is figured as an absent divine Muse, his writing as sublime eloquence, which the Prologue evokes but renounces calling up, because of the insufficiencies of the troupe. They are only so many "flat unraised spirits" (*H5*, I.Cho.9): "it were an endless thing / And too ambitious to aspire to him / Weak as we are, and, almost breathless, swim / In this deep water." As presence or as absence, sublime poetics are sufficiently evoked to influence understanding of the play.

The recusation of the Chaucer-Muse is used by *The Two Noble Kinsmen*'s dramatists to avoid falling into the ever-present danger of failed sublimity. In theatrical terms, by making Chaucer into a sublime Muse, the Prologue could fall under this heading. This particular renunciation can, then, be seen as an illustration of the precept of the spur and curb. The evocation and hypothetical prosopopoeia of a disapproving divine Chaucer is a "reliable effect" posing as a "wobbly one" (to cite Taylor again), which, while explicitly disclaiming Chaucer's otherworldly influence, ironically presumes Chaucer's approval of the play. The confidence of the Prologue, in daring to broach the possibility of the play's failing, gives the audience confidence in the play. The sublime effect is further curbed by the audience seeing and hearing the Prologue struck by a sublime effect when talking about Chaucer but not being party to the effect itself. This intimation of supernatural eloquence foreshadows the series of prayers to Venus, Mars and Diana in Act Five, Scene One, where a sublime effect is spurred on, indeed given full rein, as it were.

There is a major difference between the direct approach of Skelton, Chapman and Spenser and the oblique approach of the playwrights. The poets represent revenant-authors as Muse-figures to orchestrate external approval for the poet and his work in a way which lends them a sublime rhetorical charge. In *Henry V* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, on the other hand, the supernatural authorship topos, through the figures of the Muse and of Chaucer, is evoked and expressly denied. Despite this denial, the force of the topos is won for the plays through the rhetorical brilliance of the Chorus, who speaks as if inspired by the Muse, and the Prologue's confidence-trick, which assumes Chaucer's approval.

I want to turn now to *Pericles* and *The Golden Age*, where the revenant-author's role is not limited to providing initial external validation, however sublime, of another's enterprise. Theatrical representation elides the mediating poetic "I" seen above. Here, the revenant-author is raised from the shades and produced on stage as author of the spectacle. What Apollo, what oracle, what "Muse of Fire" awaits the audience of *Pericles*?

> To sing a song that old was sung,
> From ashes ancient Gower is come
> Assuming man's infirmities,
> To glad your ear, and please your eyes.

> It hath been sung at festivals,
> On ember-eves and holy-ales;
> And lords and ladies in their lives
> Have read it for restoratives:
> The purchase is to make men glorious;
> *Et bonum quo antiquius, eo melius*. (Shakespeare [and Wilkins?], *Per.*, I.Cho.1-10)

This opening announces Gower as a revenant, assuming human form, which he refers to as "infirmities", while going on in the next lines to give a demonstration of the rhetoric of the *excusatio propter infirmitatem*, part of a general *captatio benevolentiae*: "If you, born in these latter times, / When wit's more ripe, accept my rimes" (11-12). He prolongs the exercise in a telling image of his greatly reduced aspiration, compared to the lofty ambition for the Muse of Fire: "I life would wish, and that I might / Waste it for you, like taper-light" (15-16). Gower has emerged from the "ashes" of a fire which seemingly has gone out. The reason for his return is his concern to transmit an edifying tale, which, it is implied, has some religious note or significance: his "song … / … / hath been sung at festivals, / On ember-eves and holy-ales". This establishes a positive *ethos* for Gower as a trustworthy, moralising but infirm old man, in some performances the butt of gentle humour. There occurs a triple denegation of a possible supernatural authority for this revenant-author; he mentions his human and then rhetorical infirmities, as well as explicitly referring to his human sources: "I tell you what mine authors say" (20). We seem to have another recusation on our hands, after all.

I highlighted above the Muse-function of the poetic revenant-author, which allows the latter-day poetic persona to speak through the transfer of authorship from the revenant-author. A stark difference in the drama is that the stage establishes a direct relationship between Chorus-author and audience. A typical choric function which Gower adopts is to constantly solicit and address the audience, to the extent that the audience is made to participate, in a non-speaking role, in the staging, and is felicitated for it. No longer Muse to an aspirant poet, the revenant-author is here a cajoling collaborator with the public:

> In your imagination hold
> This stage the ship, upon whose deck
> The sea-tost Pericles appears to speak. (III.Cho.58-60)

The speech of revenant Gower is largely bereft of sublime rhetorical figures, and the old-fashioned octosyllabics (as used in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*) are unlikely to stimulate the audience "of these latter times" (*Per.*, I.Ch.11). Gower is unwilling to undertake the essentially serious sublime rhetoric, preferring punning jokes about his pedestrian verse:

> Only I carry winged time
> Post on the lame feet of my rhyme;

Which never could I so convey,
Unless your thoughts went on my way. (IV.Cho.47-50)

On this score, one could draw a contrast with the inspired energy of the opening speech of the Muse *manquée* in *Henry V*, or the subtle allusions to inspiration in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. It is as if it were too much to combine the theatrical representation of the revenant-Muse figure and supernaturally impressive inspired speech, with the result that, while the Chorus and Prologue are made to declaim style which can attain sublime effects, revenant-Gower is made to deliver deflated lines in humdrum rhymes — "stodgy yet charming", as F. David Hoeniger memorably put it (p. 468). The supernatural status of the revenant-author seems to be inversely proportional to the sublime poetics enunciated. To avoid the possible failure of staging an inspired author, Gower is made to seem "wobbly", in Taylor's terms, and any expectations for Gower as raised spirit are purposely dashed.

Richard Hillman has provided an analysis of Gower's structural importance, which accounts for the author's role in establishing on stage a "moral and spiritual context" for the play:

> [F]ortune's operations are firmly contained within a structure that is not arbitrary. The character of Gower, from the beginning of the play, is the chief means of establishing this structure and keeping us aware of it. He virtually stretches a safety net beneath the hero, thus enabling us to view tribulations and relief in the proper perspective. His supplying of a moral and spiritual context assures us that there is a point to growth, change, and response. (Hillman, p. 431)

Hillman then cites in support the Chorus opening Act Two:

> Be quiet then, as men should be
> Till he hath pass'd necessity.
> I'll show you those in troubles reign,
> Losing a mite, a mountain gain. (II.Cho.5-8)

Gower, unlike the revenants in the poetic tradition, does not draw special attention to his own status, nor to the transcendent, rather than the ancient, nature of his speech. This revenant's stage presence is not the transcendental signifier, as Homer's apparition and speech are in Ennius or in Chapman; the situation is quite reversed. Whereas the transcendent expression of the revenant-author justifies the succeeding action, in *Pericles*, Gower's apparition and prosopopoeia are justified by the play he presents, with its transcendent elements.

The providential "structure" indicated by Gower is revealed and retrospectively confirmed in its full transcendence by the apparition and prosopopoeia of "celestial Dian" (V.i.249). Diminishing revenant Gower by naturalising him, and even sending him up slightly as a bungler, contributes to the force of the supernatural in the Diana-scene, which finally satisfies the expectation he raised from his first appearance. Seen in this way, the revenant-author device in the person of Gower works by contrast. Gower's initial bathos facilitates Diana's sublimity. As a revenant, he evokes a supernatural capital but one which is diverted from his person and expended for a maximal effect in the manifestation and address of the goddess to Pericles. The pathos of Pericles' situation, the spectacular suddenness of Diana's appearance, combined with the poetic/rhetorical force of the divine subject matter (the mysteries of pagan worship) and the vehement expression of the goddess, speaking in the first person (and using the imperatives "hie", "do", "[r]eveal", "call", "give", "perform", "do", "[a]wake", "tell"), conspire to endow this scene with a potentially sublime effect in performance:

> My temple stands in Ephesus: hie thee thither,
> And do upon mine altar sacrifice.
> There, when my maiden priests are met together,
> Before the people all,
> Reveal how thou at sea didst lose thy wife:
> To mourn thy crosses, with thy daughter's, call
> And give them repetition to the life.
> Or perform my bidding, or thou livest in woe;
> Do it, and happy; by my silver bow!
> Awake, and tell thy dream. (V.i.239-48).

In his succeeding intervention, the tone has fallen somewhat, but Gower confirms with dignity the nature of the play's structure as supernatural, and his own role as guarantor of the operation of heavenly providence:

> In Antiochus and his daughter you have heard
> Of monstrous lust the due and just reward:
> In Pericles, his queen and daughter, seen,
> Although assail'd with fortune fierce and keen,
> Virtue preserved from fell destruction's blast,
> Led on by heaven, and crown'd with joy at last. (Epi.1-6)

Pericles's Gower is the only fully-realised apparition of the revenant-author in Shakespeare. Unlike the poetic revenants, Gower modestly downplays his supernatural potential. As such, he represents a disappointed supernatural expectation. This is a confid-

ence-trick of delayed gratification, which adds to the impressiveness of Diana in Act Five and the satisfaction the audience gains from this later irruption of the supernatural.

The influence of *Pericles* on Heywood's *The Golden Age* has long been noticed, and authorship of the Gower-role sometimes even attributed to Heywood.[13] Whatever the case may be, *Pericles* was undeniably a model for Heywood. Ernest Schanzer has summarised the likenesses between the two plays:

> the first three Ages share the device of using as the presenter of each play the poet the stories that are dramatized are pretended to be taken from. … Both poet-presenters upon their first appearance speak of the performance that is to follow as the singing by them of an old song. … And in most of the prologues that are prefixed to each of the acts in both *Pericles* and *The Golden Age* the same pattern is the first part of the prologue is followed by a dumb-show, some incident, essential to the plot, which is not dramatized, followed by the remainder of the prologue. (p. 21)

Despite *The Golden Age*'s reliance on *Pericles* for much of its distinctive dramaturgy, it takes a new course in relation to the revenant-author. It is an especially suitable terminal point for these reflections because the play started out as a poem. *The Golden Age* was adapted from the first five cantos of Heywood's mythographical chronicle in a grand register, *Troia Britannica*,[14] with the addition of the Homer-presenter role. While Shakespeare's Gower presents a modified version of the tale from the *Confessio Amantis*, Heywood's Homer presents a hodgepodge of wholly un-Homeric material,[15] which perhaps explains why Heywood felt the need to introduce a single presenter for the diverse mythological tales. He plumped for the prestige of a prosopopoeia of Homer; Chapman's recent publications bringing Homer's divine glory to a wider audience may have influenced this decision (Schanzer, p. 21; Coffin pp. 61-63).

The action of the play recounts the bloody rivalries between Titan and Saturn, and subsequently Saturn and his son Jupiter, for the throne. These characters are presented euhemeristically, that is, as extraordinary men honoured as gods. Divinised by Homer in the Choruses, Saturn is also given a divine title by his people because of his prodigious inventions: "Tis thy people … / Proclaime to thee a lasting deity./ And would have *Saturne* honoured as a God" (*The Golden Age*, I [p. 12]) This perhaps casts light on the choice of Homer as author-Chorus: poetry itself is the source of the supernatural and divinity in the poem. As hinted at in the full printed title, poetry, as represented by Homer, is the

---

13   See Schanzer, p. 21, and Jackson, p. 81, for recent dismissals of the theory. Gossett (pp. 135-36) points out common elements of plot between *Pericles* and Heywood's *The Royal King and the Loyal Subject* (pub. 1637), a play which, she believes, antedates *Pericles*.

14   See Holaday.

15   On the question of sources, see Peyré.

agent of deification: *The Golden Age or The Lives of Jupiter and Saturne, with the deifying of the Heathen Gods*. Who better than the inspired poet *par excellence* to orchestrate the deification of the Olympians?

And so, *The Golden Age* in its opening scene plays the supernatural author-Chorus *captatio* for all its spectacular value. This Homer *redivivus* asserts his power to raise men to deities; his speech is filled to bursting with the grandiloquence of divine names and attributes:

> The Gods of Greece, whose deities I rais'd
> Out of the earth, gave them divinity,
> The attributes of Sacrifice and Prayer
> Have given old Homer leave to view the world
> And make his own presentment. I am he
> That by my pen gave heaven to Jupiter,
> Made Neptunes Trident calme, the curled waves,
> Gave Aeolus Lordship ore the warring winds;
> Created blacke hair'd Pluto King of Ghosts,
> And regent ore the Kingdomes fixt below.
> By me Mars warres, and fluent Mercury
> Speakes within my tongue. I plac'd divine Apollo
> Within the Sunnes bright Chariot. I made Venus
> Goddesse of Love, and to her winged sonne
> Gave severall arrowes, tipt with Gold and lead.
> What hath not Homer done, to make his name
> Live to eternity? I was the man
> That flourish'd in the worlds first infancy:
> When it was yong, and knew not how to speake,
> I taught it speech, and understanding both
> Even in the Cradle: Oh then suffer me,
> You that are in the worlds decrepit Age,
> When it is neere his universall grave,
> To sing an old song; and in this Iron Age
> Shew you the state of the first golden world,
> I was the Muses Patron, learnings spring,
> And you shall once more heare blinde Homer sing. (I.Cho. [p. 5-6])

The verbal similarities to Gower's prologue serve to highlight the differences: though they both have returned "To sing an old song", Gower makes apologies for the effect his dated style must have for his modern audience, "when wit's more ripe" (*Per.*, I.Cho.12). Not so Homer, who reminds the audience that he is conjuring up the "golden world" for his audience living in a "decrepit Age". Despite the supernatural theme and the grand style, there are several signs that this particular Homer is aiming not for the sub-

lime but for the light-hearted: the bombastic insistence on his grandeur, the gratuitous insult of "decrepit", the logical fallacy of the situation, as well as the original production in the popular Red Bull Theatre. The latter two reasons perhaps require some explanation. The logical fallacy consists in Homer's obtaining permission to return to the world from the gods he repeatedly says he himself created: "The Gods of Greece, whose deities I rais'd / Out of the earth, gave them divinity. . . . I am he / That by my pen gave heaven to Jupiter". The contrived logic attracts attention to the dramatic illusion. The association of the Red Bull with vulgar shows and rowdy audiences has been challenged recently, but *The Golden Age*, not least by its composite nature, does not seem pitched at an elite audience.[16] While it was a possibility for the interpretation of Gower, the revenant-author as comic turn seems much more pronounced in *The Golden Age*. The revenant-author function here, beyond the generic responsibilities of the Chorus, seems to be to draw attention to and celebrate dramatic poetry's capacities for forging and staging entertaining and enduring fictions, specifically these Ovidian tales of the Olympians.[17] The supernatural element involved, Homer's power to deify, is the metaphorical expression of the theatre's power to reify, or produce these tales on stage.

The numerous euhemeristic references in the play proper are a case in point. Saturn's invention of the art of architecture, for instance, prompts this effusion from 1 Lord: "*Saturnes* inventions are divine, not humane, / A God-like spirit hath inspir'd his reigne" (I [p. 12]). The spectator identifies this "God-like spirit" with Homer's choric interventions and poetic inventions. The references in the play to the divinity of the Olympians are a form of dramatic irony; the audience is party to the conflation of god-making with Homer's spectacular poesis. Homer recounts that Pluto built a "strange City", whose inhabitants had warlike plundering habits. The city was called "Hell"; its people became known as "Divels" (II.Cho. [p. 20]). The audience understands that these places have acquired their dreadful supernatural reputation not through any innate transcendence but through a poetic process. The supernatural becomes a trope of superlative praise of poetry's powers to create "immortal" fictions.

Homer's epilogue is exemplary in this respect. Homer promises the audience to represent the apotheosis of the Olympians, "By vertue of divinest Poesie" (V.Cho. [p. 78]). The choric frame blithely draws attention to the fictionality of the play, helped by the syntactic ambiguity of the adverbial clause. The audience will see, "By vertue of divinest

---

16   See Griffith, pp. 3-28 *et passim*, and Coffin, pp. 65-66, 74-75.

17   Coffin makes a similar point, stressing, however, the assimilation of Homer to Heywood himself: "Because Homer is here acting as a Prologue, he initiates the transfer of authority from poetry to theatre and may speak both for the poet and the playwright" (p. 72).

Poesie", the apotheosis of the gods, and at the same time, will see how these mortals were made gods "By vertue of divinest Poesie":

> Yet to keepe promise, ere we further wade,
> The ground of ancient Poems you shall see:
> And how these (first borne mortall) Gods were made,
> By vertue of divinest Poesie. (V.Cho. [p. 78])

What follows is the division, by the Fates, "Of Heaven, of Sea, of Hell" (V.Cho. [p. 78]) among Saturn's three sons, Jupiter, Neptune and Pluto. The scene of apotheosis belongs to the Poet; the Fates and the Olympians wordlessly act out the stage directions, while Homer's voice sounds to expound the dumb-show:

> *Sound a dumbe shew. Enter the three fatall sisters, with a rocke, a threed, and a paire of sheeres; bringing in a Gloabe, in which they put three lots.* Jupiter *drawes heaven: at which* Iris *descends and presents him with his Eagle, Crowne and Scepter, and his thun-der-bolt.* Jupiter *first ascends upon the Eagle, and after him* Ganimed.

> To *Jupiter* doth high Olimpus fall,
> Who thunder and the trisulke lightning beares.
> Dreaded of all the rest in generall:
> He on a Princely Eagle mounts the Spheares. (V.Cho. [p. 78])

Poetry as an instrument of apotheosis amounts to the apotheosis of poetry, as the truth of Homer's earlier boast concerning "The Gods of Greece / Whose deities I rais'd" (I.Cho. [p. 5]) is realised. This spectacular scene of ascension to the heavens, performed with a winch and augmented perhaps with fireworks (Griffith, pp. 106-7, 112-14), shows the chorus as author and the author as godmaker. It appropriates the supernatural theme to stage a celebration of dramatic poetry's own superlative powers of representation.

Conclusion

The supernatural has long been a weapon of choice in the struggle to avoid the trite and the obvious. The presence of the revenant is a guage of supernatural quality which can endow a new work, through the inspiration topos, with the prestige of a canonical poet. Filiation, by genre or subject-matter, is claimed, but in every case it can be said that the older author is remade to suit the purposes of the newer one. This filiation, in the poetic texts studied, is represented to sublime effect and insists on the evident supernatural status of the revenant as a Muse, as well as on the divinisation of the epigone's poetic utterances.

In the plays looked at, supernatural authorship is a possibility evoked but not fully realised. Differing ironic uses of the revenant-author are evident in *Henry V* and *The Two*

Noble Kinsmen. Gower as Chorus resembles the poetic revenant-author insofar as he vouches for the quality of the play, but he is not used to produce a sublime effect himself. With blustery Homer in *The Golden Age*, we appear to have come full circle. Chapman's use of Homer, aiming at the sublime, precluded the use of humour. Heywood, writing for the public theatre, put the supernatural to other uses, with Homer as a mouthpiece divorced from the poetic sublime. The supernatural becomes an excuse for the spectacular.

As we have seen, the revenant-author is a topos of supernatural authorship whose use can range from the sublime to the light-hearted. Similar in this to liminary verses written by request of the author, it is a reflexive frame for generic and stylistic reception of a text. It has the advantage over liminary verses of giving a far more compelling, energetic, poetic form to the representation of external endorsement: the alliance of authority, of personification and of the charge of the supernatural. As the diversity of Homers alone in my examples shows, the revenant-author enables a paradoxical appeal to tradition in order to license creativity.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Chapman, George. *Euythmiae Raptus; or the Teares of Peace. The Poems of George Chapman*. Ed. Phyllis Brooks Bartlett. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1941. 173-200.

___. "To the Reader". *The Poems of George Chapman*. Ed. Phyllis Brooks Bartlett. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1941. 390-96.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Knight's Tale. The Canturbury Tales. The Riverside Chaucer*. 3rd ed. Gen. ed. Larry D. Benson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987. 37-66.

Ennius, Quintus. *Annals. Remains of Old Latin*. Ed. and trans. E. H. Warrington. 3 vols. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1935. II: 2-215.

Gascoigne, George. "Certayne Notes of Instruction in English Verse". *Elizabethan Critical Essays.* Ed. George Gregory Smith. 2 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1904. I: 46-57.

Heywood, Thomas. *The Golden Age. The Dramatic Works of Thomas Heywood: Now First Collected with Illustrative Notes and a Memoir of the Author in Six Volumes*. Ed. John Pearson. 6 vols. London: J. Pearson, 1874. III: 3-79.

Longinus. *On the Sublime*. Ed. and trans. W. Rhys Roberts. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907.

Puttenham, George. *The arte of English poesie, etc*. London: Richard Field, 1589. STC 20519.

Shakespeare, William. *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*. Ed. Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson and David Scott Kastan. London: Arden Shakespeare, 2001.

Skelton, John. *The Garland of Laurel. The Complete Poems of John Skelton, Laureate*. Ed. Philip Henderson. 2nd ed. London: J. M. Dent, 1948. 347-97.

Spenser, Edmund. *The Faerie Queene*. Ed. Thomas P. Roche. London: Penguin Books, 1987.

Secondary Sources

Borris, Kenneth. *Visionary Spenser and the Poetics of Early Modern Platonism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Coffin, Charlotte. "Heywood's *Ages* and Chapman's Homer: Nothing in Common?" *Classical Receptions Journal* 9.1 (1 January 2017): 55-78.

Curtius, Ernst Robert. *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013.

Débax, Jean-Paul. "Four Poets as Presenters and Interpreters in Late Tudor Drama". *Seeing Is Believing – Or Is It?* Ed. André Lascombes and Richard Hillman. Theta–Théâtre Tudor, vol. VIII. 57-70. Online, "Théâtre Anglais, Scène Européenne", *Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance*, Tours: <http://umr6576.cesr.univ-tours.fr/publications/Theta8/fichiers/pdf/debax.pdf>. (Accessed 21 December 2017.)

Garber, Marjorie. "Henry V". *Henry V*. Ed. Albert Rolls. Bloom's Shakespeare Through the Ages. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2010. 250-68.

Gossett, Suzanne. Introduction. *Pericles*. By William Shakespeare (and George Wilkins?). Ed. Suzanne Gossett. The Arden Shakespeare, 3rd. ser. London: Arden Shakespeare, 2004. 1-163.

Goyet, Francis. "Le Pseudo-Sublime de Longin". *Études Littéraires* 24.3 (1992): 105-20.

Griffith, Eva. *A Jacobean Company and Its Playhouse: The Queen's Servants at the Red Bull Theatre (c. 1605-1619)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Hillman, Richard. "Shakespeare's Gower and Gower's Shakespeare: The Larger Debt of *Pericles*". *Shakespeare Quarterly* 36.4 (1985): 427-37.

Hoeniger, F. David. "Gower and Shakespeare in *Pericles*". *Shakespeare Quarterly* 33.4 (1982): 461-79.

Holaday, Allan. "Heywood's *Troia Britannica* and the *Ages*". *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 45.4 (1946): 430-39.

Jackson, MacDonald Pairman. *Defining Shakespeare:* Pericles *as Test Case*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Lausberg, Heinrich. *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric: A Foundation for Literary Study*. Trans. Matthew T. Bliss, Annemiek Jansen and David E. Orton. Ed. David E. Orton and R. Dean Anderson. Foreword by George A. Kennedy. Leiden: Brill, 1998.

Millet, Olivier. "Faire parler les morts: l'ombre protatique comme prosopopée dans les tragédies françaises de la Renaissance". *Dramaturgies de l'ombre*. Ed. François Lecercle and Françoise Lavocat. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2005. 85-100.

Peyré, Yves. "Heywood's Library, Early Modern Mythological Texts: *Troia Britanica*, Library". *A Dictionary of Shakespeare's Classical Mythology. Centre National de Recherche Scientifique, University Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3, L'Institut de Recherche sur la Renaissance, l'Age Classique et les Lumières*: <http://www.shakmyth.org/page/Early+Modern+Mythological+Texts%3A+Troia+Britanica%2C+Library>. (Accessed 3 February 2018.)

Plett, Heinrich F. *Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004.

Porter, James I. *The Sublime in Antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Schanzer, Ernest. "Heywood's *Ages* and Shakespeare". *The Review of English Studies* 11.41 (1960): 18-28.

Taylor, Gary. Introduction. *Henry V*. By William Shakespeare. Ed. Gary Taylor. The Oxford Shakespeare. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. 1-74.

Till, Dietmar. "The Sublime and the Bible: Longinus, Protestant Dogmatics, and the 'Sublime Style'". *Translations of the Sublime: The Early Modern Reception and Dissemination of Longinus'* Peri Hupsous *in Rhetoric, the Visual Arts, Architecture and the Theatre*. Ed. Caroline van Eck, Stijn Bussels, Maarten Delbeke and Jürgen Peters. Leiden: Brill, 2012. 55-64.